

## **World Youth Day 2011 Madrid Spain**

I had the privilege of attending World Youth Day in Madrid this year as a member of my Parish Group from All Saints in Greenwood.

The theme was "Firm in the Faith" from St Paul's Letter to the Colossians in which Pope Benedict encouraged the youth of the world to stand strong in our Catholic heritage, to be firm in what we believe and to be witnesses to the rest of the world.

What I really loved about World Youth Day in Madrid was the emphasis on the Eucharist, which is the centre of our faith. The Eucharist is powerful and has the power to change lives. I experienced the universality of the Catholic Church through World Youth Day masses more than ever before. Pilgrims from all over the world spoke the same prayers and worshipped the same God in their own language.

The Eucharist was brought to stadiums, airfields, and to the streets. World Youth Day made it clear to me that our world *needs* the Eucharist. That we are a peoples consecrated to our Lord through the Eucharist. As Pope Benedict explained prayer through the Eucharist is a way to strengthen our faith.

At our catechesis sessions we had the privilege of experiencing a taste of South African Culture. Traditional South African dance and Song was incorporated into the mass in joyous exaltation. We also had the privilege of listening to Bishops from South Africa and Sri Lanka speak to us about the World Youth Day theme and answer questions we had about the faith.

The generosity of the Spanish people who welcomed us as pilgrims to their city was truly beautiful. In 40+ degree weather, Spaniards would hose pilgrims down from their balconies as we walked in the streets below. The hospitality, generosity and kindness of the locals surpassed all language barriers.

One of highlights of my World Youth Day experience was the Stations of the Cross held on the Friday of World Youth Day week. Pilgrims gathered around the stations and screens located throughout Madrid. What I found especially moving was how different groups carried the World Youth Day Cross to each station. For example, for the third station, 'Jesus is condemned to Death' young people from Iraq carried the cross. It was very powerful.

It was beautiful to hear the silence of the crowd and reverence for Jesus' Passion. Workers came down from office buildings, locals stopped in the street to watch and to make the sign of the cross. The whole city stopped. There is nothing else that would have been able to silence a crowd of two million people in the way that the Via Crucis did.

After the vigil Mass with Pope Benedict at Cuatro Vientos airfield, I was talking to a World Youth Day volunteer from Madrid who explained that 90% of the Spanish population identify as Catholic, yet only 15% of that actively practice their faith. Spanish Catholics openly expressed their gratitude to us as pilgrims for the hope that we brought to their country and to their young people.

It was such a privilege to have attended World Youth Day. It has really energized my faith and encouraged me to bring the revival of the church back to my parish, university, youth group and community.

As Catholic youth we are 'planted in our faith', our challenge, rather, our responsibility is to ensure not only that we remain 'firm in the faith', but that we help others to do so as well. To be a witness and light for Christ in Australia at all costs.

On behalf of all the recipients of the World Youth Day grant, I graciously thank Knights of the Southern Cross WA, for your generosity which enabled us to be a part of World Youth Day 2011.

Carina