



Even in the year 2026, I recognize not everyone takes time out of their daily schedule to scroll through Facebook or Instagram or TikTok, and for those of you who have managed to resist them all for however many years now, you may just be all the better for it, to be sure. But, for the church, as we dare to venture into proclaiming the Gospel in all

forms of communication as best and as authentically we can; the church, that may not always be the quickest to adapt with such newness, even we in the church have discovered that there seems to be this shortcut in this relatively new social media world: a shortcut to grabbing people's attention and making them feel joy and calm and happiness amidst other matters that do not always go quite as well with the daily schedule. The shortcut is absolutely anything to do with a cute and fuzzy creature.

So, for us at Divinity, amidst our spring traditions of First Communion and Confirmations and Easter Sundays, are our cute and fuzzy courtyard ducklings, who, once we post any image or video to do with them, will lead to hundreds of people clicking and viewing, and not just once, but over and over and over again. And then, a couple weeks ago, when we were trying to get the word out about yesterday's pet blessing, over 2,000 people took time out of their daily schedule to see what in the world Divinity was doing with these dogs on their front lawn. Evidently, whether we have them at home or not, the cute, fuzzy creatures seem to reel us in every single time.

However, the reason why we do this whole animal blessing thing in early October, is because of the day when the wider church not only remembers but celebrates the continued impact of St. Francis of Assisi. And, according to the church tradition, it is believed that exactly 800 years ago earlier this month, St. Francis drew his earthly ministry to a close, which included a life of fully renouncing his family's immense wealth to, instead, minister to those in impoverished conditions, as well as to build more churches to further proclaim the son of a carpenter who had his own profound way of renouncing the physical wealth of the world, and then, of course, St. Francis is perhaps now best remembered as the ultimate inspiration for all these animal blessings that seem to have grown in popularity for faith communities all over the world this time of year.

Except, the problem with this saint, is that he insisted on going above and beyond the cute and the fuzziness, to transcend the momentary excitement reaction upon seeing them. For Francis, it was about a call from the Divine to raise awareness of our connectedness to the creatures, who share an earthly journey of life and death, of hunger and thirst, of needing to find rest amidst the day-to-day, of struggles and triumphs; and if we realize our humbling inter-connectedness, we would remember our plea from God to care for the creatures and the Creation, in order for us all to thrive for the better.

And so, I cannot help but think of another image that seemed to sweep over all the social media feeds several years ago: when a dog named Sully became the most famous canine in the world, as he lay beside his human companion, who was lying in mortal rest. It just so happened

that his human partner was a former president in George H. W. Bush, but, of course, for the service dog, Sully, I'm sure he was just George, his best friend; the one who made him feel loved and cared for and purpose-full and meaning-filled; the one who went above and beyond the cute and fuzzy feels over the creature. And as the story gained national and even international attention, it seemed to be that the former Commander in Chief and the Bush family firmly believed that Sully did the exact same for his earthly counterpart; that, as he neared the end of his mortal journey, a time when even surrounded by loved ones, can still bring about feelings of loneliness and regrets and questions galore; and that the far more than cute Sully, could add further friendship and love and caring for even when the other is at his most vulnerable, and reassuring to that precious other that a purpose was fulfilled and that further meaning was added to other lives along the way.

Time and time again throughout this life, Christ calls us to come, all of us who are weary and carrying heavy burdens about the daily schedule and all life matters that thoroughly weigh us down. However, sometimes the church might be slightly hesitant from attaching too much God and theology to the creatures around us, even as we now intentionally bless them every October; but maybe we as the church need to give God a little more credit; that, as we bless them, we allow the distinct possibility of Divine activity in them; that they just might have a holy capacity to bless us and the world in the weariness and heavy burdens of life. And that such a viral image might just reveal a different but most heart-warming proclamation of the Gospel: that nothing can happen in this life, not even death itself, to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus, our Lord. So, for the treasured creatures in our midst who insist on being with us through all the joys and sorrows and everything in between, providing their own precious glimpse to Jesus Christ himself; thanks be to God for them, indeed! Amen!