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God rides the R train

by Fr. James Behrens

Soul Seeing

On my last trip up north, I rode the New York subways a lot. My aunt was in a Brooklyn hospital and the easiest way to get there was by taking the train from New Jersey and then walking a few blocks from Penn Station to catch the R subway to Brooklyn. All in all, it took about an hour and a half to get from New Jersey to Brooklyn.



I like the subways.

I was thinking about the people I saw on them as I was falling off to sleep last night. Maybe that is a kind of prayer for them. I hope so. I realize prayer is supposed to go directly to God with no stops or detours. But the subway train and its riders were on my mind last night. The people almost swayed in my thoughts as I pictured them riding the rails beneath Manhattan. So I caught another ride with them, and I think that is close to God, too. For God must have been in the subway.

There was a Chinese man whose little daughter squeezed in between his legs. He sat next to me, by the door. His daughter looked up at him and pointed to a plastic bottle he held in his hands. She wanted a drink and he would smile and slip the straw in her mouth. She would finish drinking and then rest her head in his lap. She looked at me and smiled.

A young Latino mother sat across from me. Her little boy, who looked to be about 5, couldn't stay still. He would run from her, and then turn and laugh, and then run back. She would try to grab him but he was quick. He'd be off again before she could get her hands on him. I had the feeling that the boy would have been in big trouble had not the others on the car been looking on. The mother was careful to keep her cool. And the little boy knew it. He loved it. And exploited it.

A young black couple were holding hands and kissing.

A lot of people had iPods, iPads, Kindles, MP3 players and other devices that had games on them. In fact, I would say most people were absorbed in those things.

One person sat across from me and when I looked at her I had to look away because I could not tell if she was a man or a woman and didn't want to stare. There was something about her or him that was vaguely undefined. Hard to tell sometimes.

An old Chinese man was reading his paper. The paper was in Chinese and I could see a page from how he held the paper. I think it takes a near genius to read Chinese. He smiled as he was reading. And I wondered what made him smile.

A young guy got on with a CD player and his buddy was right behind him. When the train started to move, the guy turned on the music and the buddy started to dance and twist, and then got onto the floor and spun around and around. The music was good -- I think it was something about sex by James Brown. It was a fast, popping kind of song that made me want to move, to dance. But as it was, I sat there.

The more I write this, the more I remember. All the people, so handsome and beautiful, living life as best they can and moving beneath one of the greatest cities in the world. All of it made by God, though God is always discreet, hidden, living as he does in all living things. In the dance, in little thirsty babies, in kids running up and down the aisles, in the smile of an old man and the kiss of the young. It is there every second of every day. They say Manhattan is a city that never sleeps.

God doesn't sleep, either. God rides.

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