

49/80

ANIMAL SUNDAY

CATS, DOGS, MICE AND A GOLDFISH GO TO CHURCH

Hereford - West of England Cathedral City - becomes, for one day, capital of the animal world. At Holy Trinity Church, the teachings of St. Francis of Assisi - legendary friend and protector of all animals - are recalled at a "Noah's Ark" service. Unlike the Ark, however, there are more than two animals from each group. There are mice by the caseful - and a crateful of chickens and the vicar even turns up on horseback. It's the pets' day - a day when Rover and the cat down the street come into prominence. It's a day for kind-hearted folks, too. For people who'll never make the headlines. For the ordinary sort - who form the backbone of the nation - whose love of animals recalls those words of Robert Browning "God made all the creatures and gave them our love and our fear to give sign, we and they are his children, one family here." And as, in their thousands, that big family makes its way to the little Hereford Church, those words of Browning - himself renowned for his love of birds and beasts - are recalled, gratefully, gratifyingly.

So big is the crowd that the service has to be relayed to the churchyard. 5,000 answered the Dean of Hereford's call. 2,000 had to stay outside. Yet not one dogfight - not one angry bark - disturbs the hour of dedication. It is as if the animals know that this is their day.