*Dogs*

One of the secrets of the universe is contained in the word “God.” What does it spell backwards? “Dog.” Now, I don’t mean that disrespectfully. God is infinitely beyond all things and yet God speaks to us most eloquently in the little things. A dog is faithful unlike any other creature. They’ll never let you down. They’ll lay down their life for you in a heartbeat. Their faithfulness makes me think of Jesus.

One of my favorite dogs was *Pepper.* Pepper was a mix. She was part lab, husky and collie. She had eyes that looked like two big glossy brown marbles and long black hair. Pepper was not a watchdog. She would probably show a criminal the refrigerator. She was smart. She could speak quietly if you asked her to -- almost at a whisper. It was cute. My brother’s dog Murphy was a lab and she was a *trabajadora,* which is Spanish for female worker. She was a worker! My brother would throw a frisbee about sixty yards. He could really throw a frisbee. The weather would be ninety degrees. It didn’t matter. She was a retriever born and created to catch frisbees. She would sprint after it, bring it back to Jim’s feet, stand over the frisbee with her nose to it, waiting for Jim to throw it. He could walk around and come back, and she’d still be sitting there panting with her nose to the frisbee. She would have chased the frisbee to the point of death if Jim didn’t recognize she was tired.

On the other hand, though Pepper could catch frisbees, she was smart too. When I would throw a frisbee really far, she would look at it in the sky and consider for a moment. Then she would give me a glance that says “Nah! . . . not today.”

Pepper liked to flush geese. She enjoyed the chase. She thought she could do the same thing with a buck once. At first it worked and Pepper was off sprinting after the buck, but then something scary happened. The buck turned around and faced Pepper. I never saw Pepper run so fast before! The pursuer had become the pursued.

Pepper was caring. She liked to inspect things in nature and one time we visited my aunt in the nursing home and Pepper came along. Now as a husky, she could howl when she got lonely or concerned. She must have sensed something about the old folks who felt lonely. She would howl as she went down to greet the old folks and many of them were deeply comforted by her presence. I thank God for Pepper.

Today’s Gospel may not seem to connect with dogs and yet I believe it does. Bear with me. The Gospel speaks about losing one’s life to save it and taking up one’s cross for Jesus. I realize dogs do not have free will. They don’t choose good or evil like we do. There really is no such thing as a “bad dog” for example. Dogs react the way they are treated or because of nature or instinct. Still, God created dogs and they are faithful. They will return love 110%. If you have a St. Bernard, it might mean a thousand slobbery kisses---and sometimes they come after getting jumped on and literally knocked off your feet! Seriously though, dogs are sensitive, compassionate, protective and will die for their master. This is the kind of love we need to have for Jesus and for one another. Let us pray for the grace to love and live life with everything we’ve got. Amen.

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