

“A cat called Social Justice”

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Cats/pets in the congregation

Who identifies as a cat-lover? A cat-liker? A cat...hater? What other pets did you grow up with or currently have? What pet would you want if you could have it?

Online worshippers: put your answers in the chat

Today's theme: Cats!

Totally off-lectionary

Cats in Jesus' time!

Fussie Cat: “The Romans regarded cats in terms of mythical symbolism. Cats were thought to embody independence and freedom. In fact, cats were the only animals allowed inside Roman temples. The Roman goddess Libertas is often shown with a cat.”

Mamalovesrome: Cats “were considered sacred to the Goddess Diana and highly regarded as pest control and also as companions, as depicted abundantly in frescoes from wealthy Roman homes in Pompeii.”

“The taming of the cat” by CA Driscoll, J Clutton-Brock: Cats were introduced to “keep rats in check.” The Roman army brought cats with them to safeguard their food supply from rats.

AESU: “Cats were granted legal protections under Roman law as early as the first century CE – likely due to the influence of Egyptian culture.”

Discover magazine (article called “Cats ruled these 4 ancient civilizations”): Cats “conquered one famous piece of ancient Roman history. Today, dozens of tabbies reportedly live around the Largo di Torre Argentina in Rome, part of the ruins where Julius Caesar was murdered in 44 BC.”

Engels: “Artistic representations are sometimes ambiguous, and its role as a mouse-catcher seems often to have been carried out by weasels. Yet other evidence clearly suggests that the cat was as important to Greeks and Romans as it is to many modern people.”

Evolution of cats in the eyes of some Christ-followers

Classical cats: the rise and fall of the sacred cat by Donald W Engels (1999)

“The cat has played a significant role in history from the earliest times. Well known is its role in religion and art of ancient Egypt, no less than its association with witchcraft in the Middle Ages”

JA Serpell (article called “Domestication and history of the cat”): “The gradual extinction of the pagan gods and goddesses, and the rise and spread of Christianity, produced a dramatic change in attitudes to cats throughout Europe. From being essentially benevolent symbols of female fertility, sexuality and motherhood, they became, instead, the virtual antithesis: malevolent demons, agents of the Devil, and the traitorous companions of witches and necromancers.” (94)

JA Serpell, con’t: “It is not all clear what motivated this change in the perception of cats, although political forces doubtless played a part. In order to consolidate its power, the medieval Church sometimes found it necessary to employ extreme ruthlessness in suppressing unorthodox beliefs, and extirpating all trace of earlier pre-Christian religions. Perhaps because of its symbolic links with earlier fertility cults, the cat was simply caught up in this wave of religious persecution (Russell, 1972; Engels 1999).” (94)

Dorothy Day’s cat (the inspiration)

Obviously, things changed from the Middle Ages to the 20th century....

Dorothy Day, founder of the Catholic Worker, revolutionary, writer, housing activist, woman of faith

From Bearings Online, an interview with D.L. Mayfield, the author of *Unruly Saint: Dorothy Day's Radical Vision and Its Challenge for Our Times*

“What is the most surprising/bizarre/funny/human thing you learned through researching Dorothy Day?”

I love how cheeky she was, and how human too. I always think about how they had a cat named Social Justice in the first Catholic Worker house. And she used to borrow her neighbor’s horse to transport bundles of her radical paper and called the horse Social Action. Her neighbor was a fascist, and she just thought it was the funniest thing to use his horse to spread her anti-fascist work, right under her neighbor’s nose!”

<https://collegevilleinstitute.org/bearings/dorothy-days-radical-vision/>

Kitty Cat Cafe → Thor! → MSPCA

How we found KCC – “third space”

Thor: joy, community, companionship, caretaking

KCC residents: sometimes come from traumatized/unsafe backgrounds. Thor was in a hoarder situation with 5 of his siblings

MSPCA residents: cats whose caretakers have died or can no longer afford to keep them; given to the shelter because landlords found out or took away their tenants' rights to have a pet; found matted, sick, covered with fleas or behind a dumpster; diabetic (Moose); "strong personalities"

What I do at the MSPCA: feed, water, make notes on behavior, pet, play → adoption vs receiving; some are shy, some want all the attention; Puffin!

Social justice + caregiving and protecting animals

What we learn from cats and other animals/reciprocal care, justice, and love in the Bible

Okay, out of the 100-ish different animals mentioned in Scripture, there's no actual mention of cats....

Let's look at the readings from today

Genesis: The earth brings forth "living creatures of every kind." "God made the wild animals of the earth of every kind and the cattle of every kind and everything that creeps upon the ground of every kind. And God saw that it was good." God entrusts us, humans, with having "dominion" over non-human beings. Another word for "dominion" could be "protectorate" – being given the responsibility to protect
Cats = good, creeping things + human beings = protectors

2 Corinthians: "For just as the sufferings of Christ are abundant for us, so also our consolation is abundant through Christ." Cats aren't the only ones who get something out of this relationship—we do, too. Pets can sense when we're sick, in danger, depressed, stressed, heartbroken. Did you know that a cat's purr actually has a healing quality for the human body? Did you also know that "interacting with animals has been shown to decrease levels of cortisol (a stress-related hormone) and lower blood pressure?" (NIH)

Maybe, God brought forth cats, dogs, turtles, birds, from the earth to help console our broken hearts and, in turn, use that consolation to heal ourselves and others.

Final

Love and social justice go hand-in-hand → consolation, peace, and presence are tools to keep us moving, to heal inside and outside worlds → comfort is sacred and holy →

caretaking is sacred and holy → Christ enacted social justice, echoing the prophets of the Hebrew Bible, precisely because his divine/human heart was stirred by love for Creation

May our hearts be stirred by love. May our actions manifest justice. Amen!