

Travelling to World Youth Day in Madrid with ninety other pilgrims from Perth was an amazing experience. After travelling for close to thirty hours, three aeroplanes and a coach ride later we arrived in Vigo on the east coast of Spain. There, we were warmly welcomed into our host families and their culture for days in the diocese. We spent the next four days visiting the sites and churches of Vigo, Santiago de Compostella; where bishop Don Sproxton celebrated mass for pilgrims from around the globe in the famous Saint James Cathedral, Tui; the birthplace of Bishop Salvado who established New Norcia here in Western Australia, and even Portugal for an afternoon.

Bidding adieu to our host families with tears, we travelled by coach Salamanca. Here we stopped over night in a hotel and went to an awesome fiesta held in Salamaca's main square. The fiesta comprised of different song and dance acts by, and for all the pilgrims who would be travelling to Madrid the next day. After arriving in Madrid, settling down into our mattresses on a school gym floor, and experiencing the first trills of cold showers, we slept with anticipation of what the first day of World Youth Day celebrations would bring.

The first official day of World Youth Day began with a blast as all the Australian pilgrims gathered in the Love and Life Centre – a large indoor stadium where many English events were to be held – for worship and praise. The Opening Mass followed that evening and was a spectacular, if not sweltering, celebration. Catechesis sessions followed by mass kicked off the next day with speakers including, Cardinal Pell, Jason Everet (an avid speaker on Chastity) and the Arch Bishop of New York. Following the Papal Arrival and Way of the Cross occurring over the next few days, everyone was pumped to be heading off to the renowned 'sleep out' on the Saturday. After unrolling our sleeping mats and being cooled down by fire hoses and animated firemen, the Vigil began. It was unforgettable. The atmosphere was electric. The air was alive with the faith of over one million young people gathered together for a common purpose. In much contrast to the 'storm' of the night before ('to make sure we got a mention in the newspapers' as someone put it), the sun appeared bright and early for the Closing Mass. Celebrated by reportedly up to 2.4 million people; the Popes message to "strengthen this faith which has been handed down to us from the time of the Apostles" and to "Share with others the joy of your faith" resonated deeply among the gathered pilgrims.



World Youth Day for me was a time to re-commit to my faith; a time to really become "firm in the faith". I formed new friendships that will help me to remain "planted and built up in Jesus Christ" as I travel along my faith journey. I now feel supported through the connections I have made and know that we, as Catholic youth, do not walk alone. It was a time to re-discover the 'life' of the Church. I realised just how alive and vibrant the Church is. Whoever said the Church is dead, has obviously never been to a World Youth Day!

I would like to sincerely thank the Knights of the Southern Cross (WA) for the financial support they provided me with for my trip.

I look forward to seeing you in Brazil!

God Bless,
Sarah