

Presented to

By _____

In Loving Remembrance of

On This Day

*Will I
See
My Pet
in Heaven?*

CHILDREN'S EDITION

Friar Jack Wintz



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Will I See My Pet in Heaven?

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Will I See My Pet in Heaven? is also designed to help children who have recently lost a pet. You may want to add the words “In Loving Memory” followed by the name of the child’s beloved pet on the opening Presentation Page.



A Small Question with a Big Answer

Let me tell you a story.

This story is about my young friend Eva Maria, who stopped to see me one afternoon at my office in Cincinnati. She had a question she wanted to ask.

"Today at school, one of the kids told me that only humans go to heaven," she said. "I almost started to cry. Is that true, Friar Jack?"

She went on: ". . . because my dog Daisy is my best friend. When I get home she jumps into my arms and licks my face. *Wouldn't* God want her to be with me in heaven?"

Then, Eva Maria looked at me, waiting for the answer she hoped for.

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"God loves you and Daisy more than you even know, Eva Maria," I said. "If we trust in God's love and goodness, then we believe that God wants each of us to be happy, both here on earth and for eternity in heaven. Honestly, what kind of heaven would it be if the animals we love so much can't be with us?" I asked.

My young friend nodded. "If only people were in heaven, it would be boring." Then, she smiled.

I laughed and agreed with her. "Whatever it takes to make you happy in heaven, God will make sure that it's there. We know God cares for all of us and wants what is best for all creatures."

"Then I know I'll see Daisy again!" Eva Maria said.

We don't know everything God has planned for us in heaven. But there are many good reasons for you to believe that your dog, cat, fish, hamster, snake, ferret, iguana—or any other creature that God created—will go to heaven when it dies. God has given us clues and hints in stories from the Bible and in the teachings of my favorite saint, Francis of Assisi.

I said all of that to Eva Maria that day when she asked me her question.

"I remember that St. Francis loved the animals and the birds," called out Eva Maria as she skipped away. "He called them his brothers and sisters. But I don't have time to hear more stories right now. My mom is waiting outside for me!" Much happier than when she had walked in, my young friend was already out the door.

"I'll come back another day!" she called back to me.



Most of us have the same question as Eva Maria, whether we're children or grownups. "Will I see my pet in heaven?"

We have a deep desire to know if we will see our pets again, and all the other lovely creatures who live with us on the earth that God made.

What will become of them after they die?

Have You Heard of Saint Francis of Assisi?

I have been a Franciscan friar for over fifty years, and over that very long time I've thought about this question a lot. I love the stories of St. Francis of Assisi and his close friendship with animals, and these stories have shaped the way that I view these things. Perhaps you've also heard the stories of this brown-robed friar preaching to the birds, releasing Brother Rabbit from a trap, or letting Sister Raven serve as his "alarm clock" to awaken him for early morning prayer.

You haven't? Well, then, you will!

You might even know that St. Francis wrote a wonderful poem, or song, called *The Canticle of the Creatures*, or sometimes *The Canticle of Brother Sun*. In this song, Francis invites all his brother and sister creatures to praise their Creator—Brother Sun and Sister Moon, Brother Fire and Sister Water, as well as Sister Earth, our mother, with all her sweet fruits and brightly colored flowers.

I'll tell you about some of these things in this book.



What the Bible Says

The Bible says, "In the beginning, God created heaven and earth." Right? In other words, our God, who is caring toward all, created one big family. And if that is true, doesn't it make sense that God's saving care would include not only human beings, but the whole family of creation?

I believe that's what St. Francis saw when he read the Bible. He understood that our whole world was connected, not only physically here on this earth but through God's love for us, and even after we die.

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When you learn about the ecology of Planet Earth in school—for example, about how the environment in one place is affected by a change happening in another place—you might think about Francis, who was named the patron saint of ecology. He brought the word of God to all of God's creation, talking to the rabbits and the robins just as he talked to the people in the villages he walked through.

The question we ask after a beloved pet dies—"Will I see my pet in heaven?"—may seem small on the surface, but the answer is a big one for the whole created world. What would it mean if all creatures were one family? How would it change our understanding about God, and about how we relate to God and to each other?

And It Was Very Good

Now, grab a Bible, if you have one, and look at the first chapter of Genesis. That's the very first chapter of the Bible!

In the earliest verses you will read about how darkness covered everything until God created light to separate the darkness from the light. Then it says, "And God saw that the light was good."

Soon we read that God separated the earth from the seas. Again, the Bible says, "And God saw that it was good."

Then God added plants, trees, and fruit. What comes after that? "And God saw that it was good."

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On the fourth day, God put two great lights in the sky, the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night. We call those lights the sun and the moon. In Genesis chapter one it then says once again, "And God saw that it was good."

St. Francis would call these two great lights Brother Sun and Sister Moon.

On the fifth day, God created sea monsters and birds of all kinds. "And God saw that it was good."

On the sixth day, God made land creatures of every kind—"cattle and creeping things and wild animals of the earth of every kind. And God saw that it was good."

Also on the sixth day, God made human beings, saying, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth."

Finally, in Genesis 1:31, "God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good."

This label of "*very good*," which God places upon both human and nonhuman creatures, seems to show God's desire to have both kinds of creatures share in the original Garden of Paradise, where peace and harmony reigned between God and human beings, and among all creatures. I believe that this is the first place where the Bible tells us that God loves and cares forever about everything that he created. Certainly, God is not going to create and then *ignore* what he sees as "*very good*" creatures!

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God does *everything* out of love, and this includes the creation of our world. Our God is a God of overflowing love, goodness, and beauty who is ready to give over everything to those he loves. This goodness is reflected in the whole family of creation.

It makes sense to me that the same loving Creator who arranged for these animals and other nonhuman creatures to enjoy happiness in the original Garden of Eden would not want to leave them out of the *final* paradise in heaven. If they were happy and enjoying God's presence, according to their abilities, in that first Garden, God would want them to be happy and enjoy the same in heaven.

All the creatures God has ever made were created as good, all of creation was very good together, and there's no reason why that should change in the eternal future. What will it exactly be like in heaven? I don't know. No one knows for sure. But I *do* know that in Scripture St. Paul tells us simply to trust in "all that God has prepared for those who love him" (1 Cor. 2:9 JB).

Blessing the Animals

When I try to imagine heaven, where animals and humans live together in peace and harmony, I often think of the animal blessings that I have taken part in. On October fourth, the Feast Day of St. Francis, churches all over the world hold "Blessing of the Animals" services, in which creatures are offered special blessings in church as members of God's family. Children and grownups bring their pets to a park or a church courtyard with lots of trees and flowers in it, and perhaps a fountain or pool of water.

Sometimes, when people bring their pets from different parts of town, there can be a little trouble getting along. Dogs start barking at cats and people struggle to keep their animals from fighting, growling, and hissing. But often in my experience, once the blessings begin, a spirit of harmony and peace settles over everyone, pets and people. It can even remind us of the Garden of Eden!

When we consider the story of Adam and Eve before their disobedience, and we look at the animals, the birds, the fish, the trees and plants in the Garden, they all seem to live in happy harmony with Adam and Eve.

