

## **"Planted and built up in Jesus Christ, firm in the Faith"**

On the 9th August 2011 around 150 pilgrims ( not tourists) departed Perth to commence their journey to Madrid for World Youth Day 2011. Along the way many friendships and relationships were formed with pilgrims from many different cultures, "Youth influencing the World", honouring the Father for his works, demonstrating and developing our daily prayer practices. As we began our journey the atmosphere at Perth International Airport was electric, filled with excitement and anticipation for the journey before us.

Along the way, some pilgrims got sick, others were sad and a little homesick. These negative emotions were easily overcome due to the fact that we had so many awesome people to talk our worries over with and an endless supply of "Free Hugs" from our fellow pilgrims.

Arriving in Spain the heat and humidity was overwhelming. On arrival in Vigo we were taken to our host, parish community for the "Days in the Diocese" where we were welcomed into the colourful programme of festival, faith and fellowship. During this time we also made a side trip to Portugal for the day travelling by bus which caused great excitement.

Leaving our host parish we travelled through the beautiful green countryside of Galicia Salamanca, home to the oldest city Christian University in Spain, founded in 1218 by Alfonso IX of Leon. We visited many historical sights, including travelling to the home of Bishop Dom Salvado (founder of New Norcia) and prayed at the Cathedral in Santiagode Compestela, where thousands of pilgrims journey all year round towards the end of their Camino.

At the commencement of the Opening Ceremonies the city of Madrid became alive with thousands of young people who had come together to celebrate their faith. Over 3000 Australian pilgrims came together at Madrid's Palacio de Deportes for the Australian gathering of World Youth Day. As well as the pilgrims, the gathering was attended by 24 Australian Bishops, Gary Pinto who sang the theme song "Receive The Power" WYD in Sydney 2008 and newly ordained Father Rob Galea whom I think is an inspiration to the young Catholic community. The day was immersed in prayer, testimonies and address's by the Australian Bishops and the Australian Ambassador in Spain Zorica McCarthy, who was also in attendance. Three thousand youth gathering as pilgrims to share their faith and friendship was one of the highlights of my journey.

As we prepared for the Papal Welcome Ceremony there was much excitement and joy. We had the opportunity for Catechists, daily mass and the Sacrament of Reconciliation. On the day of our Pilgrim walk to the WYD vigil, the streets of Madrid became alive with colourful pilgrims walking the streets wearing red, yellow and orange clothing, many carrying or wearing flags of their country of origin, while others carried flags and crosses. I felt very close to God as we walked the streets praying, laughing and singing and even though we could not speak the language of many who walked along beside us the love of God and our fellow man was evident for all to see. Almost one million pilgrims walked with excitement and song to the site on Cuatro Vientos. They were all there by choice, because they wanted to be, no one forcing or trying to persuade them to do it, there, to share their faith and love of God. Words fail to express the way I felt to be part of this community of young people all gathering from around the world sharing their joy and love of their faith. A day never to be forgotten.

That evening a violent electrical storm interrupted the vigil proceedings and prevented the Pope from giving his homily. During prayer and Eucharist Devotion there was complete silence by the one million young people who had come to celebrate.

We spent the night at the Airforce Base in preparation for the Final Mass the following day. Many pilgrims that arrived the next day were not allowed entry to the central area which was already full and many large screens were in place for all to see as the altar was so far away. I am blessed that I have now been able to be part of the celebration of Mass with Pope Benedict XVI on two occasions experiences never to be forgotten.

I was intrigued when I first heard of this huge Catholic youth festival in 2007 when my own parish community began offering assistance to the youth of the parish to attend Sydney 2008. I attended WYD 2008 and was blown away by the faith professed and left me longing to have this experience over and over again. For me it left me with the need to help those in need and on my return I have become a volunteer in local communities who are always looking for assistance in helping others less fortunate.

The theme for World Youth Day in Rio 2013 "Go And Make Disciples of all Nations".

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the Knights of The Southern Cross for the sponsorship that they made available to pilgrims travelling to Madrid. I was fortunate to be one of the recipients of the sponsorship which was very much appreciated in my time of need.

Kindest Regards

Caitlin