Sometimes I envy dogs. I’m speaking of dogs with good homes, mind you. Such dogs have it made. They are fed, petted, walked, and played with every single day—and they do virtually nothing to deserve it. Oh sure, they provide companionship, they guard the house when we’re gone, they fetch the paper, or they bark when a stranger comes to the door. But other than that, most dogs don’t do an ounce of real work—unless they fall into the category of “working dogs,” like sheep herders, drug sniffers, sled pullers, therapy dogs, etc.

The primary reason I envy dogs is because they are exceptionally wise. In his book, How to Argue and Win Every Time, Gerry Spencer puts it this way: “The wisdom of my dog is the product of his inability to conceal his wants.” How true that is!

When dogs want to go outside, for example, they’ll stand by the door and keep fussing until someone lets them out. When dogs aren’t feeling well, they don’t conceal this fact. Instead, they droop their head and go lie down in the corner or under a table. When dogs need affection, they tell you by plopping their heads on your lap and looking at you with those pleading eyes until you give in and pet them. If only we humans were a little more like Fido. If only we were better at revealing our wants.
Children are pretty good at revealing their wants. I was in a grocery store checkout line once. Behind me was a young mother and her small son. As soon as he saw the candy display, his eyes got real big and, pointing to one of the candy bars, he announced, “I want that, Mommy.” He had clearly expressed his want. His mother tried to distract him, but he was persistent. Finally, she said, “You can’t have that. It costs money.” To which the little boy replied, “Use your credit card!” I thought, “How quickly they learn!”

If we don’t reveal our wants appropriately to others, then they have to try to guess what we want. And they might guess wrong. When this happens, we end up with dialogues such as these:

“But I thought you wanted to go away for the weekend.” “No, I would have preferred a quiet weekend at home.”

“Why do we have to go to that restaurant again?” “But I thought you liked that restaurant.”

“How come we never have fish for supper?” “I thought you didn’t like fish.”

There is a real danger in concealing our wants from others: we run the risk of concealing our wants even from ourselves. Several years ago I was in a bad space. I had too much work to do, I was discouraged, and I was exhausted. I went to see a counselor. She was great. In the midst of our conversations, she asked, “If you had
two days completely to yourself, what would you want to do?" I had to think for a bit because I hadn’t thought about MY wants in a long time. I was too busy trying to meet the wants of others.

But I finally said, “Sleep.” She said, “Okay. The first day you sleep as much as you want. You can stay in your pj's all day if you choose. Now, what do you want to do on the second day?” Slowly, I began to name some things... I’d like to see a good movie... I’d like to read a novel... I’d like to go out to dinner with a friend or two... I’d like to visit the wild animal rescue shelter in the park..." And the list went on. The counselor had gotten me back in touch with my own wants. In future sessions, we figured out how I could work some of my wants into my regular schedule.

There’s another reason why it’s important to stay in touch with our wants. It can make us more sensitive to the needs and wants of others. In addition, it’s one way we get in touch with God, for our deepest wants and desires are put into us by God. If we follow them, they will lead us ultimately to God.

How do you stay in touch with your personal needs and wants?

How do you share these with others?

How sensitive are you to the needs and wants of others?

Has there ever been a dog in your life that imparted wisdom to you?

PS: This week I am facilitating a retreat for the Ursuline Sisters in Youngstown, Ohio. Please say a little prayer for us. I will let them know you are holding them in prayer.
This will mean much to them I’m sure, Thank you!

If we follow our deepest wants, needs, and desires we will ultimately find God. I chose Matt Maher’s beautiful song, “I Need You, Lord.”

I welcome your responses to this reflection. Don’t be shy!

Tagged as: getting in touch with your needs and wants, revealing your wants to others, what dogs teach us

Dee Lewis  June 17, 2019 at 5:44 am

I’m more of a cat person. From my cat I’ve learned to sit quietly and relax into God’s presence...just like she relaxes completely on my lap. Totally trusting
that he’s as happy to see me as I am to see him!

REPLY

John E Hopkins    June 17, 2019 at 5:45 am

Good Morning, everyone!

Sr. Melannie, I love your words, “...our deepest wants and desires are put into us by God.” So, so true and always worth remembering.

Personally, I haven’t had a dog in my life in years, but I love dogs and love to pet them whenever I can. A friend of mine – big dog lover! – says a dog keeps us in the present. Now there’s some wisdom! This wisdom is rendered beautifully and poetically in Mark Doty’s “Golden Retrievals.” Just a terrific poem!

REPLY

Pete    June 17, 2019 at 6:57 am

I’ve had a dog all my life until the last one passed away. Being retired meant travel and no dog replacement. Thank God my children have dog’s, and it’s dog sitting time when they go away. I love Granddog’s! I revealed a want to my wife one time, (Me,)”I’d like to get another dog, (her)but we’re still traveling” So, Grandog’s it is. A prayer for the Sister’s.

REPLY

Karen Suggitt    June 17, 2019 at 8:23 am

I agree with Pete. Grand dogs it is. We too are recently retired. We had cats for many years but with the desire to pick up and go, we decided no animals for now. Our 3 children each have a dog and we have babysat for each of them here and there. Yes there definitely is such a comfort having a cat or dog in one’s life. Especially when one is having not such a good day. I do miss that. My daughter put a magnet on my car stating ”I Love my Grand Dogs” It’s a true statement!

Prayers sent for your upcoming retreat.

Karen
Lucille Blais  June 17, 2019 at 9:16 am

I have been a shy person until recently as I am in a Nursing Home and learned, with God’s help to express my needs and be my own best advocate. I also advocate for others or insist on their need to do so.

Thank you for referring to dogs who express their needs so well. We have an Activity Director who adopted a puppy to serve the residents of this facility. Cooper, who will soon celebrate his 2nd birthday, has brought much joy to us—even to those who did not care for animals.

Cooper has grown in my heart. I use a walker and when he wants a ride, he stands right in front of the seat and looks up at it. I pick him up and place him on it, reminding him to sit, which he does immediately. We then proceed to greet other residents who give him a lot of welcomed attention.

Dogs reflect God’s unconditional for us. I am so grateful for having Cooper visit us and even accompany us on outings.

Kathleen Magiera  June 17, 2019 at 9:21 am

Sending prayers for the Ursuline Sisters retreat!

Our dog Ernie will sit and listen to you with undivided attention just waiting for his retreat. I so often get distracted when I listen to others. Just listening intently is what I learned from Ernie.

Kathleen

Char  June 17, 2019 at 9:25 am

Dear Sister

I love Matt Maher, remember him from St Timothy’s Church in Mesa, Az when he was starting his career. I instantly fell in love w/ his voice.
We also have had dogs and miss them, Kelby was my favorite, she was so special but w/ traveling we will wait for another fur friend.
Blessings
Char

REPLY

Marla  June 17, 2019 at 10:41 am
I just read this and know how much I really love dogs. I do not have one but where I live there are many getting their daily walks and fresh air. Some owners stop by when I am out on my patio to give me my dog fix.
I do though have a cat. He is a red-orange tabby who loves seemingly endless whisker scratches. Cats are so like dogs in basic animal functions, eat sleep, play in-out etc. but they are unique.
So dear Melannie, thank you for the lovely dog reflection. Now would you please consider one on cats? I know my cat, Marley, who you have met would be delighted to have a wonderful reflective piece written by you!
So would I.

REPLY

Tom  June 17, 2019 at 10:38 am
Dear Sr. Melannie,

What has often kept me from getting in touch with my deepest wants and needs is the fear that God will say, “No.” But recently I read that when we don’t ask, the answer will always be “No.” When we do ask, we might be surprised to get a “Yes.”

In the current Emmanuel, Mark McCann is quoted: “Yielding to the grace of God in the Eucharist did not destroy my goals and desires, but actually refined them more and more.”

REPLY

Jean Canatssey  June 17, 2019 at 10:47 am
I can’t remember very many times in my life when I haven’t had a dog. However, until my husband & I moved to Florida 26 years ago, they were always “outside” dogs – limited companions at best.
Our dogs have always “found” us. When our youngest daughter left home, she left her wonderful Aussie, Emily, in our care. A couple of years later, another daughter’s terrier mix, Jake, joined our family. We lost both dogs within a few months of each other in 2010. Although we missed them terribly, we opted not to replace them. We were finally free to travel without a “dog sitter”. Then while visiting “Jake’s mom” in NC, she asked if we would please take their two little Jack-a-Poos, Mikey & Brody, home with us for 6 months to a year while they temporarily relocated. That was three years ago and Mikey and Brody are still with us as permanent members of the family. Having to get a “dog sitter” is a pretty good trade off for the love and companionship my husband and I get in return. Thank God for dogs.....

REPLY

Barbara Erdmann  June 17, 2019 at 12:33 pm

As a retired dog and cat groomer, I pretty much speak dog fairly well. Yes they are excellent communicators. Better yet they perceive our needs, moods and so on. They have taught me much about paying attention to other humans needs, moods and so on. This is what is so wonderful about God’s design. I never cease to thank Him for all of his creation

REPLY

Nancy Frederico  June 17, 2019 at 3:00 pm

Hi Sr. Melannie

Thank you for this wonderful reflection especially being open to our personal needs and wants. So often the days fly by and already it’s next week! We’ve had two dogs in our family that brought us much joy. I find it very necessary and nourishing to take time to breathe in all of God’s creation and the inspirations of the Holy Spirit as well as nurturing those around us who might need a boost! Thanks again for these great topics you share with us. Please be assured of my prayers. The Sisters are in for a great retreat! God bless you always! Nancy

REPLY

Sister C  June 17, 2019 at 3:15 pm
Sister Melanie...no matter dogs or cats...I just know that I am in need of God ...need to learn to pray more...quiet myself to do so...find that almost impossible at times...the Song was exactly what I needed
Thank you!!!!!

REPLY

---

**Joan**  June 17, 2019 at 5:40 pm

Sister Melanie,
Matt Maher's song was wonderful! I've never had a dog, but I have four beautiful cats. God can comfort us through our pets. they also can cheer us up when we are feeling down, and they certainly can make us laugh. God shows His love throughout all He has created.
May God Bless you and all those attending the retreat.

REPLY

---

**Karen**  June 18, 2019 at 7:18 am

Sister Melanie,
I look forward to your Monday reflection every week, although sometimes I don't get to it until Tuesday or Wednesday! I can't speak too much to dogs, as my parents only finally gave in to our plea for a dog when I was a senior in high school! But I do know what it is like to lose all sense of my own wants in raising kids and a husband. Just recently, I came home from the grocery store and realized I did not look for items I 'wanted' any more, a small thing, but it was telling.

I thought maybe my wants had become a little selfish or petty, but your statement that God places our greatest wants and desires in our hearts that will lead us to Him...that really deserves some reflection. Thank you for reminding me of that. I'm not going to automatically dismiss what might have been placed in my heart by God (hopefully) any longer.

Will pray for your work and the Sisters’ retreat this week. Thank you so much for being who you are and sharing with us!

REPLY
Deb  June 18, 2019 at 8:30 am

Good Morning Sr Melannie,
This morning as I walked, I watched a gal walk her two dogs. She gently nudged the bigger dog to come her way. He protested and stood still. He did not want to go her way. She eased up on the leash, his tail wagged and they went his direction. It brought the thought to my mind, that, how many times does God nudge me and I protest and only move forward when I get my way. God gently smiles and lets me do my own thing knowing eventually I will see that I should have listened to his nudges. It was an insightful walk this morning. Thanks for your thoughts on Fido, as it brought forth a message to me.