



Today, if it were not a Sunday, it would be the Feast of St Francis of Assisi, a Saint loved by many because of his gentleness and closeness in following Christ, a Saint especially relevant today because of his love for all the created order; and to us for he regarded the animals as his brothers and sisters.

Most Christians make a dreadful mistake in interpreting Holy Scripture in relation to the created order, especially with regards to our relationship with our fellow animals. And most of this interpretation hinges on one verse in the first chapter of the first book of the Bible - and they get this wrong interpretation by totally ignoring the verse that immediately follows it. Let me read these few verses to you:

“So God created human beings, making them to be like himself. He created them male and female, blessed them, and said, “Have many children, so that your descendants will live all over the earth and bring it under their control. I am putting you in charge of the fish, the birds, and all the wild animals. I have provided all kinds of grain and all kinds of fruit for you to eat; but for all the wild animals and for all the birds I have provided grass and leafy plants for food” — and it was done.”

God said: “I am putting you in charge of the fish, the birds, and all the wild animals.” Some translations put it “I am giving you dominion over..”

And people have used this as an excuse for killing, eating, hunting and in other ways abusing animals, totally ignoring the next verse which says: “I have provided all kinds of grain and all kinds of fruit for you to eat; but for all the wild animals and for all the birds I have provided grass and leafy plants for food”.

In the next sentence after putting us in charge of animals, or giving us dominion over them, God gives us not just a vegetarian, not just a vegan, but a fruitarian diet, where not even plants are killed for food.

For the dominion he gives us is not the dominion of the earthly ruler, but the dominion of Christ.

In the Gospel of St Luke (22:27) Jesus says: “But I am among you as one who serves.”

Again, in the Gospel of St John, (13:13-17) after Jesus washes his disciples’ feet, he says:

“You call me Teacher and Lord; and you are right, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.”

We are then to exercise our dominion over creatures as Jesus exercised his dominion over us - with leadership, yes; but in service and self-sacrifice for our fellow-creatures.

St Francis called all creation - animate and inanimate - his brothers and sisters.

Let us then, like St Francis, not eat, but care for and serve our fellow creatures, as we are commanded in the Book of Genesis.

And if your animals are missing out on a blessing this year, here is the Franciscan blessing you can say over them:

“Blessed are you, Lord God, maker of all living creatures.
You called forth fish in the sea, birds in the air
and animals on the land.
You inspired St. Francis to call all of them
his brothers and sisters.
We ask you to bless this animal.
By the power of your love,
enable it to live according to your plan.
May we always praise you for all your beauty in creation.
Blessed are you, Lord our God, in all your creatures! Amen.”

And if you have any Holy Water, sprinkle them with it.

Let us pray.

Lord, As we remember St Francis, we remember the great Christians of our own land who have gone before us who eschewed the eating of flesh; people like John Wesley, John Woolman, William and Catherine Booth, and Baron Donald Soper, to name but a few. We pray that like them we may join St Francis in following our Lord Jesus Christ, in loving and serving all of God's blessed creation; and the blessing . . .