

WYD11 Madrid  
A Pilgrims journey

On the 11<sup>th</sup> of August we, Katie and Emily, set off with the group from the Bunbury diocese for World Youth Day in Spain. The first four days were spent in the city of Salamanca (which is 2.5 hours from Madrid) for "Days in the Diocese". This time is designed to get you ready mentally and spiritually for WYD. While we were in Salamanca we stayed at a school where we slept on the floor. A group from Germany was also situated here and we soon became very good friends with them. Each day our Spanish guides, Juan and Antonio, would teach us the history of Salamanca and take us to see the many churches; 2 cathedrals, 5 churches and several monasteries all within walking distance in the city! We also celebrated mass each day with the German group and a group from Zambia. One memorable night as we were exploring the city, we came across the Plaza Mayor where a huge pilgrim party was going on. We learnt many songs and games from other countries and played what was possibly the biggest game of Duck Duck Goose ever!

After four days in Salamanca we left for Madrid to begin the WYD week. On arrival we were greeted at our church in Getafe by our Spanish host families (our group was one of the lucky ones, no more sleeping on the floor for us!). We soon discovered that neither of our families spoke any English, and this realisation was made worse by the fact that we only knew about 10 words of Spanish, needless to say the week was like a very long funny game of charades.

Each morning in Madrid we went to catechesis. We heard from an Australian bishop, a Canadian Bishop and also Cardinal George Pell speak on issues around the theme 'Firm in the Faith'. Catechesis also included lots of singing and we got to know many other pilgrims there. The major events which we held where all of the pilgrims attended were the welcoming mass, the Papal arrival and the Stations of the Cross. A couple of us were even fortunate enough to get within about 20m of the Pope as he arrived in his pope mobile. A particularly beautiful experience for Katie was The Stations of the Cross. The stations were traditional porcelain statues used in different areas in Spain, and the WYD cross was carried to each station in turn. This cross was carried by people from all over the world who had real life hardships. They had people affected by the tsunami in Japan and the Haiti earthquake, recovering drug addicts and people who are significantly persecuted for their faith, along with many others.

On Saturday morning the Bunbury group headed off to begin the pilgrim walk to the airfield where the sleep out and the final mass with the pope would be held the next day. It was such a hot day to be outside let alone walking kilometres. Thankfully the locals were sympathetic and hosed us down from there balconies, even the firemen were called in to cool us down. All of the pilgrims were so grateful. When we arrived at the airfield we found that the Germans we stayed with in Salamanca were only about 200m from us, along with other groups we had met; Scotland, Canada, France, Italy, California and Sydney, and we spent the night signing together and sharing our stories from the week. WYD week officially ended the next morning when the Pope came back to the airfield and celebrated the final mass. It was an amazing thing when Pope Benedict XVI began the opening prayer, the whole airfield of 2 million pilgrims went silent. It showed that although most of the week had a party atmosphere, we were all there because of our love for God.

By going to WYD Madrid we got to experience the Spanish culture and country, which is beautiful and so different to Australia. We met some amazing people from around the world, our Spanish guides, the Germans and other Australian pilgrims, who we are still friends with. It was also great that we got to hang out with our Bishop, Gerard Holohan, and get to know each other. Being in a place with 2 million other young Catholics was an amazing thing to be a part of. It has strengthened and helped us to be "Firm in the Faith."

Katie and Emily  
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