

When I lived in Hoboken, I had a cat named Frankie- I loved that cat. He was a gray tabby I adopted from the ASPCA in the city and he was my companion you could say. Frankie would be there at the door when I came home and he would follow me around the apartment and he would lie over the book I was reading and lay on my chest while I was sleeping. I spoiled him rotten- I have to admit that- I allowed him to tear up my couch because that's what cats want to do and I would make him whatever food I was making for myself- one pork chop for me and one for Frankie.

I used to love watching him hunt- I didn't have any mice thanks be to God because there was a cat in my apartment but I had bugs and Frankie would spend hours staring at the crack in the wall where he knew the bug was and he would be in perfect stillness as he watched the crack intently to see when the bug would dare to come out.

It made me wonder at such perfect stillness and perfect quiet and it made me jealous since I could never even begin to approach such concentration and such an ability to keep watch so perfectly. Not that he wasn't still aware of what was going on around him- I would throw him a piece of ham and he would run and get it or I would scratch the back of his head and he would purr but then it was right back to being vigilant in catching that poor bug who would inevitably venture out- and you could guess what happened next.

And Jesus said: *What I say to you, I say to all: 'Watch!'*

Which is not easy for us humans- we're so easily distracted and we're burdened with so many things to worry about and so many things to take care of that our minds are all over the place and we don't keep watch- keep watch over ourselves and the situations we're in and what's

going on around us. We tend to just react to what is happening within us and around us and forget that it is within our power to be in control of what we're doing and what we're thinking. We just have to pay attention to what is going through our minds and what is happening in our hearts and not allow the not-so-good things arising in both places take control of us.

Because an important part of the moral life- the life of virtue that God is calling us to and giving us the graces to grow in- is to pay attention to our thoughts and our feelings and to allow what is transitory- which is the great majority of our thoughts and feelings- to just go by and leave us unaffected.

That is, to not let thoughts and feelings become bigger and more than they really are and bring us places we don't want to go- because thoughts and feelings in themselves are morally neutral- since we don't will them into being- but we are morally responsible for what we do with them. So we watch- we keep vigilant and we don't entertain the thought and we don't put ourselves into situations that may cause us to sin. And slowly but surely, bit by bit, we gain the prize of a virtuous and holy and peaceful life.

My cat Frankie had instinct to help him be so vigilant and so perfectly watchful but we human beings can't rely on instinct for that- we need the grace of God- grace which is, remember, God's very life given to us so that we may be elevated to share in that divine life- we need God's grace to stay focused on what is good and to carry it out. And it's not like there's any shortage of grace- grace is by nature always and everywhere available to every person. We just have to acknowledge it and thank God for it and then use it to train ourselves to watch over our thoughts and feelings. And then being watchful becomes something you don't have to constantly work at- it becomes second nature.