

THE DOG MIRROR - Chaplain Tom Azar February 2026

“Do not judge others, and you will not be judged. For you will be treated as you treat others. How can you think of saying to your friend, let me help you get rid of that speck in your eye, when you can't see past the log in your own eye? Hypocrite! First get rid of the log in your own eyes; then you will see well enough to deal with the spec in your friend's eye" Matthew 7:1-5.

Have you ever been a proud dog owner? Dogs respond and reflects our behavior like a weathervane. Virtuous Christian men and woman want to grow in God's righteousness and walk the 'King's Road'. They want to improve, to be a better version of their present moral and spiritual state of being. No one wants to remain a 'kindergarten Christian.' We want to pursue and graduate to higher levels of faith and sacrificial service. One avenue we all need to pursue is to overcome what holds us back—the seven deadly sins.

Therefore, I'm offering a practical prescription to those of us who wore 'dog tags'- "Man's best friend". It is really a simple and worry-free way to objectively see oneself in the mirror. Dogs can be our helper so one can see and change oneself. Dogs can give a person sight, sniff out cancer and even warn individuals when a medical emergency is forthcoming. They are valued partners in military and law enforcement. Dogs give us so much in the exterior world, I believe they can do the same for our interior world. We need to use them as part of our toolbox for one's spiritual walk.

What am I barking at? Since I often wear a 'dog collar' let me say that no one likes to look deep into the soul to self-reflect and repent, so engaging your dog's assistance is an additional way to become self-aware and to have a moral framework to look within and without.

Rarely do we hear others disclose their spiritual battles publicly. Most are too proud because they fear mockery and gossip. No one wants to be thought less of in a world that pushes pompous self-image, be king of the mountain, and get all you can.

So let me shine a private light on these sins, (I will try not to be "dog-matic"). It's difficult to see clearly one's hidden motivation and behavior when one is proud, angry, lustful, envious, greedy, gluttonous and slothful.

Our two dogs, Sarah Lee and Hazel Mae, helped me see these vices. They live and move within our family. Just as parents can see themselves in their children, we can see ourselves in our dogs if they take the time to objectively reflect.

Let's start with pride and obedience. How many times have we held our dog on a leash or at ease next to our feet and gave it a direct command not to move. It often does the opposite. That's what happened to Adam and Eve. God told them directly not to eat the fruit, but they disobeyed and ran for the fruit. I'm sure you have had this experience many

times, often resulting in embarrassment when your dog disobeys you at home and in public.

Obedience school doesn't always guarantee 100% change, but if there were dogs in the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve might have chosen differently. They could have been "the dog in the manger" and changed history and saving us a lot of suffering and separation.

Furthermore, when your dog walks in the room, head and tail high, doesn't she feel like she is the queen of the house. That's pride. They forget who the alpha dog is. Same with Adam, Eve and us—we deceive ourselves and think we are equal or better than our Creator God. Many today arrogantly strive for that same power and position. The world is replete with such leaders in all areas of life. They strike me as being very "doggy."

Did you ever notice when your dog wants another pet's bone, toy or treat- that's envy. Why can't they be content with what gift you gave them? The tenth commandment tells us not to covet. Society pushes material gain. We humans are not much better, wanting what others have and flaunting it. Envy causes one to take another's money, property or spouse. Nations go to war to exact them. We engage in "dog fights" to prove ourselves. We are just like our dog, but if we are humble, we can see and change.

Have you ever noticed when your canine family member looks at a dog of the opposite gender? It sniffs and jumps all over the place. We lust over other bodies, books, movies etc. We crave immoral sites on the internet and sinfully pursue our neighbor's possessions. Individuals end up in "the doghouse" and lose everything!

Then there is greed. Have you ever noticed how your dog hides their bone in the backyard or basement burying it so even their owners can't find it? We have our 'hush' monies and jewelry scattered in safety deposit boxes. We crave more to the point of major debt. We ruin our reputation and credit to fill our greedy desires and addictions. We end up doing "the dog paddle" to avoid drowning financially and socially.

We have all experienced our dog sleeping all day. They refuse to move off their comfortable bed or couch. We even call it "dog days." That is sloth. Christians are called upon to overcome their fleshy nature and seek renewal from the Holy Spirit so we can be about our Father's business.

Sadly, our dogs growl and bark at our innocent neighbor or passer—by. The dog gets mad and possessive to the point of being angry. Sometimes it even bites the hand of a family member that feeds her. As many of you know, the cross-shaped petals of "the dogwood tree" represents purity, harmony and peace— nature's reminder that life is sacred and one should not growl.

Of course we can't forget gluttony. Our dogs broke into the pantry and ate the whole bag of food. They never think of the homeless pets in shelters, hungry, beaten and abandoned. We don't expect them to, but we should be more cognizant of those less fortunate. There are many innocent people caught up in natural disasters and war.

If you take time to study your best friend closer, (best friends want the best for you), you may be getting to see how these seven deadly sins exist in your life. We who keep our dogs like family have a better chance to reflect and change. They are part of God's creation for our purposes. When we pray and act humbly, the Trinity can intercede for our growth.

Yes, I believe "you can teach us old dogs new tricks."

It becomes a team effort; our dog is an extension and reflection of its master. However, you and I have much more capability given to us by God's grace, so we need to work on those sinful tendencies and develop those heavenly virtues.

Who is your top dog? Ours is God, so we listen to and obey His commands and example. History is rich with great men and women of faith. Study their biographies. Make notes in your journal. "Dog ear" those pages. Westminster Kennel club won't help much.

Life can be 'ruff', but 'God' spelled backwards is still 'Dog' and he can show us how to live the opposite to today's self-absorbed culture. Our canine companions have become a framework to see and live by. When they do wrong and we scold them, the next day they give us unlimited licks of forgiveness. (I don't think cats are as forgiving; they seem to hold grudges longer, lol).

We owe our pets so much for all the undeserved love and endless protection they give us, especially the ability to change. Loyalty and love are a great combo to emulate. We 'prodigal' dogs have a Master who welcomes us with open arms.

Now who is the 'best friend'? Trinity blesses us with these heavenly hounds in the name of Love. (And that is church "dogma").