



in Judge, Nestor Cortes
ride injury updates,
ing levels of optimism



Most migrants in NYC
struggling to access legal
help, other key services:...



Disgusting, dangerous
chicken products served to
students amid NYC school...



Crazed straphanger douses
MTA bus driver with lighter
fluid in Brooklyn



Lawyer: George Santos
would rather go to jail:
reveal names of people

OPINION

Crucified, as usual: The coronavirus hits working-class New York hardest, of course

By Eileen Markey
New York Daily News • Apr 19, 2020 at 5:00 am



The churches were empty this Easter. We who practice moved our rituals elsewhere. Like millions of Catholics around the world, I pray the Stations of the Cross on Good Friday. We move around the periphery of our churches, on which hang 14 paintings of episodes in Christ's death march.

The prayer is about walking into the wound, contemplating a tortured body, accompanying Christ to his execution and wondering if we'd be mealy-mouthed Pontius Pilate or daringly empathetic Veronica. It is a dark ritual, an acknowledgment that life is full of suffering. But there is some comfort in it, to know that God suffers too.

There was no church to go to this year, no painted plaster reliefs to gaze on as I tried to traverse space and time. Instead, I'm thinking about [the zip-code map](#) of COVID-19 infection in New York City. It looks, with slight variation, like every other map I've spent my career writing about. This is the asthma map, the pays-more-than-50%-of-their-income-in-rent map, the eviction map, the real-estate-speculators-left buildings for dead map. Scroll back a few generations, it's the redlining map. COVID-19 has quickly become like all our other sins, a map of race and class.

It was strange to read odes to shut-down NYC as my neighborhood kept working: Bangladeshi fruit vendors and Mexican groceries, Dominican home health aides and Puerto Rican supers, subway and livery drivers heading to their jobs. Now my zip code has one of the highest infection rates in the city.

Two thousand and eighty-seven people in my zip code have tested positive, as of April 16, according to NYC Department of Health statistics. That's a rate 45% higher than the city as a whole. There are 27,000 cases in the Bronx. Those are just the ones who got tested. By April 17, the Department of Health put the number of Bronx dead at 1,802. Another 443 are reported as probable COVID deaths.

One month in, it is working-class New York that's being crucified. Not for the first time. No church to go to, I'll walk this Via Dolorosa instead. The Stations of the Cross roll through my head as I walk, the reality of life in the COVID Bronx blurring over the religious images I was raised with. They come out of order and incomplete, but no less illuminating.

I touch nothing. Hands stuffed in pockets, bandana on my face like some kind of pilgrim stick-up man, I set out. I'm thinking about a student of mine who works 60 hours a week, the only breadwinner in her house. She's been missing in action since we went to online teaching, ignoring assignments, not answering the emails I send to her college account. She's an EMT hoping to get into the nursing program. But with each unanswered email I wonder if she's dead. This is how the Stations of the Cross begin. *Jesus is Condemned to Death.*

I walk to Montefiore Hospital and find a supplementary oxygen tank the size of a trailer hooked into the building to feed the many respirators pumping away inside. The nurses here who've been warning about penny-pinching management for years were on CNN exclaiming that they need PPE. *Jesus takes up his cross.*

A few blocks on I pass the building where a child died in a fire years ago, the result of decrepit conditions that the landlord refused to fix. *Jesus Falls for the First Time.*

Around the block, under the No. 4 train and I'm in the park where my son had early-season baseball practice, coached by dads who work with their hands, who can't telecommute, who finished their shifts and stepped into the grass here to toss pitches like they learned in the Dominican Republic. No baseball this spring. No cars pulling up with music too loud and coolers dragged onto the sidelines.

A few of the blocks near here are notorious, they defeat each anti-crime innovation. The baseball coach lived there. A big man, he wept at the end of the season, enveloping the boys in his massive arms as he shouted out their finest qualities, told them how much he loved them. His family struggled.

One son was sick with asthma and the side effects of medications. His wife ran a 24-hour daycare, taking in the children of mothers who worked late night at bars or early morning cleaning jobs. She was tough and crass and kind, and ran the end of season picnic with trays of baked chicken and rice and peas. They got off the block, moved south. The neighborhood is poorer without them. *Simon of Cyrene Helps Jesus Carry the Cross.*

I walk into the woods where kids smoke pot and homeless people sleep, the trees here older than any of these waves of working-class New York. Still here, reaching. No hymns on this Via Cruz, but the ambulance sirens sing.

I exit the woods near the apartment of another student. He's sick now, fear in his voice when he called to tell me it got him. For weeks he and his mother, she a home health worker, suited up as if for battle, braved the subway, equally terrified of the virus and lost paychecks.

Past the nursing home now. The nurse's aides make little more than minimum wage but they take the place of family disallowed from visiting. *Jesus Meets His Mother.*

I walked in this stretch a few months ago with a friend who turned his head quickly and said he didn't like to think of the future. He glimpses beauty everywhere, but the past rattles round in him, bruises from the scourging of the Bronx last time: neighborhoods and the people in them abandoned. When they rose again, they did it themselves. *Weep for Your children, Women of Jerusalem.*

The other day I found a phone number for the student who is an EMT. I send one-way texts: Are you OK?

Down through Van Cortlandt Park now, into the BBQ area packed in summer with families on their one day off, Bachata and Mariachi and Cumbia on portable speakers. Quiet now. At Good Friday services we chant *Ubi Caritas, Deus ibi est*. Where there is love, there is God. No singing now, but I hear the sirens' wail.

This fall I stood in this part of the park every Saturday, watched my son and a few hundred skinny high school kids pump their lungs, test endurance on the famed cross-country course. Now it's rimmed in chainlink, portable generators every 50 feet, talk of a field hospital. *Jesus Falls, again and again.* A broken body.

I cross myself. Up the stair street, through the co-ops built by radical tradespeople a century ago. They turned their union fund into housing, took their battle everywhere. We need their power now.

Now I'm on the slanted side streets next to the public hospital the city's chipped away at. I look up at the window of the room where I had my son. When the maternity ward closed, we feared it was a prelude to shuttering the hospital. Neighbors rallied, sang songs in the street and said the neighborhood needed this hospital, that poor people deserve medicine. I make a sign of the cross and pray for the people inside now, gasping their last breath where my son took his first. *Jesus is Stripped of His Clothes.*

At the Bx10 bus stop, the rear doors open. The only people on the bus are Caribbean health workers. Masks covering their faces, they walk to the hospital. I cross myself. *Veronica wipes the face of Christ.*

I remembered that my EMT student had an internship last year. I asked the internship if they have alternate contact for her. I sent an email to her Gmail address.

Down the hill, past the office of the Bronx County Historical Society. The new archivist says there is a box that holds the whole sorry tale of what was done to the Bronx in the 1970s. *Jesus is Nailed to the Cross*. Again, I cross myself.

Into the local park where the playground was rebuilt with money activists demanded of the state after it sited an industrial plant in Van Cortlandt Park, in the borough with the most asthma and poorest kids. Blood money, or lung money. The daffodils are blooming.

All along my walk, the daffodils have bloomed. After 9/11, when half as many people as this died, the city of Rotterdam sent New York a million bulbs. For years afterward school children and park volunteers have planted them, dead-looking little onion things, in fall, and now they rise each spring.

A Mexican mother leans over her American daughter, adjusts her facemask. *Ubi Caritas.*

I get a text from a strange number. The EMT student. She lives. She has COVID-19, but thinks she is recovering. “I’ve seen a lot of things, professor.”

On my walk I passed under a graffiti mural to the always dying, the candles and the silk flowers and the bottles before a shrine. There are many plagues in the city. The spray-painted letters read: *“Yo soy la resurrección el que vive creyendo en mi no morira para siempre...”*

I’m never quite sure if I believe. But if I do, it’s as much because of this Bronx as because of the church, that other, inside church.

Easter didn’t happen all at once. The apostles remained in the upper room, like us, suspecting death’s victory. They kept bumping into Christ and not recognizing him. Maybe by Pentacost, the end of May, we’ll stand on our balconies and in a thousand languages proclaim a new order.

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