

## Remembering Grace

By Bishop Don E. Johnson

Today I discovered that I am "out of time." This is February 8, 2007. Today, my dog died. She ended her life being "put down," as the descriptive but somehow not too comforting expression has it. So today I find myself "out of time" in part because Grace, our boxer, was out of time as well.

Grace was out of time in more ways than her precise death date might imply. That is, I know approximately how old she was, but I am not exactly sure. I know approximately her birth day, but I am not actually certain. Grace (or Gracie) came to us from an animal shelter in Nashville. She was approximately two years old when she became part of our family. (In fact, many have observed that she looked more like my side of the family than Jeannie's.) She came to us near enough to Valentine's Day that we adopted the date as her "approximate" birthday. Interestingly enough, she died today very near to her adopted birthday. Death is like that. An ending becomes a beginning, and a death day becomes a birthday.

My family was blessed to have Grace with us. The Church has known that about grace all along. For approximately eleven years, she saw our family grow up. She saw me move from being a parish priest to becoming a bishop of the Church, and she showed all due respect for me in this new ministry. (That is to say, she didn't notice much of a difference in Don and treated me accordingly. She still wagged her tail and told me what she needed me to do for her. But overall, she just loved me as I am.)

She saw Jeannie becoming more involved as a leader in one of her many areas of interest, Education for Ministry. She sat at her feet (approximately) each Tuesday as Jeannie studied to be a capable mentor for this important ministry of the Church. Grace also saw Jeannie move back into one of her first loves, music and singing. Here Grace abounded by settling in under the piano for Jeannie's rehearsal times. (Grace showed more interest in Jeannie's ministry

and music than in my wearing purple. She was, as you can tell, an insightful dog.)

Grace saw our children graduate from high school, college, law school, art school, and begin lives on their own in other parts of the country. She saw Gordon go on to marry Sarah who she had already come to know and befriend. She knew about, but never had the chance to see Daisy, our daughter Laura's new puppy, arrive. And yes, Daisy is also a boxer "rescue dog" of approximate age in an out of time world.

So Grace has been with us a while and has seen us through life's transitions. Today, as one out of time here on earth, Jeannie and I went with Grace to the veterinarian as we stayed with her during the passing out of time of this old friend. Tears shed, yes, but not in despair. Since heaven, if it is to be heavenly enough to want to go there, must surely have dogs, cats and other companions who have taken us through the transitions of life, I look forward to the grace of Gracie's presence in that great Day where time does not matter and only the love of God will be known.

Gracie Johnson, born approximately Valentine's Day, 1994. Died, February 8, 2007.

May she rest in peace, and know that the peace she brought to all who knew her was a source of joy. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ was certainly not limited to our Gracie dog. But surely her presence was part of the grace God has provided us along life's way. For that grace, O Lord, I continue to be grateful. Amen.

+Don