

Chapel Message

About 800 years ago a man named Francis lived in the country of Italy.

- Francis was a terribly selfish person.
 - o He only ever thought of money, killing people in war (power over others), partying, and being popular among his friends.
 - Good thing his dad was ultra-rich, as he would provide him with all the money to pursue anything that he wanted... and he always wanted the best.
 - The best wine, the prettiest girls, and the most trendy and expensive clothes.
- But things began to happen in Francis's life that slowly changed him.
 - o He started to have dreams where he felt that God was trying to say something to him, but he couldn't work out what it was.
 - And more and more he was arguing with his parents... his father being the worst.
 - 'Francis, get a flash job and makes lots of money like me!' his father used to say.
 - o But Francis didn't do what his father told him.
 - And one time Francis took some money from his father, and his father was so terribly angry said 'That's it! I'm taking you to court and having you put in jail. In fact, as far as I am concerned you are no longer my son. Whatever inheritance of money you were going to receive, you will now have NOTHING!

So ashamed, humiliated and confused, Francis ran away and began to live in the forest among the trees and rocks and animals and birds.

- And one would think that after a day or so he would go back and apologise to his dad, and get his old comfy room and all his money back.
 - o But he didn't.

For some reason Francis began to feel quite at home with the animals and the trees.

- Instead of dreaming about money he spent time watching the deer grazing on the meadow... and felt rich.
 - o Instead of thinking about killing people, he would peacefully watch sparrows nesting and building up their young... his soul began to strengthen.
 - o Instead of listening to party music... he listened to the songs of the birds... and in their song he sensed God was singing.
- The animals seemed to accept him, and not run away.



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- The violent angry Francis had now become a peace loving person
 - He began to see that God not only made the animals as he had read in the bible, but through the animals God somehow filled him with wonder and joy and peace in a way that no money, no loud music, no friends, no expressions of anger ever could.
 - Francis, or Francis of Assisi as he became known, went on to be recognised as one of the first historic figures to see the importance of the environment, ecology and care of animals.
 - Because somehow God had changed his heart through the animals.

Today people all over the world observe Francis of Assisi day on October 4th, and its non-religious cousin, 'World Animal Day' also on October 4.

- People, like Francis, are more and more realising the importance of animals not simply for what they can provide in food and clothing, but that they are our friends, and that we have a God given responsibility to make sure we look after them.
 - Animals can be the key, as Francis found out, to a deeper understanding of God.
 - When we respect animals and love them, somehow we are also respecting and loving God... and ourselves.

It is a good time to focus on animals and what they do for us.

- But instead of me rabbiting on about what animals do, how about we ask some of our owners what their pets bring to their lives?
 - Have they had any experience that changed their heart?

