Columns
Religious Life



Kittens Snowdrop and Stardust are pictured in this photo. (Courtesy of Jane Marie Bradish)



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It's been nearly two years since kittens Snowdrop and Stardust joined the household, and what an adventure it has been. When we sisters first moved in, we inherited the dog of the previous tenant. The landlord took financial responsibility; we just had to allow Heidi in the house with us. Heidi gave way to Oreo, a great companion of 15 years who saw me through the death of both of my parents and moving my housemate to a memory care facility and her eventual death.

When Oreo died, the household was so quiet. I needed something to need me and knew another dog was out of the question. After ensuring my nieces and nephew would assume responsibility if the new companion(s) outlived me, the search was on.

The kittens are siblings and have completely taken over the place. Early on, they insisted on always being with me, even sitting on the edge of the tub when I showered — Snowdrop fell in twice, and she was less than happy. As they have grown and matured and have freer reign of the space, they are not with me constantly, but they do keep tabs on me and settle into my bed every night.

They have been home almost two years now and the lessons they are teaching me are multiple.

They play hard and rest hard every single day. Snowdrop has a favorite stuffed mouse that she brings me every night when it's time to watch the evening news. She plays fetch and then curls up on my feet and purrs herself to sleep. Meanwhile, Stardust will steal my bottle cap and play keep-away until she too tires and curls up to nap. Think for a minute: Do you play every day? And do you rest multiple times a day? I sure don't, but following the kittens' lead I'm learning to. A little play is a great release, and a few moments of relaxation are always energizing.

They love to explore. The laundry and storage are in the basement, so when I venture downstairs, "the girls" follow. Everything is new to them, and they scurry from place to place seeing what they can see but also making sure I'm still around. I've taken their lead and started to explore what is all stored away, discovering forgotten things as well as things that were set aside to be donated. My recycling bin has been getting filled up and the trunk of the car has boxes of things to donate.

They make their needs known in no uncertain terms. Stardust and Snowdrop are not at all vocal cats, except when on the way to the vet for their annual checkup — they yelled the entire way there and back. When they want or need something, they have other ways of letting me know, and I'm getting better at figuring them out.

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For example, when their food dish is empty, they jump up onto the counter near where their food is stored. They will not come down until their dish is filled. When they are scared or restless, they jump into the middle of whatever I may be doing. They have managed to send texts, emails and make phone calls by walking over my devices in an attempt to be close. They count on me to protect them. And so, I have started to think about how I get my needs met.

I do not jump on counters or walk across keyboards. When things get intense at my ministry, I take a brief walk away from my office. I have people I can reach out to when I'm scared or restless. For me, it's about paying attention enough to know what I need and then acting on it.

When the kittens need some "alone time," they disappear for a bit, never very long, but they manage to be out of sight. I've yet to discover their hiding places. Say what you will about cats being aloof, but mine usually come when called and will always

appear when I rattle the treat package.

Many people, sisters included, have trouble stepping away from time to time especially since it's so easy to be connected 24/7. This lesson I'm pretty good at. Even when overnight storms were predicted and I knew I'd have to send out closing announcements long before dawn, my phone never entered my bedroom. I preferred to get out of bed super early rather than risk a night of interrupted sleep.

Maybe Snowdrop and Stardust's biggest lesson is *awe*. So many things are still new as they can now get to more places and in some cases experience things for the first time. I watch their eyes get big and the intensity of their gaze. In our daily routines it's so easy to overlook things. The weather has been nasty, so my mornings have been focused on getting out of the house and to my place of ministry safely and dry. I don't take time to notice the beautiful sunrises.

Silly as it may sound, Stardust and Snowdrop also "make" me pray. They will get onto me or between me and whatever I may be doing and simply plop themselves down. I can push them aside or move myself, but they will persist until I stop and am quiet. It can be a moment or two, or much longer depending on the mood they are in.

I look forward to many more years of lessons. I can only hope I remain open to what Stardust and Snowdrop will continue to teach me.