

Framework Liturgy for the Loss of a Pet

By Fr. Jody Howard

Introduction:

The loss of a pet is a difficult experience for people, sometimes made worse by the sense that sometimes accompanies it that it is “only” a pet. This guilt is understandable given the way that our society sometimes looks at pets, or because of the backlash against treating animals as somehow too human. But grief at the loss of a pet can be deep and is nothing at all to be ashamed of. Creation is given to us as something to rejoice in. Beyond that, our pets are given to us as a foretaste of the peaceable kingdom where the lion shall lay down with the lamb, and children shall play over the hole of the asp. They give us a glimpse of something that we are attuned to yearn for. On top of that, many of us spend as much or more time with pets or working animals as we do with certain people in our lives whom we can about: of course their loss will be felt.

The service which follows is for use with the burial service of a pet. Please adapt the service as needed to fit the needs of the particular service you are conducting. The N. marks the places where you will need to insert either the pet's name or the owner's name as appropriate.

Service:

The family and friends gather together in some convenient location. When everyone has arrived and they are ready to begin, the person appointed begins, saying:

Officiant: Blessed be the one, holy, and living God.

All: Glory to God for ever and ever.

Officiant: All-merciful and compassionate God, Lord of all that lives, we come together in the midst of grief asking for the strength to bear the loss of N, our companion(s) (*or, a companion to our friend(s)* _____). We offer you thanks for the gift of pets, for the ways in which they make us more caring and loving people, and the glimpse they offer of your peaceable kingdom, reminding us that you love all that you have made. And we bring you our prayers for peace of heart in the knowledge of your mercy and love, in Christ Jesus. *Amen.*

Invitatory: *Psalm 121*

- 1 I lift up my eyes to the hills; *
from where is my help to come?
- 2 My help comes from the Lord, *
the maker of heaven and earth.
- 3 He will not let your foot be moved *
and he who watches over you will not fall asleep.
- 4 Behold, he who keeps watch over Israel *

- shall neither slumber nor sleep;
- 5 The Lord himself watches over you; *
the Lord is your shade at your right hand,
- 6 So that the sun shall not strike you by day, *
nor the moon by night.
- 7 The Lord shall preserve you from all evil; *
it is he who shall keep you safe.
- 8 The Lord shall watch over your going out and your coming in, *
from this time forth for evermore.

First Reading: Isaiah 11:1-9

A shoot shall come out from the stock of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots. The spirit of the Lord shall rest on him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord. His delight shall be in the fear of the Lord.

He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide by what his ears hear; but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked. Righteousness shall be the belt around his waist, and faithfulness the belt around his loins.

The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze, their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den. They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.

A Song of Creation Benedicite, omnia opera Domini Song of the Three, 35-65

Glorify the Lord, all you works of the Lord, *
sing praise and give honor for ever.

In the high vault of heaven, glorify the Lord, *
sing praise and give honor for ever.

Let the earth glorify the Lord, *
sing praise and give honor for ever.

Glorify the Lord, O mountains
and hills, and all that grows upon the earth, *
sing praise and give honor for ever.

Glorify the Lord, O springs of water, seas, and streams, *
O whales and all that move in the waters.

All birds of the air, glorify the Lord, *
sing praise and give honor for ever.

Glorify the Lord, O beasts of the wild, *

and all you flocks and herds.
O men and women everywhere, glorify the Lord, *
sing praise and give honor for ever.
Let us glorify the Lord: Father, Son and Holy Spirit; *
sing praise and give honor for ever.
In the high vault of heaven, glorify the Lord, *
sing praise and give honor for ever.

Second Reading: St. Thomas à Kempis, Of The Imitation of Christ

And if thy heart be straight with God, then every creature shall be to thee a mirror of life and a book of doctrine, for there is no creature so little or so vile, but that sheweth and representeth the goodness of God (Thomas à Kempis, *Of The Imitation of Christ*, 66).

If there is to be a burial or other form of interment, the remains may be placed in the grave or the ashes poured/placed in the intended resting place at this point, followed by the versicles and responses below, taken from Psalm 36:5-7).

V. Your love, O Lord, reaches to the heavens,
R. and your faithfulness to the clouds.
V. Your righteousness is like the strong mountains,
R. your justice like the great deep;
V. you save both man and beast, O Lord.
R. How priceless is your love, O God!
V. your people take refuge under the shadow of your wings.

A few words or remembrance or reflection may be offered as may be appropriate.

Then the officiant and people join together in praying the following prayer, adapted from a prayer attributed to St. Basil:

Officiant: Let us pray:

O God, we thank you that through the life of N., you have enlarged within us the sense of fellowship with all living things, our brothers and sisters, the inarticulate beasts, to whom you gave the earth as their home in common with us. We pray that we may carry the memory of N. in our hearts for all our days and that the companionship and affection we shared may be a balm to grief and an inspiration to more faithful living and care of your creation and creatures. In the name of your son Jesus Christ, *Amen.*

Officiant: Let us go forth in the name of Christ.

People: Thanks be to God.

If additional readings are desired, Romans 8:18-2, Psalm 104:1, 10-25 are suggested.