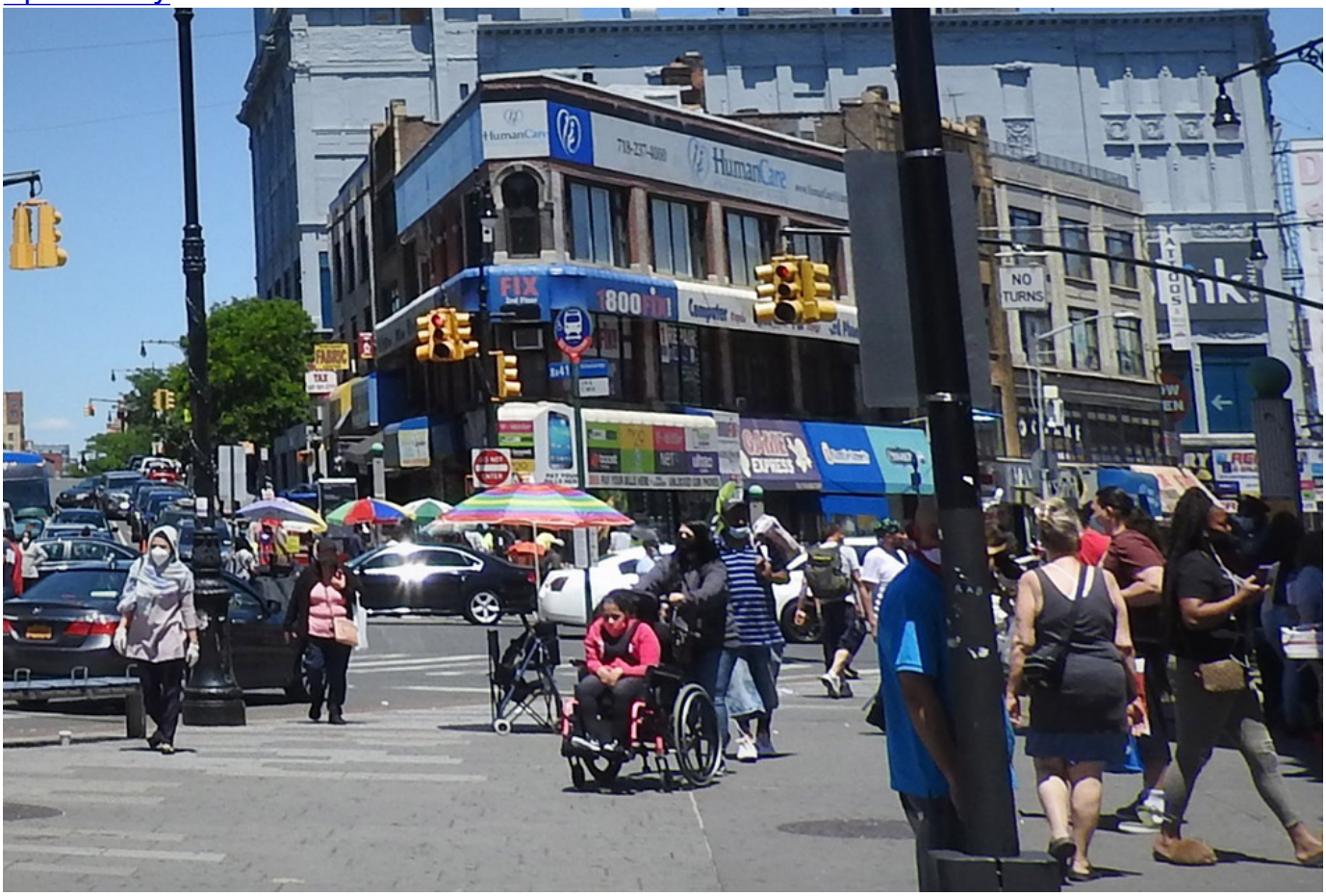
Blog
Spirituality



The Hub in the South Bronx, pictured June 8 during the pandemic (Wikimedia Commons/Jim.henderson)



by Maria Longo

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Power Springs, Georgia — July 1, 2020

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Editor's note: *Notes from the Field includes reports from young people volunteering in ministries of Catholic sisters. A partnership with Catholic Volunteer Network, the project began in the summer of 2015. We are wrapping up our 11th round of bloggers: Celine Reinoso is a Loretto Volunteer in El Paso, Texas, and Maria Longo is a Notre Dame AmeriCorps volunteer in the Bronx, New York. This is Maria's final blog post.*

The end of this school year left much to be desired.

I was given a weekend to travel back to New York City to move out. When I flew into LaGuardia Airport, our pilot took us up the Hudson River, providing us with a spectacular view of Manhattan.

I realized then that there was so much I would miss about mission. I would miss the community. All 27 of our teammates will now go our separate ways, some as wives, some as teachers, some as students, some as religious, some as priests. I would miss my students, most of whom I will probably never see again. I never had the opportunity to properly say goodbye to them in person.

I realized I would miss a lot of the little things, too. I would miss the man who always sold mangos on the corner of St. Anne's Avenue or the curbside car wash on Westchester. I would miss *coco helado* and The Hub and Adoration at St. Rita's. And I would miss the stench and the filth of the South Bronx because it opened my eyes so much to the reality of the human person for the seven months I lived there.

I've heard it said that we are mud and poetry, and I couldn't agree more. My favorite word in the English language is "crepuscular," a term that defines something as between light and dark, in a twilight. Indeed, we as human beings are crepuscular, but not necessarily in the biological sense of the word.



Several Seton Teaching Fellows of 2019-2020 in the South Bronx (Courtesy of Maria Longo)

Crepuscular creatures — like deer or sharks — feed at dawn and dusk, the golden hours. Similarly, at least here on Earth, we as human beings are caught between the light of heaven and the darkness of hell, the light of goodness and the dark of sin. Our very nature and free will set us at a crossroads while we dwell here within time and space. Living in the Mott Haven community, making the 25-minute walk to and from the school, working there, shopping there, growing there, made our situation as crepuscular beings all the more apparent to me.

Especially now, coming out of a pandemic and with the sociopolitical unrest that has recently shaken our country, there seems to be more darkness than light. However, I believe that is merely the work of the devil. Given that he wants nothing more than to tear us down and separate us from The Most High, it makes sense he would use the most insidious tactics to divide us and hit us where we are most vulnerable. Of course, he would target the aspects of our existence that are obvious gifts from and

ties to a higher power: virtue, accountability, places of worship, prayer, the family, and relationship.

Knowing who the devil is and what he wants, we shouldn't be surprised. However, we also shouldn't stop at this acknowledgement. We are called to continue moving beyond this recognition. Yes, there is suffering and darkness in the world. Yes, the devil is taking action to separate us from eternal glory. What are we going to do about it?

This is not to say that we alone can do anything. That's not what I mean at all. *By the grace of God*, what are we going to do to combat ill will, prejudice, unnecessary suffering, injustice and the like? What are we going to do to go beyond whatever temptations the devil might be using against us?

One thing I've learned recently is that it's not enough for me to simply resist temptation. It's not enough to simply say "no" to something. Rather, what I have found to be truly effective is, rather, to say "yes" to something else. It's not a "no" to prejudice, it's a "yes" to equality. Rather than saying "no" to injustice, say "yes" to equity. Instead of a "no" to vice — gluttony, greed, sloth, lust — say "yes" by choosing to practice virtue — temperance, generosity, diligence, chastity.

When I ran track and cross-country back in school, it wasn't enough to me to simply not eat junk food or lay on the couch all day. I had to also live by a balanced diet and training schedule. If I wanted to make it to the state championship or run a marathon, I had to say "yes" to running a certain weekly mileage, consuming a certain amount of water and nutrients, and getting enough sleep. I had to actively pursue my goal, not simply deny the things that might obstruct my path to that goal. It's not enough to simply wait around for someone to give me what I need. Rather, I believe I am called to patience. With patience, we are called to continuously search for where the Lord is moving in our lives and follow his guidance.

I am forever grateful to him for everything that I have experienced and learned in this last year of missionary work. I pray that he will continue to guide and protect me, my students, their families, and all who have supported us so well. May the Lord bless you and keep you. Glory and praise forever! Amen.

[Maria Longo serves with the Notre Dame AmeriCorps program in the Bronx, New York. Because of COVID-19, she is currently working from her family home in Powder Springs, Georgia.]

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