

Man's best friend has vision pointers

During these dog days of August, I've been thinking about – dogs!

I'm reminded of a favorite story of a little boy talking to his little friend. He said: "If you want a dog, don't ask your parents for a dog. Ask them for a baby brother. You'll get the dog."

Since I've written a book about cats, I'm often misunderstood as being prejudiced in favor of them. I hasten to emphasize that dogs were my first love. My little dog from childhood, King, will live in my heart forever.

Each animal teaches us many things. Cats certainly teach us to live in the present moment – in the now. Eckhart Tolle, the bestselling author, has written; "I have had many Zen Masters. They have all been cats!"

While cats show affection, dogs show us unconditional love. A dog will love you no matter what. Few things can match the good feeling of a dog rushing toward you, prepared to lather your face with kisses.

This brings me to the purpose of this article. Over the years, I have been treated by my dermatologist for many cancerous and pre-cancerous growths on my face. Since my mother – a lady who spent very little time in the sun –died from skin cancer, I'm vigilant about having check-ups.

The last visit to Dr. Lauring, however, brought an amazing result. She found no new growths at all. I don't have to return for another year! I consider this a borderline miracle.

As I became reflective, however, I realized that the only thing I've done differently to my face, aside from using the various prescription creams, is that I have allowed a little dog – a white West Highland Terrier to be exact – to lick my face. While I don't see the dog daily, perhaps I'm onto something. So, I want to announce a very unscientific medical conclusion. Based on this study of one priest and one dog, I've

concluded that dog saliva prevents skin cancer!

When word of this “study” spreads, no doubt I can expect fewer kisses from the human species. But I do want to proclaim that Lucy, in the Peanuts comic strip, was wrong. Snoopy licking her in the face did not bring germs, it only brought love. And yes, I do wash my face. When I watch the dog lick other parts of her body I’m reminded that maybe there are some other “ingredients” that may not be as healthy.

To love animals is to love ourselves. In fact, any time we leave anyone or anything out of our love, we leave some part of us out of our love. We can’t reject someone else without also rejecting a part of ourselves.

There’s a famous quote from Chief Seattle. He said: “What is man without the beasts? If all the beasts were gone, men would die from great loneliness of spirit. For whatever happens to the beasts also happens to man. All things are connected. Whatever befalls the earth befalls the children of the earth.”

To see God manifest in all of creation is one of the enduring gifts of Francis of Assisi, and other saints and mystics. The reason Jesus taught us to even love enemies is that when we withhold love from anyone we deny ourselves the joy of giving love. That’s why dogs can again teach us the value of unconditional love.

An anonymous author has put it so well: “The dog is the only animal that has seen his god.” The dog looks at us and sees God. When we look at ourselves and at each other, what do we see?