

A View from the Pew

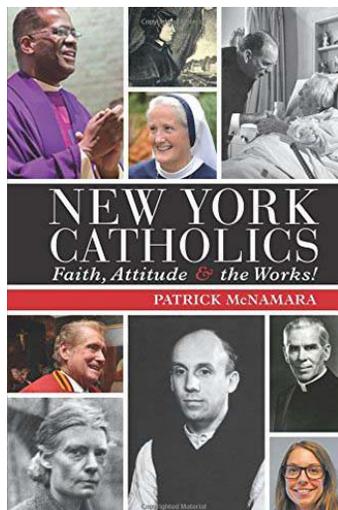
by Deacon Greg Kandra

Being a New York Catholic

A few years ago, I got a call from my friend Pat McNamara, who worked for many years as an archivist for the Diocese of Brooklyn. He wanted to interview me for a book he was compiling about Catholics in New York. We chatted for an hour or so over the phone about my life, my vocation, my career in the media. I hung up and quickly forgot about the conversation. Every now and then Pat would touch base and tell me how the book was coming. It seemed like it would never get done. There were delays, setbacks, detours involving family and jobs. Finally, he made the happy announcement that the book was being published.

Lo and behold, it's finally out.

New York Catholics: Faith, Attitude and the Works! (Orbis



Books) is 210 pages of sheer wonder (in spite of the fact that I'm in it). With this slender, eminently readable volume, Pat McNamara gives us vivid portraits of faith in the most vivid city in the world, as lived out among 76 Catholics from all walks of life.

Pat has divided the book into two parts: Historical Voices and

Contemporary Voices. The historical ones include people like Dorothy Day, Thomas Merton, Fulton Sheen, Fr. Mychal Judge and St. Elizabeth Ann Seton. The contemporary ones are folks like Brooklyn's Bishop Guy Sansaricq, Fr. James Martin, *Tablet* editor Ed Wilkinson, Peter Vallone, Jimmy Fallon, Martin Scorsese ... and me.

I know. I can't quite explain my inclusion, either.

Nonetheless, you will learn a lot about New York and the Catholic Church in the pages of this book. As Pat notes in the introduction:

What does it mean to be a Catholic New Yorker?

I think it means, first of all, to know that you're part of something bigger than yourself, and I mean that in both the geographical and theological sense...

There is also a distinctive charism to New York Catholicism: to welcome the newcomer. New Yorkers are a welcoming people and New York Catholics have been welcoming newcomers from all parts of the globe for as long as there's been a New York.

So you find here people like Gov. Al Smith who once said, "Rabble? That's me you're talking about." You discover the story of Bishop Francis Ford, whose episcopal motto was "To feel compassion." There's Fr. John Corridan, immortalized by Karl Malden in *On the Waterfront*, crying out on the docks: "This is my church! And if you don't think Christ is down here on the waterfront, you've got another guess comin'!" And there's Peter Vallone, who observes simply: "A Catholic should be a perennial optimist."

There's much more—and reading these stories I felt both humbled and gratified to be rubbing elbows with these great, gifted men and women. Being a New York Catholic is a challenge, and a grace—because here, amid all the tumult and turmoil and tears you encounter Christ. You meet him on the streets, on the subway, on street corners and in checkout lines. And you find yourself uplifted again and again by the spirit of the city and the unbending faith of its people. You discover anew just what that faith means. Pat writes:

Being Catholic is about more than observance of rules. Catholicism, as Flannery O'Connor put it, is a "habit of being," a way of viewing and relating to both God and humanity. If such is the case, then all the people profiled herein qualify as Catholic, both with a big and a little "c."

Curious for more? Check it out. *New York Catholics* is available at Amazon.com.

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