



The Church of England
in Essex and East London

Diocese of Chelmsford

The Feast of St Francis

Animal Welfare Sunday

Sunday 4th October 2026

Reading: Psalm 19

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Deanery

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer.

There are 3 options for readings for the 4th October. The psalm set for the first option (proper 22) is psalm 19 and a very fitting one for Animal Welfare Sunday, which happens to fall on the 4th- the feast of St Francis.

Psalm 19 is a poem of praise focused on the Word of God in both nature and Scripture. The second half of the Psalm focus on the commandments of the Lord/ our instructions for living well; the first 6 verses are known as a nature hymn. Verse 1 begins: "The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hand." Creation tells; proclaims; sings of the Glory of God. Verse 3 is translated in different ways, the KJV more heavily emphasizes not the inaudibility of creation, but the universality of it: "There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard. Their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the earth." Everyone on earth can perceive something of the Glory of God from the book of nature. From this general revelation, the Psalmist writes of God who is eternal and powerful. But while creation reveals the Glory of God, it is of course the Word, the Son, the bridegroom, who enables us to have a close relationship with God- to know God's grace. The Word "through whom all things came into being... without him not one thing came into being. And what has come into being in him was life...".

St Francis is the Patron Saint of Ecology and non-human Animals, in recognition of his deep reverence for all life/ for creation and the Saint's understanding of humankind's kinship with all that God has brought forth.

If you were to conjure up an image of St Francis in your mind, it may well be of a man covered in beautiful creatures a la Snow White; but St Francis wasn't a romantic or

sentimental character- for example in one story about his life, he told a flock of birds to shut up because they were interrupting a service! He also couldn't understand why people would maintain a vegetarian diet on feast days.

What Francis did understand is that creation is a gift flowing out from the love of God. Francis also understood our duty to care for non-human animals because all life is important, everything has a purpose because God brought it forth and therefore it deserves our courtesy and care. For example, Francis told the gardener at the Friary to leave a corner for the weeds and wildflowers because they had a right to be there. He told villagers of Gubbio to stop hunting a wolf and to instead provide him with food because he had a right to be there as much as they had.

Francis understood that our relationship with other creatures is an essential part of what it is to be human and what comes naturally from having a relationship with God. There is a sadness behind separation, and a lack of joy in seeing ourselves as set apart from rather than living with. Ultimately of course this is what stops us from flourishing- when we see ourselves as apart from God rather than accepting God with us in relationship. That is the heart of our faith- that God took on human flesh to share our life and save us from within. Which enables us to have an intimate relationship with the Godhead, so much so that we are told to call the all-powerful; omnipresent, creator of all- 'Dad'.

In talking about the relationship between God and creation, the Franciscan, Brother Sam Double, has highlighted what we have lost in the newer versions of the Lord's Prayer which ask that God's will be done on earth, rather than in. By saying on we are suggesting- put upon/ top-down power but in earth is far more in accordance with the theology of creation and incarnation- which teaches us that God remains interested in creation and is part of it and longs to be in relationship with all creatures. And it is far more in accordance with God's concept of power as revealed in Jesus Christ- that those

who have, share; that those with authority, protect the weak and the vulnerable; that those who are first, must serve. Adam was instructed to serve and to safeguard the earth, that's what the Hebrew says. And yet we talk of dominance, stewardship, separation rather than kinship and living with, or as the Franciscans call it 'making room for the other'.

This year marks the 800th anniversary of the death of St Francis. May we take the opportunity to think more deeply about how we can make room for the other, not only our human neighbours, but all the created order that God has blessed us to be a part of.

In the words of St Francis, from the Canticle of the Creatures:

Praised be You, Lord, through Sister Mother Earth,

who sustains us and governs us and who produces

varied fruits with coloured flowers and herbs.

The Highest, all powerful, good Lord,

Yours are the praises, the glory, the honour, and all blessing. Amen