

Saint Barnabas the Apostle

June 11, 2021

By the Reverend Stephen Gerth

Acts 11: 19–30; 13: 1–3; Psalm 112; Matthew 10: 7–16

For just over a year now, I rarely use the 47th Street door to the rectory. If I'm coming from anywhere north of Saint Mary's, most of the time, I will get to the rectory through the 46th Street door to the parish house. When I returned from the gym about 9:30 this morning, as I reached the corner of 46th Street and Seventh Avenue, a very disturbed man, unkempt, thin, uncared for, perhaps off medication or on something, was aggressively, verbally attacking an older man. The troubled man was African-American, the man being attacked was Asian-American, whom I've seen before. I think he may work close to Saint Mary's.

Fortunately, there were two police officers on the corner who intervened. I did not linger as I was carrying a bag of unclaimed shoes left at my gym by people who had moved or had forgotten them. This time of the year, athletic shoes are the most needed and least donated item of clothing for our "Neighbors in Need."

Like many cities across our nation, our city is not as safe as it used to be. Over the past year, I have seen too many people who need help, and our system no longer allows them to get it. Verbal assaults and worse happen every day now. One notes that the news media will report the victim's race but seldom the race of the perpetrator. I read the *New York Post* online, but not because I want to read about these assaults, not to mention shootings that kill even very young children. I read so that I don't become lazy or over fearful about being here.

I never thought of leaving the city on or after September 11, 2001. Three months from today, it will be the 30th anniversary of that attack. I knew senior members of the clergy who left the city that day as soon as they could get off the island of Manhattan.

Today is an anniversary for me. Thirty-eight years ago, I was ordained deacon at the Cathedral of St. James, Chicago, with six others, two of whom were classmates at Nashotah House. We were the last group of seminarians in that diocese not to include women. It was a hot Saturday morning. The cathedral was not air-conditioned then.

It was the tradition in that diocese for ordinands to lie prostrate during the litany for ordinations.¹ What I remember most about that day is a physical memory: we lay on a cool marble floor. For whatever reason, of the thirty-eight years I've served the church, only five have been spent in parishes where the church had air-conditioning.

From time to time over the years, I will turn to Paul's letters to remind myself of what challenges the first believers faced as they proclaimed the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. The work I've been called to do in the church, though not without challenge, has been a blessing of faith and of the work four communities of faith have entrusted to me.

Thank you for being at Mass today. Please pray for the peace and safety of the city.

✠ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son,
and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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¹ *The Book of Common Prayer* (1979), 548–51.