

All Creatures of Ordinary Times

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By Lucia A. Silecchia

Kittens have eyelashes. I distinctly remember the moment I first noticed this. Years ago, a cat welcomed a litter of kittens in my family's backyard. Happily, they were unafraid of their accidental landlords but had a wide-eyed curiosity about us. As they let me approach them, I saw perfect, nearly invisible, rows of eyelashes above the bright yellow eyes that looked up at me.

I was well beyond the age when this sort of discovery should have struck me so deeply. Yet, it did. There was something about such minute detail on such tiny creatures that overwhelmed me with a sense of creation's glory – and the far greater glory of the Creator. God had planned every tiny eyelash above every tiny eye on every tiny face of every tiny kitten throughout time.

Often, it can be overwhelming to think directly of the glory of God because it is so far beyond what I can start to comprehend. Indeed, it is also overwhelming to contemplate the great dignity of human persons created in the image and likeness of God. Thus, I am grateful for all the ways in which the more accessible, but often overlooked, everyday miracles of creation show a glimpse of the face of God.

Each autumn, October's feast day of St. Francis of Assisi turns our attention to the particular way in which the creatures of this world reflect their awesome Creator. In so many churches, blessings of animals take place – perhaps with some trepidation! Household pets are blessed during these days in an expression of gratitude for the ways in which they brighten our ordinary times in so many ways.

Cats will come, with that look of disgruntled ennui that cats wear better than anyone else can. Good-hearted dogs will frolic joyfully at the chance to meet new two and four-footed friends. Fish will slosh around in their bowls when they are carried to church steps and gardens – and it is hard to fathom what they may be thinking as their serene existence is interrupted in this way. Birds will dart around in their cages as they go on this peculiar fieldtrip, and the turtles, toads and lizards will wear the inscrutable looks they always sport. Gerbils and hamsters may nervously burrow in their cages when they discover that they are in a crowd that includes cats and the occasional snake. More exotic and larger animals will be welcomed too, in the hopes that nothing unexpected happens as they assemble.

As people and pets gather in holy places, I hope it will be a chance to think again of the ordinary extraordinariness of the animals who share our world. If I had an eternity, I could never imagine into creation the octopus, the elephant, the starfish or the giraffe – or any of the creatures that dart in the depths of the sea and fill the sky with fluttering.

Who but God could conceive of a butterfly, a dolphin, a porcupine or a sea urchin? Yet, they grace my world and for the gifts of them, I am grateful.

Paradoxically, there are circumstances in which it seems as though our animals are treated better than our neighbors are. Conversely, there are other times when animals are treated with cruel neglect and thoughtlessness. Yet, despite these failings in the ways we share our world with others, I hope that this year, our tributes to St. Francis are a time for gratitude.

It is a time for gratitude for the blessed gift of creation, and for the gentle power of God the Creator who brought humanity and all else that lives into creation. It is a time for gratitude for the animals who share our homes, hearths and hearts – and for all those creatures we do not know. Most importantly, it is a time to be grateful to a God who even gives kittens those eyelashes that to this day remind me to be thankful for the smallest of miracles in ordinary times.

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