

Q&A

Q: Father Alex, do the animals go to Heaven?

A: I love animals, and I bet most of you do as well. In fact, each December we have a special pet blessing service in front of our Church, in honor of St. Modestos (who loved nature and animals) and in preparation for Christmas, the birth of Jesus. This is because Jesus came not only to save us and help us get to Heaven (Heaven to us meaning close to God), but also to renew all of Creation: the earth, mountains, flowers, grass, animals. Everything is made new with our Lord.

Now, the difficult thing is that we humans have a very special connection to our Lord. We are made in His image and likeness. We are different than the animals and different than the angels. If it helps, think of us as somewhere in between the animals and angels, but also still very unique. And Heaven is an idea that has to do specifically with our special relationship with God. In Heaven, we will be close to Him, in His loving embrace, in a way that is different than any other relationship that any other creature could have with our Lord. Heaven is part of our relationship with Him and our relationship alone. In the end, the answer is no, as far as animals participating in this next phase of our unique human lives.

But don't let this make you sad. God loves the animals very much; everything He made is good. He created them, and they do just what He made them to do. They don't sin, and so they don't need saving in that way you and I do. They are just one of the many gifts He has given us, and it is important that we treat them with great respect and love. In fact, caring for a pet teaches you a lot about how God wants us to be: loving, responsible, giving, sacrificing, patient. God wants us to be good stewards with His animals. Don't ever underestimate their importance. Remember, too, that when you look into your dog's or cat's eyes, you are looking into the eyes of a little friend that God made; know that the affection you give and receive from them is very real and matters. Enjoy our animal friends ... beautiful gifts from God!