

Isabelle Oss
10/06/24
Mulvihill

Hooves, Hymns and Hedgehogs: Cathedral Church of St. Paul's Blessing of the Animals Brings Peace to Creatures Great and Small



The Very Rev. Amy McCreath recites a blessing for Boston Park Ranger horses bring the Feast of St. Francis ceremony and the Cathedral Church of St. Paul, Sunday, Oct. 6, 2024. (Isabelle Oss)

Hooves clattered along Boston's Tremont Street as Otis and Missy, two horses from the city's Park Ranger Mounted Unit, arrived at the granite steps outside the Cathedral Church of St. Paul to receive a blessing last Sunday.

Mounted rangers led the tranquil animals as a dozen congregation members snapped photos and videos following an hourlong ceremony inside the Cathedral.

"Let them be good companions to each other, and to the people they serve," the Very Rev. Amy McCreath, Cathedral dean, said with one hand on Missy's neck and another in the air.

The service included readings and prayers for animals, including those harmed in North Carolina and Florida during recent hurricanes.

"We pray for all who lost their lives because of Hurricane Helene, and that all who have been affected may find shelter, food and comfort," McCreath said.

The horses and a Chihuahua named Chief were the only live animals at the ceremony. Owners also brought photos of beloved pets to have a blessing bestowed upon them. McCreath's sentiment of peace and protection is part of the Episcopal Church's annual "Season of Creation" celebration, according to the ceremony transcript.

The celebration honors St. Francis of Assisi and begins Sept. 1—the start of the month that Jesus Christ inflicted wounds replicating his own on the cross—on the patron saint of animals and the environment, according to Catholic Church websites.

The "Season of Creation" ends Oct. 4 with the animal blessing and the Feast of St. Francis, according to the Cathedral's website. The congregation held the ceremony on Oct. 6 to align with St. Paul's normal Sunday service.

At the start of the ceremony, sermon leaders invited attendees to stand and introduce their pets. Ezekiel, Obi Wan, Pumpkin, Louise, Rat, and Oscar—the photographed cats—are some of the newest companions to make the list of St. Paul's blessed animals this year.

The blessing of animal companions is a regular event in some U.S. communities, according to news reports.

"I've always just thought it was a really sweet tradition and I do it every year," said Laura Thomas, a member of St. Paul's choir. This year, she hopes the blessing will bring her rambunctious cats, Benji and Tiny Chef, more peace.

The annual blessing is open to all, and attendees included homeless individuals or those looking for a safe haven for the day, McCreath said. The congregation takes pride in its unhoused persons ministry, "Many Angels Needed Now and Always" or "MANNA," according to its website.

A plastic dinosaur, "Terry the Pterodactyl," sits beside the Eucharist each week as "MANNA's" honorary mascot, congregation members said. McCreath also blessed "Terry."

The celebration concluded with the choir's rendition of 1989 British hymn, "O Ye Badgers and Hedgehogs," written by composer, Andrew Carter. It is a playful call to the animal world to bless and glorify the Lord, Thomas said.

"Remind us that we are connected to creatures that dwelled on this earth long before us, and we are part of a beautiful web that you have designed and called to us to care for," McCreath said.