

Animals take center stall in St. Peter's Square

VATICAN CITY – Amid an occasional chorus of moo, oink, baa and neigh, Cardinal Angelo Comastri blessed several dozen animals peacefully munching their lunch in St. Peter's Square.

The Jan. 17 noon blessing of a donkey and her baby, a water buffalo and her calf, a skittish ostrich, a large white boar, rabbits and baby bunnies, hens and geese, milk cows, a horse and a steer, sheep, lambs and goats marked the feast of St. Anthony the Abbot.

Although the Vatican has its own farm at the papal villa in Castel Gandolfo south of Rome, the animals who took center stall in St. Peter's Square belonged to members of an Italian association of farmers and ranchers.

St. Anthony, who died in Egypt in 356, is the patron saint of the association. Cardinal Comastri, papal vicar of Vatican City, celebrated a Mass in St. Peter's Basilica with most of the members of the association, while a handful waited with their livestock in the square for the blessing.

The Vatican set up 14 sturdy stalls in the square for most of the four-legged critters and the ostrich. The bunnies and fowl were in spacious cages.

Along with black rubber buckets for water and feed, the Vatican also moved a few large dumpsters into the square, for obvious purposes.