

Gen. 1:20-25
Feast Day of St. Francis of Assisi

The Beauty of Animal Being

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This will be a quick homily because, one, it's cold outside; and, two, I recognize that I'm not the main event!

Today we celebrate the feast day of St. Francis of Assisi, the 12th century friar who taught us to love *all* of God's creation. Not just human beings, but the entire cosmos – the land, sea, and sky, and all the creatures that inhabit them – as beautifully described in today's readings from the Book of Genesis and the Song of Creation.

There's a story about St. Francis that I really like and which I think is particularly appropriate for today. When Francis and his monastic brethren were setting up their vegetable garden in the monastery, Francis insisted that they leave a corner of the garden just for flowers.

The brother in charge of the garden said to Francis, "Why should we leave a corner of the garden for flowers? We would have more fruits and vegetables to eat if we planted in that space."

Francis replied, "My brother, the reason why we should leave a corner of the garden for flowers is so that we can enjoy the beauty of the flowers and, in turn, remember to give thanks to God for the beauty of creation."

Like Francis' flowers, our beloved animal companions serve much more than just a utilitarian purpose. Rather, they are icons of the divine. They help us to recognize the beauty of creation and to give thanks to God. As the poet John O'Donohue put it so well in today's reading: "May we learn to return and rest in the beauty of animal being."

So let us ponder Francis' wisdom in helping us to see the beauty of the created order, and let us indeed "rest in the beauty of animal being."

+Amen.

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