

Sermon :: 04-Oct-2026
St Francis of Assisi, All Years

“ that we may, for love of you,
delight in your whole creation
with perfectness of joy ”

Spiders in the bathtub.

No, that's not the name of a new children's story or some scary Halloween poem ... but something I've become aware of only since moving to San Diego. I don't know whether I'd just never *noticed* them *elsewhere* ... or whether it's a peculiar trait of *San Diego* spiders (!) ... but here, several times a *month*—occasionally, even several days a *week*—I open the curtain to take a shower ... and there's a spider setting up housekeeping in the bathtub. It might be big Daddy Longlegs or a smaller house spider ... but there they are, either still scurrying about their business, or suddenly frozen by my disturbance.

Now, I never used to give spiders much thought. I've never been afraid of them (and apologies to anyone I may be triggering with this intro!), and I've also never met one that posed me any real harm. And I've known for quite a while now how much *good* spiders do: catching *other* pesky insects ... reducing the spread of disease ... helping reduce farmers' reliance on chemical insecticides.¹

And all of those are, of course, *excellent* reasons to permit friendly neighborhood spiders to take up temporary residence in my bathtub ... rather than clobbering them with a shoe or swooping down on them with a wad of tissues and a toilet flush. But having pondered this phenomenon more and more in San Diego ... I'll confess coming to something of a spider '*epiphany*': These creatures are God's own, too. They have both *autonomy* and *interdependence* ... both *practicality* and *beauty* ... both *biological life* and *sacred spirit*. And since coming to grasp this, it's been my *pleasure*—my *delight*, even—on 'spider mornings' to gently lift them out of the bathtub, *before* the deluge (!), on a piece of paper and safely deposit them on the bathroom floor, where they can embark again on whatever it was they'd *been* doing.²

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Saint Francis didn't know of bathtubs, but he surely knew spiders ... and I think he'd have seen—and treated—them exactly the same way. While we know and remember Francis ... contemplate and maybe seek to emulate him ... for his legendary love of, care for and rapport with animals ... preaching to birds, reasoning with a wolf, freeing a rabbit, doting on a sheep ... these are more than just fond tales—resonate with meaning far deeper than mere tenderness or compassion. For Francis saw ... in *every* living creature—human, animal³ and plant ... the image of the God Who *made* them and the dignity which the *same* God gifted *to* them. Francis made a point of extending

¹ See, e.g., <https://www.oneearth.org/eight-surprising-reasons-why-spiders-make-the-best-roommates/> (accessed 01-Oct-2026); <https://southernpestcontrol.com/the-many-benefits-of-spiders/> (accessed 01-Oct-2026).

² I always look when I get back out of the shower, but not one has ever been where I'd left it.

³ I 'get' that humans are animals, too. I separate us in this list to make a point about how *we* tend to separate *ourselves* from *them*.

COURTESY—*his* word: meant to evoke the genteel, respectful, even chivalrous—deferential—manners of a royal court—to *every* living creature he encountered.

Now, I don't know whether Francis ever *said* it, or even *thought* of it, this way ... but I detect in the COURTEOUS *tenderness* ... the intentional *nurture* ... the un-self-conscious *love* ... Francis showed every dog and cat, rabbit and mouse, fish and frog, wolf and fox who crossed his path ... something of a perpetual circle-of-love:

- First, God *creates* every living thing—human and otherwise—in full *love* and with full *dignity* and *goodness*
- Next, God *gives* every creature certain gifts ... attributes ... 'goods' for *themselves* and 'goods' they can share with the *world*: beauty ... agility ... speed ... patience ... cunning ... intelligence ... the ability of their flesh or their produce to nourish *other* creatures ... the ability to rid *other creatures* of pests and parasites ... the ability to companion and communicate with, comfort and share with other creatures, in community: a whole ecosystem of *interconnected*—and, ultimately, *shared*—'goods,' all from God

In *God's* design for this world ... which is a never-ending *circle of equals*, rather than a top-down *hierarchy of prey* (think less of a *food-chain* and more of an endless *loop-of-love*) ... *all* creatures, in their own way, recognize, in each another, both the *loving* hand of the Creator Who *made* the world and the *merciful* hand of the Savior Who *sustains* it. And *in* that innate love and mercy, they—we—dwell in mutual, beneficial—even nurturing—interconnectedness with *all other creatures*:

- The soil provides the worm a home ... and the worm, in turn, nourishes the soil; and in so doing, they *praise* the God Who *made* them
- The nourished soil gives growth to grain ... and the grain, in turn, 'roots' and stabilizes the soil; and in so doing, they *praise* the God Who *made* them
- The grown grain feeds the cow ... and the cow, in turn, produces manure for the soil (and the worm); milk for its (and our) young to drink; meat for humans to eat and hides for us to wear; and in so doing, they *praise* the God Who *made* them
- And we *humans*? Well, God has given us some of the greatest gifts of *all*⁴: superior intellect, maximal agency and unfettered imagination. *With* these gifts, Francis would argue, come not just the moral *obligation* ... but also the God-given *joy* ... to respond to each of our fellow-creatures with *gratitude* ... with *compassion* ... and with *respect*: ¶to husband the cow not just humanely ... but also with the understanding that when we look into her eyes, we are staring at Christ-in-Sacrifice; ¶to farm the grain not just abundantly ... but also in concert with its inherent design, and attentive to the needs of *all* creation; ¶to care for the soil not just efficiently ... but also honoring *its* goodness to *us* and our *reciprocal* calling to be good to *it*; ¶to regard the lowly worm not just as a *servant* ... but also as a *sibling*—to be regarded, protected and esteemed ... *delighting* in

⁴ Full disclosure: I would still very much relish the ability to fly (without any mechanical assistance)!

God's creation with *perfectness of joy!*
and in so doing, we *all praise* the God Who *made us*

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Does this all seem a little far-fetched? All just a bit too *fantastic ... unrealistic ...* maybe even *childish-sounding*? Perhaps. Francis was passionately—maybe even uniquely—devout: so far ahead of his time and so much deeper in faith than his colleagues that within just a year or two after his death, his brother Franciscans were relaxing *this* rule of his and ignoring *that* one.

But then again, perhaps *not*. For look at the animals who've joined us here, this morning ... and ponder, a moment, all their *siblings* back *home*: snoozing on dog beds; scratching on cat condos; singing in cages; sunning on rocks and patios; swimming in bowls and tanks. We very readily grasp, I think, the *individuality ... the personality ...* the complex matrix of *abilities and inabilities, of giving and needing, of obeying and asking ...* collectively, the *personhood*—the *divine personhood, the incarnate sacredness*—of the animals whom we've invited into our lives ... made integral parts of our families ... as our *pets*. We *treasure* all of this in them, just as *Jesus treasures* all of this in *us*. And if, as we believe, *Jesus* loves all of *us*, in *our* divine personhood, *without exception ...* then it only stands to reason, that He expects *us* to love *all creatures*, in *their* divine personhood, without exception, as well.

And so, this St Francis Day, let us not only celebrate ... but also take *up—commit to—live out ...* the gentle genius of spirit ... the transforming perceptivity of faith ... of the Friar from Assisi who teaches us to see Christ in the eyes of a cow ... in the blossoming of barley ... in the inching of a worm ... in the fruitfulness of soil. For if *we*, with *Francis*, can come to see Christ in *them ...* then surely, we can learn to see Christ in one another—in *every* other—too.

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