

April 30, 2020

Good day, dear Parishioners,

Pembroke and Church Streets poured eastward like streams into the soaring river that was Willis Avenue. Pembroke Street was in the direction of the North Shore of Long Island, Church Street to the South. Our parish buildings were sandwiched between both streets.

You might say that the DeMartino family lived over on the Upper West Side of Williston Park. Then again, you might not want to say that, though there was a Park Avenue around the corner from where we lived, and even a Park Avenue School once upon a time. I went to Second Grade and Linda went to Kindergarten there. On Linda's first day at school she kept crying and trying to get sent home. She thought she had a great line: "I need a glass of milk, I need a glass of milk," she kept crying! "We have milk," said the teacher swiftly to Linda's dismay. Not to be defeated (she was always the athlete and quick on her feet) Linda replied, "I want chocolate milk, I want chocolate milk." Not to be outdone the ever sharp kindergarten teacher replied: "We have chocolate milk, we have chocolate milk!" Curses, curses, foiled again, Linda, poor little one.

Anyway, from Third Grade to Sixth Grade I went to Saint Aidan Catholic School. Saint Aidan was a friend of Saint Patrick. The good Sisters of Charity of Halifax taught us that. In our overwhelmingly Irish neighborhood that meant that the rarely heard of Saint Aidan was in fact HUGE through his happy association with the patron saint of green beer. We even wore green pants and ties with emblems that had *SAS* woven on them against a very black back drop. I still have my *SAS* emblem in an uncle's old cigar box up at the rectory.

At 2:30 PM dismissal time each day, the sisters had a plan. When don't they have a plan? The plan involved two basic lines to get into, either Pembroke Street or Church Street.

My ordinary route was Pembroke Street which led me on my way to the Upper West Side of town and to home. That was how I usually escaped. Then, *one day* I began to get in the Church Street line that ran parallel to Willis Avenue and passed in front of the church. *That day* Sister Catherine told us that the Communists (who hated God) had exploded an atom bomb! She said that the fallout was really bad and was steadily blowing in the wind toward the United States and that we should pray to our Blessed Mother to save us!

This was also HUGE, like *The Cuban Missile Crisis* of the first semester, all over again! (Jesus used these dark days to prepare me for what we're living through now.) I became a boy with a mission overnight. I figured that by taking the southern, Church Street Line, I could deftly slip out of line (another great escape, like I watched them do on my army TV shows, *Combat* and *Gallant Men*) and proceed with my mission from Sister, and so I did.

Risking "severe consequences" (meaning Sister's ruler), having made my daring escape, I slipped quietly into our brilliant church. Quiet and peaceful, it even smelled like church. Votive lights and stained glass windows of all our saints helped to put me in the MOOD.

My eyes quickly found the Sanctuary Lamp burning beside the Tabernacle. Reverently, I made my way to the grave, grey-streaked black marble altar rail and knelt down to pray, a boy with a mission. After some time with Jesus, I quietly made my way to our Blessed Mother's altar and knelt there to pray. "Oh, Blessed Mother, please turn that wind around and make it blow all that bad fall-out away from our country."

From that day on I made my secret visits after school every day and never got caught! I don't know how long this went on, but it went on until, one day, Sister said that the wind had turned the fall-out away and that we were *saved*. I never told anyone *why* we were saved until today. Like they say, "Now it can be told."

Our beautiful church is open every day from 7 AM to 7 PM. Our Lord is waiting for you in the Tabernacle and so is our dear Blessed Mother, Our Lady of Saint William of York. We all have a mission now, all of us together.

Now I send you my blessing again, through the air, *faster than a speeding bullet, more powerful than a locomotive* and able to *leap from my right hand with a single bound!*

May God protect and save all of you.

Faithfully yours,

Father DeMartino