

Blessing of the Animals
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Good Morning!

Last year at this time I stood up here & looked at all the lovely animals and felt like I really, really missed my dog Musa. He always came on St. Francis Day, generally disrupted the proceedings with friendly enthusiasm, and happily got blessed by the minister.

So here I am, another year later, & it doesn't affect me as much this time. This time I am just happy to see all the wonderful pets and their people. I think about animals a lot, and I really do miss having some kind of furry companion animal. I guess you could count my husband as one, but it's just not the same. This is the longest period of time in my life that I have gone without what I call a real pet. You know, something you can pat. I have always, as long as I can remember, owned a creature that left behind gobs of fur, spots on the carpet, and various parasites on the furniture. Musa was my only dog ever, and he was an amazing animal, despite those things mentioned. I don't think he considered himself anything less than a full member of the family. A person in a big furry black coat.

All that is in our house at the moment is a "Methuselah" goldfish named Freddy. Freddy is a beautiful fish. We don't have a clue how old he is - he has migrated around the house in various locations and tanks for years - he pre-dates many other things in our house. Other pets have come & gone. He has survived strange illnesses. I really think he is an immortal fish. When I am at the sink in the evening, he comes to the corner nearest me & wiggles up & down - his signal that it is his dinner time. The other captive animal in the house is Erica's safely non-allergenic Corn Snake, Cleopatra. Cleopatra sheds at an alarming rate and eats only once a week. This shedding business means that she keeps getting bigger. And needs more when she does eat. It seems to be a vicious circle. At least it is a fairly cheap pet - she doesn't require shots or neutering. She won't upchuck behind the couch or leave ticks crawling on the front seat of the car. Erica really does seem to love her (we think it's a her) . She likes the feel of it sliding around her fingers, & I will admit it is very pretty & it's muscular fluidity is fascinating.

I have always been interested in animals of all sorts. It's why I studied Wildlife Ecology in college. I am not put off or made squeamish by any animal. Some are more attractive than others, some have the "Awww" factor while others are merely curious or interesting. Many animals have the capacity to be unpredictable or even dangerous. Including Homo sapiens sapiens. And so all animals deserve our respect and our care.

My science education has taught me to observe and appreciate animal Life wherever I see it and to avoid attaching emotional responses to them. Snakes, for instance. Many people recoil instinctively and put this horrible expression on their faces when meeting (or even at the THOUGHT of meeting) Cleopatra. Which I think is ridiculous. Granted, I would not personally pick a snake for a pet, but Erica genuinely seems attached to it and she takes good care of it. This is a beautiful living creature that eats, sleeps, poops, moves & explores it's environment, and has it's own kind of "personality".

In Mark's Gospel today it says that whoever does not receive the Kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it. I say whoever does not receive the Kingdom of God as a cat or a dog will have trouble entering. My dog Musa was a creature to emulate. He was accepting of wherever he happened to be - he was never sad, he was always ecstatic to see us, and always up for anything. He occasionally was fearful, but he greeted everyone with the same amt of enthusiasm, even his worst enemies. He tried to be polite most of the time even when his hyperactively friendly nature got the best of him.

Yes, I surely attached human emotions to this animal. He was as much a member of the family as anyone else, and his stoic suffering & passing caused us all much grieving. Like Job he endured many loathsome sores & illnesses without complaining, and with full integrity. Living with integrity, receiving the good and the bad. If dogs communicate with a higher power, I am sure it is never to curse God or to bemoan their fate. Should we be put on a higher pedestal than our animal friends just because of our larger mental capacity to contemplate & to gripe to God? I don't think so. Just because we have more power doesn't mean we are better than the animals. It just means we have the responsibility to give them the extra special care & respect that they deserve, and to be thankful for their presence in our lives.

Amen