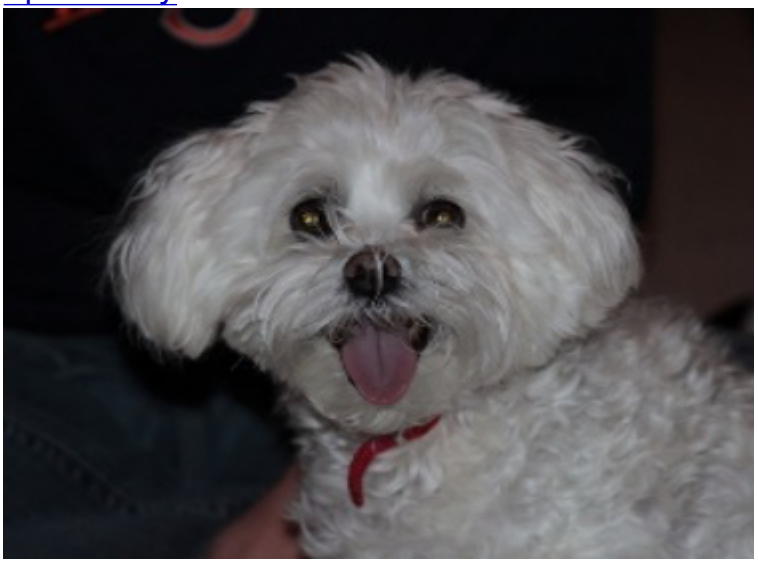
Voices of Sisters
Spirituality



Chloe, the beloved pet Maltipoo of Judy Principe (Courtesy of Judy Principe)



by Sr. Judy Principe

Contributor

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I lost my beloved pet Chloe on Oct. 27, 2021, but she is alive and well in the lessons she taught me. Chloe is a "Maltipoo" with whom I bonded while my friend recuperated from surgery; we were great buddies for the 10 years of her life.

I said Chloe "is" a Maltipoo because I believe she is alive and well. Chloe had to be put down unexpectedly while I was away on retreat. My retreat director shared with

me a beautiful article on " 'Ensouled' Animals" by Sr. Ilia Delio, which brought me understanding and comfort about our animal companions. She referred to the teaching of Franciscan Blessed John Duns Scotus regarding the "thisness" of every created being — that uniqueness which determines its identity and being, coming from the Creator God. There is a belief that animals are "ensouled" and enjoy the reward of eternal life, depending on their capacity to know God.

Some may find it difficult to grasp the depth of grief animal lovers experience upon the loss of a pet. We have all tasted the bitterness, pain and emptiness death brings. Even a child knows the gut-wrenching sadness of having to let go of a beloved toy. When we love, we suffer from the loss of the beloved.

My personal foundation for belief in Chloe's eternal life in God's kingdom are the lessons she taught me. After she died, for the rest of my retreat I felt an intuitive sense of her presence and an assurance that she was enjoying a transformed life. She completed her mission in my life; with gratitude to her and to God for the blessing of Chloe, I would like to share those lessons with you.

Take time to "*snuggle*" *(be with) the ones you love.* It is hard for me to appreciate the value of simply spending time with family and friends and enjoying togetherness. I let Chloe sit on my lap or snuggle with me on a chair — while feeling I *should* be *doing* something else, and not *wasting time*. Slowly, God began to instruct me in the importance of just *being* with God and loved ones. God loves to snuggle with me and each of God's beloved children! Take time to be with God and others you love.

Show others you love and appreciate them. Whenever I entered Chloe's house, we had our greeting ritual: with rapidly wagging tail, she circled my feet, awaiting petting or a belly rub, and always, my greeting, "Hey, buddy, how ya doin'?" Most of all, we had a few seconds of quiet, steady eye contact and a profound connection. Do I look others in the eye and truly listen to them without haste, preoccupation, or concern about how I respond? Silent connection with another is often more powerful than many words or grandiose gestures. Show others how you appreciate them with a validating look, openhearted listening, and full attention.

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Follow the "leash" of grace when God says, "Come this way!" My attempts to train Chloe to walk beside me and follow commands were futile. She did learn my command — "Come this way!" — to keep her from danger or avoid an accident. God so often reminded me to listen for that "still small voice" (1 Kings 19:12) which invites me to "come this way" in response to God's invitation to avoid a pitfall. I was often like that little dog, wanting to do it my way. I am learning to be attentive and respond to God's "leash" of grace when I feel its tug and the invitation to "come this way."

Be content with simple things. Ah, the joy of a chew toy or a small treat to brighten up the day! How wonderful to walk with the wind in one's floppy ears and chase the squirrels! It took very little to set off a wagging tail or happy jumps at the prospect of any of these. I often pray for the gift of biblical joy that Jesus promises us even when life is difficult, and hope wanes. God, please give me the grace to enjoy the many simple pleasures you give me daily and — like Chloe — show you how much I appreciate them.

Depend totally on God who cares for all your needs. I have pondered how children and animals — especially pets — live with total dependence upon us. God surely brings home the lesson of total dependence through them. Chloe trusted us to care for her and God wants my total trust and dependence for all that I need.

Love to play and have fun, but "no bite!" Frolicking with a beloved pet is such a source of laughter and fun — though I had to remind Chloe not to grasp the ball too tightly with her sharp teeth. In my social interactions, I also need to be fair, compassionate, nonjudgmental, forgiving, and loyal to my companions and avoid the "biting" behaviors of anger, impatience, judgment and gossip.

Enjoy the outdoors and the beauty of nature. It was impossible for me to appear without a penetrating look from Chloe, with ears perked, and a stance that said, "Walk! Walk!" Indeed, the very word, "walk," invited a stroll around the neighborhood. Those slow, steady walks awakened in me a reflective enjoyment of the seasonal colors, shapes, sights, sounds prevalent in the natural beauty surrounding me and I continue to enjoy them even now, when I walk alone.



(Unsplash/Natasya Chen)

Communicate your thoughts and feelings honestly — but no "growly stuff." Animals are totally honest and transparent despite a lack of words. Chloe communicated through many nonverbal signals, but when she showed displeasure with a low, slow growl, she stopped when I commanded, "No growly stuff." In my interactions and communications with others, am I respectful, honest, kind and considerate? I need to watch for the "growly stuff" that can hurt, harm or damage a relationship.

Wait, and look both ways before proceeding. Chloe would shift directions or cross the street without warning, so I taught her to "Wait!" before impulsively moving forward. Taking the time to pray and discern God's movements, commands and invitations is so important for me, especially when tempted to react impulsively to a person or situation. I can better hear God's counsel to "wait" so I can decide with clarity, in peace.

Stay in your lane. Have boundaries and allow others to have theirs. Laughingly, I had to remind her to stay with me when she wanted to chase a squirrel. "Stay in your lane" became my ignored command. When I fail to maintain a healthy respect for myself and others, my relationships can become burdensome, interfering and codependent. I have learned to ask God to help me to be a loving person while avoiding the pitfalls of self-neglect or enabling others.

God welcomes and rejoices over me like Chloe waiting at the door. Perhaps the most important, consistent, and enduring lesson from Chloe is the reminder of God's steadfast love and boundless joy in our unique relationship. As soon as Chloe spotted me coming, she exploded into frenzied jumping and welcoming tail wags. I joked that no one ever made such a fuss over me as Chloe. But it gave me such pleasure, affirmation, fun and laughter. And now God says: "I always welcome you whenever you come to me, with the same love, pleasure, excitement and enjoyment as Chloe." I often think of that now when I show up for prayer, assist at Mass, spend time with Eucharist, or welcome the day on my deck. I can feel God welcoming me like Chloe waiting at the door.

Chloe has gone to my God and hers. She was a powerful instrument of God's communication with me. I believe we will be united someday and will have wonderful conversations about the awesome things God did in my life through her. I will always be grateful for the gift of her presence. Goodbye and thank you, little buddy!