Discussion Questions for Orsi, *Madonna of 115th Street*, Chapters 6-8 (for Mon Sept 30)

6. Toward an Inner History of Immigration

In this chapter, Orsi constructs immigration as (among other things) a *spiritual* event. He considers emotional and material dimensions, as well as issues of identity, naming, and prejudice. In that way he’s setting up Madonna devotion as a form of *self-expression*. Explain.

7. The Meanings of the Devotion to the Madonna of 115th Street

The length and multiple sections within this chapter suggest that this is the heart of his analysis, the core of the book. He unpacks symbolic meanings on many levels.

Some ideas for making sense of his analysis: Try taking close notes on this chapter in the form of a chart or concept map, parsing out the symbolic meanings as a pilgrimage, as a re-creation of Neapolitan identity, within the *domus*, as a neighborhood experience, as a community self-expression, as an expression of devotion within larger contexts of city and nation, as a means of “professionalism,” as healing, as simply their way of being human, as a working-class event, as the redemption of suffering, along gendered lines, and as a way to explore power.

8. Theology of the Streets

Orsi claims we can “read the theology of a people” in the *festa* of the 115th Street Madonna (p. 219). He perceives a primitive “Catholic sensibility” not determined by the Church or its authority structures (p. 220-221). What kinds of theological patterns or problems are shown within the *festa* – in other words, what does the *festa* say about Italian Catholicism? How does it illuminate Italian Catholics’ views of the divine? About the meaning of “holy”? About human destiny?

Closely read the final two paragraphs (p. 230-231).

What has Orsi accomplished in his careful attention to the outward forms of religious practice and to the inner meanings its participants gave it?

In your view, what is the contribution of this book to American religious history?