



# LIGHT & LIFE

VOICE OF THE ROSARY CENTER & CONFRATERNITY

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## Conversion is a Foretaste of Our Own Resurrection

Among our active members, we count an untold number of currently incarcerated prisoners, varying from the “short-timers” to the “lifers.” But one thing that they have in common is that they have turned their lives and surrendered to Our Lord, and pray Our Lady’s Rosary for themselves, for their fellow prisoners, and *for us*. This profound conversion is not only possible, but precisely part of the reason why Our Lord came to Earth. Let us recall that He proclaimed that the prophecy of Isaiah was fulfilled, in part when He is sent “to preach deliverance to the captives” (Luke 4:19a). Physical incarceration in Scripture, like physical illness, is a visible symbol of the greater spiritual reality underneath: to loose us from slavery to sin, to heal us from our spiritual illness – and both of these point to our resurrection that last day, and everlasting life in God in the world to come.

And so I wish to share the story of one Dominican friar, himself a somewhat hesitant convert to preaching the Good News to captives, courtesy of our English Dominican Province and the Godzdogz blog. Please, in your charity, pray for those who pray for *you* as well. Pray for those incarcerated in need of conversion, and for all their families and loved ones outside the prison walls and their healing. May God shatter every chain of sin in our own lives!

Jean-Joseph Lataste was born in Cadillac, near Bordeaux, in France in 1832. After his study, he became a civil servant. While working in various cities around Bordeaux, he was an active member of the Society of Saint Vincent of Paul. However, since he was a child, Jean-Joseph was thinking about a possible vocation to the priesthood. During his study in Bordeaux, he got to know [Fr. Jean-Baptiste Henri-Dominique Lacordaire, OP] and turned to him when he started to deepen his vocation to religious life. Eventually, Jean-Joseph Lataste joined the Dominican Order in 1857, some 18 years after

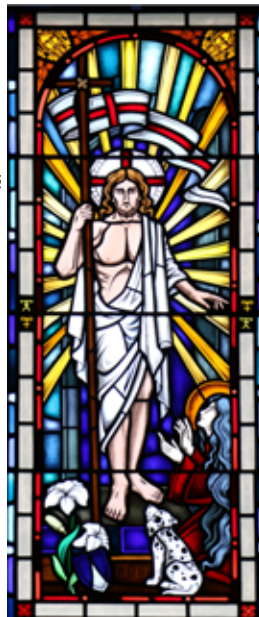
Lacordaire, who had re-established it in post-revolutionary France.

As a young friar, Jean-Joseph was trained for the priesthood in the Saint-Maximin priory, in South East France. On the occasion of the transfer of relics of Saint Mary Magdalene to the priory, it was revealed to him that the greatest sinners have within them everything needed to become the greatest saints.

In September 1864, he was sent to preach a spiritual retreat at the women’s prison in Cadillac, near Bordeaux. He went there with skepticism and all the preconceived notions one might have pertaining to the incarcerated. But during the retreat there was a transformation in him. He was the first to be converted by what he preached. While praying with the prisoners in front of the Blessed Sacrament, he came up with a radical idea for that time, to found a new religious congregation for women coming out of prison. The answer he proposed was called the House of Bethany. He wrote:

*The Gospel tells us that at Bethany there lived two sisters: Martha of inviolable virtue and Mary Magdalene who had been a sinner. Jesus loved to come and rest in their home, where one served him and the other listened to his words. He made no distinction between them – or did he...? It is rather Magdalene who is preferred. Martha is surprised and Jesus answers kindly but still gives preference to Magdalene: ‘You worry and fret about so many things; yet few are needed, indeed only one. It is Mary who has chosen the “better part” and it is not to be taken from her.’ (Luke 10:41). What was the better part? It was that Magdalene loved more. She who had been a sinner had advanced further in the way of divine love than Martha, the model of virtue. When God loves us and gives us his grace, he does not ask us what we have been; he is only concerned with what we are – not with how far we have fallen, but with how much we love. He judges us only on the strength of our love.*

*(Continued on page 4)*



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# THEOLOGY FOR THE LAITY

## ON CREATION - Baltimore Catechism

By Fr. Dismas Sayre, O.P.

Continuing with the Baltimore Catechism lessons:

### Lesson 4: ON CREATION

This lesson treats of God bringing everything into existence. The chief things created may be classed as follows: (1) The things that simply exist, as rocks, and minerals—gold, silver, iron, etc. (2) Things that exist, grow, and live like plants and trees. (3) Things that grow, live, and feel, like animals. (4) Things that grow, live, feel, and understand, like men. Besides these we have the sun, moon, stars, etc.; all things too that we can see, and also Heaven, Purgatory, Hell, and good and bad angels. All these are the works of God's creation. All these He has called into existence by merely wishing for them.

\*32 Q. Who created Heaven and earth, and all things? A. God created Heaven and earth, and all things.

"Heaven," where God is and will always be. It means, too, everything we see in the sky above us. "Earth," the globe on which we live.

\*33 Q. How did God create Heaven and earth? A. God created Heaven and earth from nothing, by His word only; that is, by a single act of His all-powerful will.

34 Q. Which are the chief creatures of God? A. The chief creatures of God are angels and men.

### The Guinea Pig Priest

I need to lay my cards down on the table. I've been told I have two nicknames: "The Singing Priest," and "The Guinea Pig Priest," as a way to differentiate me from other friars wearing the same habit. The first, because I tend to chant the Mass if the situation and local custom allow. The second, because one of my hobbies was rescuing guinea pigs -- yes, *those* squeaky little critters so many people give their kids. I can count over three hundred, maybe four hundred guinea pigs, that I've had a direct part in rescuing from bad situations, and/or fostering for adoption. Personally, I've found it a good way for me to stay grounded and humble; cleaning up after demanding rodents and serving their needs is not for the prissy and self-centered. The squirrels and crows in the neighborhood know me on sight as an easy sucker for treats. I've also participated in recycling before it became mainstream, composting waste, and so forth. I consider myself a true nature lover.

That said, there is a concerning recent trend in over-anthropomorphizing our animal friends and pets. That is, we make them too much like ourselves as human beings. I find that domestication and familiarity does tend to have an effect on animals. It teaches them something about ourselves and our nature, and they inevitably copy us or change to please us or to become dependent on us, we end up at the same time destroying their own dignity and

worth by changing them in our minds into something that they are not. This is where perhaps Pope Francis made his most controversial statements in the eye of the secular world when he spoke about couples who 'replace' children with pets. "These marriages, in which the spouses do not want children, in which the spouses want to remain without fertility. This culture of well-being from ten years ago convinced us: 'It's better not to have children! It's better! You can go explore the world, go on holiday, you can have a villa in the countryside, you can be care-free... it might be better – more comfortable – to have a dog, two cats, and the love goes to the two cats and the dog. Is this true or is this not? Have you seen it? Then, in the end this marriage comes to old age in solitude, with the bitterness of loneliness. It is not fruitful, it does not do what Jesus does with his Church: He makes His Church fruitful.'" ("Pope Francis at daily Mass on Monday," Vatican Radio, June 2, 2014). This is, however, perfectly in harmony with the teaching of the Church and the previous popes. These statements and homilies condemned neither those who have pets, or those who cannot have children, but rather, called into question the lack of sacrifice many in our world make in *substituting* pets for children in their lives. Man and animals are not the same. This much should not be controversial, although this leads us to how we care for those creatures that are not human.

### The Demands of Proper Care of Animals

This is not to say that we are free to do with animals as we please, or that we may mistreat or act inhumanely against them. God made man steward, *not* a god, over them. Farming was the very first occupation, and thus an honored, God-given one. In Genesis we hear that God told our first parents, "Be fertile and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it. Have dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, and all the living things that crawl on the earth. God also said: See, I give you every seed-bearing plant on all the earth and every tree that has seed-bearing fruit on it to be your food; and to all the wild animals, all the birds of the air, and all the living creatures that crawl on the earth, I give all the green plants for food. And so it happened. God looked at everything he had made, and found it very good." (Gen 1:28a-31, NABRE). At the same time, man was to look out for *God's* creation, which was declared good by God Himself and received His "stamp of approval." Scripture even tells us that animals were to share in the sabbath, "that your ox and your donkey may have rest" (Ex 23:12). In Numbers, we hear the humorous story of Balaam, who saddled up on his donkey and rode off to bless the enemies of the Israelites. The Lord sent His angel to stop him on his journey. The donkey saw the angel of the Lord, and in holy fear refused to go any further, three different times, and each time Balaam beat the poor animal, to make her

go forward. The Lord gave his poor donkey the power of speech at that moment:

*“What have I done to you that you beat me these three times?” “You have acted so willfully against me,” said Balaam to the donkey, “that if I only had a sword at hand, I would kill you here and now.” But the donkey said to Balaam, “Am I not your donkey, on which you have always ridden until now? Have I been in the habit of treating you this way before?” “No,” he replied. (Num 22:28-30)*

The angel of the Lord then made himself visible to Balaam, and Balaam bowed before him to pay him honor. The angel of the Lord was angry at Balaam, saying, “Why have you beaten your donkey these three times? I have come as an adversary because this rash journey of yours is against my will. When the donkey saw me, she turned away from me these three times. If she had not turned away from me, *you* are the one I would have killed, though I would have spared *her*” (*ibid*, 32, emphasizes mine). So certainly, we are not free to do with animals as we wish, and most definitely not maltreat them, although as we read before, God did give us the animals for food as we need to sustain human life. It bears repeating, that they are God’s creation, not ours.

Now, Aquinas has held the position that cruelty to animals is an evil, not as much for the animals, but as for the *person* who is cruel, since cruelty to animals corrupts the way we treat our fellow man, saying, “lest anyone by exercising cruelty towards brutes [animals] may become cruel also towards men; or, because an injury to brutes may result in loss to the owner, or on account of some symbolic signification” (*Summa Contra Gentiles*, II, 102). This is not to say he was indifferent to the animal, but that the risk and moral weight of a Christian soul losing its charity by becoming cruel to animals, then to his fellow man, and thus losing eternal friendship with God, could have repercussions, now and for eternity. Even medieval thinkers recognized the danger that animal cruelty presents. Cardinal Henry Edward Manning, the great English Catholic prelate, expanded on this by writing:

It is perfectly true that obligations and duties are between moral persons [people], and therefore the lower animals are not susceptible of the moral obligations which we owe to one another; **but we owe a seven-fold obligation to the Creator of those animals.** Our obligation and moral duty is to Him who made them and if we wish to know the limit and the broad outline of our obligation, I say at once it is His nature and His perfections, and among these perfections one is, most profoundly, that of Eternal Mercy. And therefore, although a poor mule or a poor horse is not, indeed, a moral person, yet the Lord and Maker of the mule is the highest Lawgiver, and His nature is a law unto Himself. And in giving a dominion over His creatures to man, He gave it subject to the condition that it should be used in conformity to His perfections which is His own law, and therefore our law (*The Zoophilist*, London, 1 April, 1887, emphasis mine).

### **The Order of Man and Creation’s Relationship with God**

As we read in the catechism lesson for this issue, there

is still an order, a hierarchy of creation. The Christian faith is built on what many call “human exceptionalism,” that of placing man at the head of material creation, which is made evident by the very incarnation of Christ in human flesh. Even St. Francis, in his beloved “Canticle of the Creatures,” praises God’s creation, but not once does he specifically mention any animal, or animals as a whole. The value of the human soul, rather, is emphasized by the penultimate stanza (which somehow never makes it into the hymnals), “How dreadful for those who die in mortal sin! How blessed are those she [death] finds in your most holy will, for the second death [damnation] can do them no harm.” Rather, by nature, God is above, or rather beyond His creation. He is not created, but the Creator, then angels, then man, then the rest of creation. By grace, man is elevated beyond his created nature, by sharing in a divine, personal relationship with God, as we saw in Genesis, and is echoed in the Psalms, “What is man that you are mindful of him, and a son of man that you care for him? Yet you have made him little less than a god, crowned him with glory and honor” (Ps 8:4, quoted in Heb 2:6). In “His image and likeness” God made man, not any other creature, nor even creation as a whole. For this reason, while we are not excused *by any means* from care of creation according to our state in life and capacity, we must take as paramount the care of our fellow man as part of our God-given duties. As Judge, Christ will come again, and bestow His glory on the elect, telling them, “Come, you who are blessed by my Father. Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me, ill and you cared for me, in prison and you visited me” (Mt 25:34b-36). As Dorothy Day once said, “I only love God as much as I love the person I love the least.” These challenging words from Dorothy Day echo the same challenging cry of Scripture and the Church Fathers. The Good Samaritan is the one who cares for a stranger, even a kind of enemy. The Lord Jesus in His earthly ministry repeatedly emphasizes His mission, which was to reconcile us to God and to one another in Himself. Now obviously, if we ruin the earth by our careless, overly-exploitative practices, we will also have some explaining to do before the Judge, especially as it likewise unduly harms the poorest and the weakest, who do not have the means to escape the man-made hells we have created on this world. Ironically, the very materials we tend to mine for our own “green” energy solutions tend to happen away from our eyes, ruining the earth at the same time of the poor and weakest in far-away lands, away from our sight in the First World. This is a double outrage against God. I am very much for green solutions, but I detest that we brush off the ecological damage resulting from these “solutions.” We need to do better.

### **The Glory that Animals Give their Creator**

One misunderstood aspect of St. Francis is his love for nature. Much of this comes from stories told *after* his birth into eternal life (for a good summary of the *real* St.

Francis, I recommend our brother Augustine Thompson, O.P.'s book, *"Francis: A New Biography"*). During his life, his focus was on the salvation of souls and the restoration of Holy Mother Church. St. Francis was not the one traditionally invoked for animals, but, rather, and almost 900 years before him, St. Anthony of the Desert, who is said to have cured and tended a blind wild boar sow and her piglets. She would accompany him for the rest of her life. But like much of Scripture, people miss the deeper meaning here. His life points to a kind of restoration of man's relationship with God, as it should always have been, in the Garden. It points to the past and to the future, the New Creation, the New Jerusalem, the City of Peace (although we don't know what that would look like in any dogmatic form as far as animals are concerned). St. Blase, more famously known for the candles and Blessing of Throats, lived in a cave during exile, and animals are said to have politely waited their turn, waiting for his sweet words and healing. St. Martin de Porres, the great Dominican lay brother, is well-loved for getting the dog, cat, and mouse to peacefully co-exist with each other and with the priory. These saints should really be the saints for animals, not St. Francis, to be honest.

There are even stories of animals bending before the Blessed Sacrament, for example, or Balaam's Donkey, who refused to go against the will of God, as we read above. These are not just a praise of animals, but in a deeper way, a condemnation of man, who is often too foolish or prideful to understand God. If men would not listen to the saints, then the saints preached to the animals, since they at least gave *some* glory to God and understood something of that relationship with the Creator.

### Will There be Animals in Heaven?

The answer is, I don't know.

Oh, you wanted more? Well, we don't have any definitive answer. Everything is an opinion, and neither can be dismissed. As we saw before, the stories of the saints point to a kind of "restorationist" view of Heaven, where we see man living with the animals in peace, so why not imagine a Heaven as an even better Eden? On the other hand, if Heaven is union with God... why would you need anything else? As we saw Pope Francis say above, people too often replace people with animals, although his opinion is that there probably are animals in Heaven. But if we insist on animals, are we then just replacing God with animals in Heaven? And where is the cutoff for animals? I certainly don't want to share Heaven with mosquitoes for all eternity. So, what more do we need if we have God? Of course, being in Heaven doesn't mean we ignore the saints, or even the souls still on earth. So *could* we share a Heaven with animals? Yes... and no. Again, I don't want to give a definitive answer where there is none. I merely leave those two arguments for you to think about.

But if there *are* animals in Heaven, well, when I get there, there will be hundreds of little rodents waiting for me to feed them, wondering why I was so late with their lettuce.

### CONVERSION IS ... (Continued from page 1)

*Happy are those whose past urges them on to a greater love, and happy those others who, in a sort of rivalry, redouble their own efforts in order not to be left behind (Lataste, Les Réhabilités).*

He preached another retreat in Cadillac in September 1865 and found the same prisoners who had remained faithful to his spiritual directions. He was able to say: "here I saw marvellous things!"

The House of Bethany was founded on 14 August 1866 in Frasnés, near Besançon, in eastern France. Its originality is that the community is constituted by former prisoners and other women with an irreproachable past, living the religious life together, to the extent that it is not possible to distinguish between them. On Christmas day 1868, Jean-Joseph Lataste celebrated Mass in the House for the last time, and was blessed in giving the Dominican Habit to the first former prisoner, little sister Noël. But Jean-Joseph fell sick and died on 10 March 1869.

In his booklet, *Les Réhabilités*, he wrote:

*Now you understand our aim and the means by which it can be achieved. You have seen the problem and you have seen how it can be solved. These [prisoners] are worthy of your compassion. It is for you to give them some recompense for those long years of prison. Dishonored in the past but long ago rehabilitated before God, they must now be rehabilitated before humanity. They must be saved, not only from the past dishonor, but from that inevitable return to crime; they must be saved, not only for this life, but for eternity; they must be saved out of love for him who said: 'The Son of man has come to seek and to save what was lost.'*

On 27 June 2011, Pope Benedict XVI approved the beatification of Jean-Joseph Lataste, which was celebrated on 3 June 2012 in Besançon.



Figure 1:

*Statue of Bl. Jean-Joseph Lataste, OP, with some of the former prisoners at his feet. Photo credit: Sr. Barbara-Johanna, Wikimedia.*

*Page 1: Stained Glass Window detail of the Mystery of the Resurrection, Holy Rosary Church, Portland, Oregon. Photo by Fr. Lawrence Lew, OP.*