

DIOCESE OF ORANGE



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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

ORANGE COUNTY CATHOLICS AND THEIR PETS GATHER AT THE MISSION SAN JUAN CAPISTRANO FOR ANNUAL BLESSING OF THE ANIMALS

ORANGE, Calif., (Oct. 3, 2006) – Parishioners from throughout the Diocese of Orange will travel with their pets to the historic Mission San Juan Capistrano this Saturday at 10:00 a.m. for the annual Blessing of the Animals. This unique festivity is held each year at the mission in observance of the feast day of St. Francis of Assisi, the patron saint of animals. Rev. Arthur Holquin, pastor of the Mission San Juan Capistrano began the Franciscan tradition of blessing animals in 2004 after he was installed as pastor.

“Blessing our pets has been a wonderful way for us to recognize the importance of animals in all our lives and to appreciate the companionship they provide,” said Fr. Holquin.

This ritual is conducted in remembrance of St. Francis of Assisi’s love for all creatures and is held each year following the October 4th feast day. St. Francis of Assisi was born in 1182 as Francesco di Bernardone, Franciscus meaning "Little Frenchman" in Italian. He was a poor man who astounded and inspired the Church by following the teachings of Christ literally and living a pious lifestyle. St. Francis of Assisi founded the Franciscan Order or "Friars Minor" in 1209 and wrote a Cantic of the Creatures, an ode to God’s living things.

“The annual blessing of animals and feast of St. Francis of Assisi recognizes the importance of ecology and animals in daily life. During this celebration we honor St. Francis and his many contributions and seek to serve the Lord and to live the Gospel message in joy and enthusiasm,” said the Most Rev. Tod D. Brown, Bishop of Orange.

Founding of the Franciscan Order

St. Francis of Assisi was inspired to begin the Franciscan Order in the year 1209 after hearing the words of Jesus in (Mat. 10.7–10) bidding his apostles to go forth on their mission. Francis, as a layman gathered a group of followers and went to Rome to meet

with Pope Innocent III, who gave them permission to conduct their lives as Francis had chosen. This blessing by the Pope constituted the beginning of the Franciscan order of friars, an entirely new type of order in the church. The Franciscans began their mission in the Umbria region of Italy - preaching the Gospel and living simply. Francis and the friars preached extensively abroad - traveling to Dalmatia, France, Spain, and the Holy Land.

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