
Bless The Lord, O My Soul

**An article from the *Cathedral Times*
by the Very Reverend Samuel G. Candler
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We sure did a lot of blessing this past Sunday!

As most of our community knows by now, we recognize the Feast of St. Francis every year on the first Sunday of October. And what a day it was this year! This past Sunday, we welcomed into the 8:45 service all manner of God's creation: dogs, cats, hamsters, fishes, birds, hermit crabs, and even snakes. This was in addition to our usual human beings, who, as you know, are a wide assortment as well.

On Sunday, I saw huge dogs pulling wildly on usually staid and solemn parishioners. I saw young children wide-eyed with wonder, eagerly looking for the next great animal to enter the nave. I saw families caring tenderly for smaller animals. I saw vulnerability and sensitivity on Sunday. I saw people worshipping outside our normal "comfort" zones. Our community felt even more alive than usual. We were not trying to cover up all our weaknesses and dirty spots; we were real.

The Feast of St. Francis of Assisi, and the Blessing of the Animals, has become one of my favorite services for these reasons. Even if I cannot hear the sermon so well on that day (and it was a great sermon, from Beth Knowlton!), even if I cannot hear some of our favorite hymns, I do hear and see the gospel in a fresh way. I see people acting as if they are in love. I see authenticity and laughter and joy. When I see all those things, I also see the presence of Christ.

My first Sunday as the Dean of the Cathedral of St. Philip was nine years ago on the Feast of St. Francis. I'm not sure many folks heard that first sermon! But I reminded us then that our word "animal" comes from the Latin word, "anima," meaning soul. An animal is a being with soul, or "life force." At the Cathedral, we are meant to bless the Lord with our soul, just as the opening words of Psalm 103 say: "Bless the Lord, O my soul!" (the small little words in our prayer book before each psalm are written in Latin; for Psalm 103, they are: *Benedic, anima mea.*)

We are meant to be a blessing church, a church that blesses one another with our soul. We are meant to bless God with our soul. We are meant to bless others with soul!

Every year, on the second Sunday of October, we observe another feast, the feast of St. Philip the Deacon. It was Philip the Deacon who ventured forth from Jerusalem, and who was so quick to bless the Ethiopian eunuch with the waters of baptism. His faith led his soul to uncharted territory.

We, too, will baptize new members into the church on this Sunday. Some of the younger ones may be crying on that day. Some may be disorderly. But we will bless each one. We will bless each one with soul. Then, together, we will all bless the Lord.

The church is at our best when we bless.

Sam Candler signature



The Very Rev. Sam Candler

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