



Digital Commons@

Loyola Marymount University
LMU Loyola Law School

Spiritual Essays

Center for Ignatian Spirituality

2006

Dog Lesson

Fr. Randy Roche

Loyola Marymount University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.lmu.edu/spiritualessays>



Part of the [Catholic Studies Commons](#), and the [Religious Thought, Theology and Philosophy of Religion Commons](#)

Repository Citation

Roche, Fr. Randy, "Dog Lesson" (2006). *Spiritual Essays*. 383.

<https://digitalcommons.lmu.edu/spiritualessays/383>

This Essay is brought to you for free and open access by the Center for Ignatian Spirituality at Digital Commons @ Loyola Marymount University and Loyola Law School. It has been accepted for inclusion in Spiritual Essays by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons@Loyola Marymount University and Loyola Law School. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@lmu.edu.

Dog Lesson

Tina was our dog – a rather small Daschund – the sole pet in a household of eight. The dog and I were the same age. At some point in our lives I received the duty of going out in the yard with a shovel to bury the results of Tina's having done her "duty." I cannot say that I quite enjoyed my task, but I was glad to help take care of our pet. I believe now that I had been introduced to a basic human experience: what we do for love is not burdensome.

Reflecting on experiences of my childhood, I came to recognize that love is partly spontaneous, but partly learned. I did not choose our pet, just as I did not choose my parents or siblings. But when I acted on the impulse to love, something happened that made life more interesting than when I did not. Love moves us into actions beyond ourselves. I was (and am) as capable of selfishness as anyone, but when I was drawn by grace in the direction of love, I found a special kind of pleasure in, for example, reading a story for my younger brothers or bringing some flowers from the garden for my mother.

Love is much more than an unplanned feeling; love always involves a choice. What we love and who we love, as Fr. Pedro Arrupe once pointed out, is what will get us moving. When love is our motive, we have strength for action that is greater than all the power we can summon for gathering goods to ourselves. We become capable of sacrifice, at not counting the cost.

The real meaning of sacrifice is not "that which we give up," but, "that which we do for love." When I was a pastor in Hawaii, I was introduced to the concept of "sacrificial giving," which I thought at first meant "giving until it hurts." I learned from others and from my own experience that the word and the practice describe the action of giving because of love. I came to understand again that when we love an individual or a community, what we do for them is worth the expenditure of our time, energy and resources.

We can make a choice to care about a pet or a person, a cause or a task. When we sense that we are following a calling, or a deep personal invitation, we can with confidence pour out our love in those directions. God is at work – God, who is love, drawing each of us to live out the never ending source of activity from within us. We are limited as to our energy, unable to accomplish all that we wish. But love is not a possession, and does not know limits, being the primary expression of God within us.

We do not have power to make another person's dog or cat trust us. Nor can we force responses of love from the persons we know. Not even God does that. But we can love. And we can sacrifice for love: we can spend freely from the unlimited supply of love that is both ours and God's at the same time.

We can see love manifested in Jesus Christ. He gave up everyone and everything for no good reason, unless we can accept that love has its reasons. Awful as was the process towards the end of his life, everything we know about "the Son of Man" is that he chose the way of sacrificial giving not in a contest of who could suffer most or who could give up the most, but wholly and entirely as his personal expression of love. Such love is truly human as well as divine. In the midst of starvation, parents give their last bit of food to their children; people lay down their lives for others; men and women literally wear themselves out for a project that they love. We are not forced to love, but love makes life worth living. Even a child can begin to learn this, in caring for a dog.