Opinion
NCR Voices



Michael Sean Winters' dog, Damiana, says humans would have calmer, more spiritual lives if they were less serious and paid closer attention to the seasons and beauty of nature. (Courtesy of Michael Sean Winters)



by Michael Sean Winters

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In honor of the feast of St. Francis of Assisi, today we host a guest columnist, my beloved St. Bernard Damiana.

Dear NCR readers,

My dad tells me it is the feast of St. Francis of Assisi and that this is a special day for all animals. I wonder if that includes the squirrel I tried to catch this morning? We are going to the church this afternoon for something called a blessing. I would be fine with an extra Milk-Bone but my dad says this is important.

Dad just had his feast day last week. A lot of people called him to wish him a happy day and that always makes him happy.

I suppose you already know a lot about my dad. He spends a lot of time at the thing with the keys, figuring out what he wants to write to all of you. He seems to enjoy spending time typing and sometimes he breaks into a big smile as if he just discovered something although, all the while, he has not moved, except his fingers. His fingers are always moving. Sometimes he gets up to go grab a book. There are a lot of them in the study, but all the bedrooms have bookcases too, and both halls. I am not much of a reader myself. When he is reading or writing, I am usually sleeping.

Dad is serious, always talking about theology and politics. I try to remind him about the simple things: belly rubs, treats, walks. Humans seem to be much better tempered when they spend time outside, enjoying nature. They don't chase squirrels, but they notice the rhythms of the seasons, the effects of rain and drought, how many shades of green appear in the spring and what colors the leaves turn in autumn, the changing position of the sun when it rises and of the stars at night. Paying attention to such things seems to calm them down. I think that is what they mean by spirituality.

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Before I met Dad, I bounced around a bunch of different homes and the humans there did not take me for walks. One person lived in the city and I do not think I would have enjoyed those walks anyway. Too noisy. Here in the countryside, the loudest noises we hear when we walk are the birds. They apparently are talking to each other, but I do not understand their language. Wild turkeys can make quite a ruckus, but even that is better than the sounds of cars and buses and trucks.

Some of the people who had me before I met my dad were mean to me and I was mean right back. At the last house I lived, a little boy stuck his finger in my eye, and so I bit him. They said he had joined their family first so I had to leave. I still don't think that was fair. I wouldn't have bitten the little monster if he hadn't poked me in the eye. There is injustice in nature, not just in society.

The good thing is that because I had to leave them, my dad found me. I remember the day he walked into their house. I liked him right away and went over and lay down at his feet. I wanted to appear nice and calm. He agreed to take me on the spot. We drove a couple of hours to his house, which is now our house, and you know what? At dinnertime, in addition to the dog food, he put in some roast pork. Other times I get baked chicken thighs or ground beef. Dad is a great cook.



(Pixabay/Janet Meyer)

That first week with Dad, a friend of his with a funny accent visited. His name was Austen and I was afraid he was coming to take me away from Dad so I bit him. I have not seen him since. I wish he would come back so I could get another bite.

Every couple of weeks I get to go to doggie daycare and play with other dogs. It is so much fun. We slobber all over each other and I especially like playing in the water sprinkler. Being around humans all the time can be exhausting, so it is fun to just

hang out with my dog friends every once in a while. Still, at the end of the day, it is always nice when Dad pulls up in the van to bring me home.

Humans are funny. The way some of them walk around, you would think they owned the planet or something. Dad says there is a wonderful man named Pope Francis who is trying to teach the humans how to behave as if they did not own the planet, and that part of that is learning how to live well with other animals. I hope this means I will keep getting roast pork in my dinner.

Time for me to go nap. So, happy feast of St. Francis to all my fellow animals and especially to those funny animals we call humans. If you keep giving us belly rubs and treats, we'll keep showing up and being loyal and loving. Maybe that is how we will all save the planet together.