

A View from the Pew

by Deacon Greg Kandra

Underground Prayer

You can tell a lot about people by what they do on the subway.

In the early hours of a weekday morning, heading to work, we are transients. We have no home but that subway car. For a few minutes, we are co-habitants: neighbors, bound by time and space and dirty plastic seats, blinking at one another as the lights flicker, the windows rattle, and the stops go hurtling by in a blizzard of white tile. It's interesting to see what people are doing at that hour.

A lot of people are reading their smartphone screens these days. Some people do the Sudoku puzzle or the crossword. Some take the *New York Times* and fold it into long rectangles for easy reading. (It's a peculiar New York form of origami, I think.) Once in a while, a young man with a yarmulke, dressed in black, will step onto the train and crack open a book of Hebrew. Sometimes, I'll see older ladies with little pamphlets, reading lessons from the Bible.

But on one occasion, while I was unfolding my *New York Post*—there's a confession for you!—I caught sight of a very serious young woman seated across from me, hands folded, eyes closed. Her lips moved. And as I looked down at her hands, I noticed they were fingering beads.

She was praying the Rosary.

I've seen it before—like that folded *New York Times*, it's a New York phenomenon, a prayerful habit that suggests we are a distinctly devout city, full of immigrants and varied cultures that are constantly rubbing up against each other and giving people a lot of reasons

to pray. But that morning, I found it unexpectedly moving. This young woman was in prayer, and a special, profoundly personal kind of prayer.

*Pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death,
Amen.*

In a hole in the ground, clattering under a river, surrounded by darkness and strangers, one of the anonymous throng that had been herded into a tin box was praying to a woman full of grace.

Subways are a mystery—they shouldn't work, but they do, and it's a minor miracle we aren't swallowed alive by the earth. But that morning, one of our neighbors on the subway—a traveler on this journey, a fellow transient, a pilgrim bound for points unknown—was embracing another mystery. She was holding it in her hands.

I looked again at the woman with the Rosary and saw her smile to herself. And I smiled, too. A subway car of strangers was no longer full of people. To those who choose to believe, it was full of grace.

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