

Longing for a savior: the world, humanity and Otto

As I was preparing my Christmas homily for my parishes of Our Lady of Mount Carmel in Thurmont and St. Anthony Shrine in Emmitsburg, I was praying and reflecting on what to preach about, and a recent memory came to mind.

As many of you who have read this blog before know very well (as do all of my parishioners!), I am blessed to have a little, happy, furry companion that lives with me here in Emmitsburg: Otto, my little black-and-tan Pomeranian. Almost 2 ½ years old now and weighing a mighty 12 ½ pounds, he brings the holiday cheer and glee to the parishioners here now – and throughout the entire year.

I've been trying to "convert" Otto into being a good, obedient and pious church dog. I'm getting him to pray before meals; when I have a serious man-to-dog conversation, I teach him to look me straight in the eye.

I'm also bringing him to the 8 a.m. daily Mass in our small church of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, which is arguably one of the smallest-sized churches in the whole archdiocese, seating only about 100 people comfortably. During Mass, he remains "tethered" to a drawer in the sacristy, so technically he's not in the church.

Although he can't see the altar from where he is – he can see me when I am seated in my celebrant chair, as the sacristy is open and to the left of the sanctuary – Otto can hear everything: the songs, the readings, the homily (which, like my parishioners, he always listens to very attentively, hanging on every word) and, of course, the prayers.

Lately, something very interesting has been happening: when we get toward the end of Mass, usually during Communion or around the time of the final blessing, he starts to whimper. He doesn't bark, he's very quiet until this point, but then Otto starts whimpering and whining.

He starts doing this, because really, he wants to see his "master" again (that would be me) and wants to greet the people present after Mass. It's cute and, most

thankfully, not distracting to the worshippers.

So he has a “longing.”

This longing, this sad whimpering and crying, if you will, is a great analogy for the world and humanity before the coming of Christ into it. The world, saddened by the brokenness created by original sin, awaited a mysterious, most unique savior.

As we prayed during the Advent Preface at Mass:

“All of the oracles of the prophets foretold him; The Virgin mother longed for him with love beyond all telling; and John the Baptist sang of his coming and proclaimed his presence when he came.”

When Jesus was finally born into the poverty of a poor and sad world and as he was being laid in a simple wooden manger, a trough used to feed farm animals, suddenly the world was joyful.

A newfound joy, as the words of the song “Joy to the World” express:

“Joy to the World, the Lord is come!

Let earth receive her King!

Let every heart prepare Him room, and

Heaven and Nature sing!”

Both heaven and earth sang when Christ was born: the angels sang the song we now call the “Gloria” and humanity rejoiced, adoring a little child – a tiny, fragile and vulnerable little baby – who is also the mighty God, He is divine!

We know that they both rejoiced because they knew that this child was born for a purpose: that he was born not only as “Emmanuel,” “God is with us,” but also as a redeemer and a savior, in the purpose of a saving, sacrificial love beyond our wildest dreams.

How do we receive that truth into our minds and hearts this Christmas – and how

will we let Jesus change our hearts as we prepare him a room there?