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ALLEGED VANDAL INDICTED ON CRIMINAL CHARGES AFTER DESTROYING RELIGIOUS STATUE IN ASTORIA CATHOLIC CHURCH

Defendant Allegedly told Priest to 'Die' and Threw Glass at Woman Inside Church; Faces up to Seven Years in Prison If Convicted

Queens District Attorney Melinda Katz announced that Jose Rodriguez has been indicted on charges of burglary, attempted assault, hate crime of aggravated harassment and other related crimes for allegedly striking a statue of the baby Jesus in front of the altar at Immaculate Conception Church in Astoria on April 6. The statue fell to the ground and shattered. Rodriguez is alleged to have told a priest to “die” before the attack. The defendant returned to the church three days later, trespassed behind the altar and threw a glass top of a water cruet at a parishioner, causing the top to shatter.

District Attorney Katz said: “This defendant has been indicted on felony and hate crime charges for allegedly entering a Catholic church with the sole purpose of desecrating a holy institution and harassing those inside. Houses of worship are sanctuaries in our communities and Jose Rodriguez allegedly violated that covenant by intentionally creating havoc in what is supposed to be a place of peace. I thank our partners at the NYPD Hate Crimes Task Force and the 114th Precinct for their quick apprehension of this defendant.”

Rodriguez, 38, of Shore Boulevard in Astoria, was arraigned today on an indictment charging him with burglary in the third degree, attempted assault in the second degree, two counts of criminal mischief in the fourth degree and three counts of the hate crime of aggravated harassment in the second degree.

If convicted of the top count, Rodriguez faces a potential maximum sentence of seven years in prison. Supreme Court Judge Toni Cimino ordered him to return to court June 6.

District Attorney Katz said that, according to the indictment and investigation, on April 6, at approximately 1 p.m., Rodriguez rode a Citi Bike to the front of the Immaculate Conception Church on 29th Street in Astoria just after Sunday Mass ended. He shook the hand of the Rev. James Hughes and allegedly told the priest, in sum and substance, “Die.”

Rodriguez then walked inside the church and up to the altar. The defendant allegedly knocked down a statue of baby Jesus that belonged to a parishioner. The statue fell to the ground and broke into pieces. He then fled the church.

Rodriguez returned to the church on April 9 at approximately 1 p.m. and trespassed behind the altar. He is alleged to have taken the top of a glass water cruet from behind the altar and thrown it at a

parishioner who was praying, causing the top to shatter as it narrowly missed the victim. Rodriguez is alleged to have then spit in the face of a church employee after the employee flagged down the police.

Assistant District Attorney Melissa Beach, Supervisor in the District Attorney's Hate Crimes Bureau, is prosecuting the case under the supervision of Michael Brovner, Bureau Chief, and under the overall supervision of Executive Assistant District Attorney for the Major Crimes Shawn Clark.

Criminal complaints and indictments are accusations. A defendant is presumed innocent until proven guilty.

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