

St. Otto, pray for us (and my hyper-spastic Pomeranian puppy)

As some of you may know from the recent article in the Catholic Review about priests and their pet dogs (“Four-Legged and Faithful”), I am now the proud and happy owner of a new puppy. He’s a fluffy black Pomeranian named Otto. He’s about 3 months old now, and standing mighty, tall and at attention. He recently entered the heavyweight dog division by weighing in at a whopping 3.1 pounds! When I first got him, he could actually fit comfortably in my Baltimore Orioles ballcap. No joke! Otto is a happy little pooch with a lot of personality and an amazing amount of energy. Though “Poms” are small in size, they eat a surprising amount of food (thankfully for my bank account, it’s “small dog” food), and they have what has been described as a “big dog personality in a small dog package.”



I find that Otto is very bright, teachable and quite agile, quick and athletic. He’s getting pretty fast, but he can’t outrun me yet; that day may come very soon – Usain Bolt, look out! He’s a lot of fun! And, he’s also great around people. My parishioners – especially the children – love him! He’s super-friendly and so far hasn’t met a face unworthy of multiple licks.

He’s also teaching me a lot. For example, I was sharing recently in a homily that one day I took him out for a walk, and as I did I started pointing out to him all of the beautiful things above on the horizon: the lovely trees with the leaves becoming red and orange and yellow, the sun shining brightly above, even some bluebirds flying by.



His response? He just looks at me, and then he continues eating the leaf, bug, stick, piece of grass, etc. that is right in front of him in his 2-foot radius. He’s just a puppy, of course. But, as a way of talking about prayer, I used it as an example of how, often when we pray, we only see what is right before us; yet God sees in a much bigger, broader way – which we should always remember.

Otto is also learning how to do “steps:” going up and down a typical step or stair is a big thing for him. But recently he went down a step that was about 5 or 6 inches tall.

He nailed it! He did it with confidence and trust. This - I shared with my parishioners - is the same way God wants us to be with him when we pray to him with a great trust that he is always there for us. He wants what is best for us, and we should not be afraid or worried in spirit when we pray.



The one thing I have found in having a new puppy (this is my first time as a dog owner - my family had dogs and cats when I was a child/youth) is that his energy level is quite high. He wants to play all the time, it seems. And when he takes naps, I find that I often want to nap as well. Alas: "come to me, all you who are weary" the Lord once said. But, as I often reflect and pray before I go to sleep at night, Otto gives me joy and, like the very gift of my priesthood, he gives me a "good tired." I'm going to need a lot of energy in the next few months ahead with this companion (especially with 3:30 a.m. "potty breaks" - more on that in a future blog.)



So, I need some heavenly help. And so my litany to St. Otto of Bamberg, priest, bishop, missionary and peacemaker, begins:

St. Otto, Apostle of Pomerania, obedient to the pope, and patron saint of hyper-spastic Pomeranian puppies and their slowly-learning owners: pray for us.

Photos of Otto courtesy Father Collin Poston