

# Encounter on D.C. subway offers Resurrection lessons

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JOURNEY TOWARD HOLINESS

Sister Mary Garascia, C.P.P.S.



My friend almost fell into Sandra's lap! We had boarded the subway in Washington D.C. during rush hour, and were reaching for poles by her seat, when the train started with a jerk. Sandra was a senior lady, tiny, with bright eyes fringed with gray brows. We started chatting, and the conversation quickly became pretty amazing and filled with the light of the Risen Christ.

On hearing we were tourists, Sandra wanted to know what we had done. "Museums," we said enthusiastically. "Ah," she said, "I know them all. And you know what you see there? That we are all the same. All peoples have stories, all of us have beautiful histories, and all of us have the same hopes and dreams! We are all one!" Resurrection lesson 1: the great priestly prayer of Christ in John 17 presents a purposeful Jesus, marching toward death, saying: "I am coming to you, Holy Father...so that they may be one as we are one." His death became a revelation in our human history of what violence, which is part of our humanness, does when it is unleashed, and his Resurrection became a light that reveals to us the possibility of living through violence and moving toward oneness with one another.

Sandra wanted to know which museums we had visited. On hearing that we visited the Smithsonian's Aerospace Museum, she exclaimed: "Ah! You know, we are part of the stars! They are in us!" In fact, we had heard there in the IMAX film about the cosmos that we have about a teaspoon of stardust in our bodies, essential elements created by explosions of stars early in the formation of our universe. We are more than our earthly bodies! Our present bodies, part of the immense universe, began to form eons ago, and those star elements in us will exist for eons more. Resurrection lesson number 2: Clearly the Risen Lord had a resurrection body. It was a body freed from the constraints of his Jesus of Nazareth body: Christ's risen body could suddenly appear, even in locked rooms, and it could ascend into the

heavens. Risen bodies are our destiny also. We only have picture language about all this in our religious tradition! But stardust and Resurrection give us a hint of what is to come!

"And where else were you," she asked? "We are just coming back from a tour of Mount Vernon," we said. She smiled and paused just for a moment, and then she said: "Mount Vernon! You know, I have lived here in Washington all my life, and my family for two centuries before me. Because, you see, my great, great, great grandmother was a slave who escaped from Mount Vernon to freedom in Washington D.C. when she was 13." Mount Vernon in fact had slaves for many years, both before and after George Washington's death. I was overwhelmed, when she said this, by dimly understanding the history that this woman facing me carried in her lifeline! Not only was Sandra a slave's descendent, but she had lived through so much aftermath of slavery in her own life time — lynchings that continued into the 1960's and beyond; the martyrs of the civil rights movement including MLK; the race riots; the decimation of black families in the 20th century. Yet she glowed with beneficence as she proclaimed our oneness with each other. Resurrection lesson 3: Jesus spoke so often of how his Kingdom grows slowly. He used images like wheat planted and growing, mustard seeds turning into trees, yeast leavening flour. Living a resurrection life means understanding, like Sandra, the slowness of the "coming to be" of unity, non-violence, and devotion to a "God without boundaries," another of Sandra's little phrases. So often I am impatient with the slowness of change for the better in my religious congregation, in the Church, and in our nation. We said a blessing on Sandra as we left her, but she has not left me. My Easter resolution is to be more like Sandra, seeing, embracing, and rejoicing in the slow sprouting of oneness, peace, and love. It is really here, emerging and bringing hope.

*Sister Mary Garascia belongs to the Congregation of the Sisters of the Precious Blood (C.P.P.S.). After many years of Church work she is retired and maintains a presence in ministry at The Holy Name of Jesus Parish in Redlands.*