



“Whatever you do unto the **least among my brothers and sisters**, you do as unto me.” —MATTHEW 25:40

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November 15, 2022

His Eminence  
Timothy Cardinal Dolan  
Archbishop of New York

Your Eminence:

Peace be with you, and happy holidays! I’m writing on behalf of LAMBS, the Christian outreach division of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals U.S.—PETA entities have more than 9 million members and supporters globally, and PETA U.S. is the largest animal rights organization in the world—in response to the news that you recently blessed the animals who are set to be used in the “Living Nativity” scenes for the Radio City Rockettes’ *Christmas Spectacular* at Radio City Music Hall. Will you please agree that this year will be the last time you ever do it? Allow me to explain why it’s harmful.

When you bless these animals, the implication is that you endorse using them for entertainment. Forcing animals to appear in Nativity scenes and festive shows contradicts what this holy season represents: peace on Earth and goodwill to all members of creation. In Matthew 25:40—the verse that inspired LAMBS—Jesus says, “Whatever you do unto the least among my brothers and sisters, you do as unto me.” Animals are truly “the least” among us and are in dire need of our compassion and mercy. What better time is there than Christmas to show kindness to all God’s creatures?

The use of animals in Nativities began in times when we were far less enlightened about who animals are, what makes them tick, and what they think and feel. We know now that it’s highly stressful and confusing for animals to be transported, placed into unfamiliar surroundings, and made to endure large crowds, music, and loud noises. Interestingly enough, live Nativity displays that use animals aren’t even historically accurate. Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, in his biography of Jesus Christ, points out that contrary to popular belief, there were no oxen, camels, donkeys, or other animals present at Jesus’ birth.

For those who still feel animals are an integral part of Jesus’ birth story, faux prop animals and animatronics are wonderful cruelty-free alternatives. We have urged Madison Square Garden to make this change, and we hope it’s done soon. In the meantime, we hope you’ll make the compassionate decision to focus on the true message of Christmas by refusing to be involved with promoting the use of live animals for entertainment. Instead, we ask that you encourage the many people who look up to you to always treat every sentient being with kindness and respect and never to exploit them for any reason.

Thank you for your consideration. I look forward to hearing from you soon. May you, your family, and your flock have a blessed Advent and Christmas.

With compassion for *all*,

Candice M. Kelsey  
Faith Outreach & Engagement Campaign Coordinator  
PETA Foundation