



## **Deacon John reflects on 15 years of Blessing of the Animals**

Over the years we have seen a number of interesting pets and non-human companions presented for a blessing. The strangest have been hermit crabs, while the largest have been horses. In performing the sprinkling rite, Deacon John has noted it's the fish that seem to pose the biggest challenge since they are already swimming in water. Do they realize they've been blessed?

"I leave it up to God." Deacon John said. "And, of course, the family that cares for them. I figure, "If you bring 'em, we will bless 'em!"

Since his ordination, Deacon John has been an advocate for and invited other members of the diaconate community to join him in the celebration, including two newly ordained who were able to experience the rite at St. Catherine before taking it back to their own parishes.

"It seems only fitting, to pass it on," Deacon John said, "because until we began in 2005, we had to take our pets to Our Lady of Perpetual Help for their blessing. I saw what a change came over our cat after she received her blessing that I was determined to offer this experience to our parish.

As for the day of the event, "I never know what to expect. God always surprises me. We've had as many as 120 or so to be blessed and we had to forgo the 2020 event due to the pandemic. I try not to get too nervous about the numbers. I tell myself, wait and see what God will do. This celebration is really all about gratitude and trust." As long as the participants (both human and non-human) maintain decorum and do not frighten one another with their barking, etc. I know God will be glorified.

The annual Blessing of the Animals, held on the first Saturday of October on the front steps of the church, is sponsored by the Ministry of Social Concerns of St. Catherine of Alexandria, Riverside. If you would like to help with this or other events sponsored by the parish ministry, please contact Deacon John at the Ministry Center.