

"In these days I too have come, as the Successor of Saint Peter, to this magnificent land of Australia. I have come to confirm you, my young brothers and sisters, in your faith and to encourage you to open your hearts to the power of Christ's Spirit and the richness of his gifts. I pray that this great assembly, which unites young people "from every nation under heaven" (cf. Acts 2:5), will be a new Upper Room. May the fire of God's love descend to fill your hearts, unite you ever more fully to the Lord and his Church, and send you forth, a new generation of apostles, to bring the world to Christ!"

(Homily at Closing Mass, Randwick, July 20)

The final stations, including the Crucifixion, took place at Barangaroo and were very powerful, moving many to tears. The crucifixion scene, against a backdrop of the city and the setting sun was particularly moving, accompanied by a rendition of "Were you there when they crucified my Lord?" and Andrew Lloyd Weber's "Pie Jesu".



On Saturday morning, the Holy Father celebrated Mass in St Mary's Cathedral, where he dedicated the new altar and addressed thousands of seminarians and young religious in the congregation. He told them that they may feel the burden of the day and the struggle of bearing witness before a world that can appear deaf to the demands of God's word, but that they should not be afraid to bear the light of Christ, which would dispel the darkness.

The Pope took advantage of the occasion to express his deep sorrow at the sexual abuse of minors by some clergy and religious in this country, and he asked all to support their Bishops in combating this evil.

Meanwhile, many thousands of pilgrims were making their way across the Harbour Bridge, which was closed to traffic for the day, on their

pilgrimage from the shrine of Blessed Mary MacKillop to the Southern Cross Precinct at Randwick Race Course for the evening Vigil. It was a colourful sight with flags from all over the world waving in the breeze.

At Randwick there was entertainment from noon on, in preparation for the Vigil itself, which was attended by the Holy Father. It included reflections and prayers on the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit, interspersed with verses from the World Youth Day hymn "Receive the power", a time of Eucharistic adoration before Christ present in the large monstrance, and an address by the Holy Father. The Pope spoke of how young people can be witnesses of Christ in a fragmented world, by calling upon the Holy Spirit to help them lead others into communion with the Blessed Trinity in the Church. He referred in his address to the candles held by the hundreds of thousands in attendance which lit up the darkness.

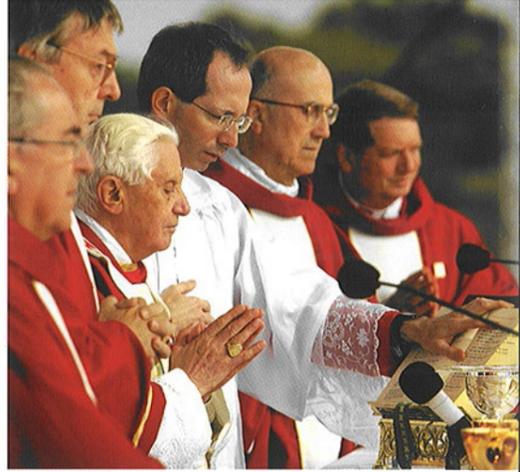
After some 225,000 pilgrims had spent the night sleeping out at Randwick came the culmination of the week with the final Mass celebrated by the Holy Father, along with some 400 bishops and 4000 priests. It was a magnificent spectacle, with the race course filled with over 400,000 people and flags waving everywhere. During the Mass the Pope confirmed 24 young people from numerous countries, including 14 Australians.

In his homily the Holy Father prayed that this great assembly would be a new Upper Room, in which the fire of God's love would descend and fill the hearts of those present so that they would go forth as a new generation of apostles to bring the world to Christ.

On Monday morning the Pope thanked some 8000 volunteers in the Domain for their generous services before going to the airport for the final farewell, attended by Cardinal Pell and Prime Minister Kevin Rudd.

And so the momentous events of World Youth Day 2008 came to a close. But the memories will remain forever.

Now it is up to us, to the Church throughout Australia, to harvest the fruits of what the Holy Father has sown. It is up to us to welcome into the life of the Church the young people, and the



not-so-young, who have been touched by the events of World Youth Day.

As Cardinal Pell said in his address to the Holy Father before the Final Mass at Randwick: "So we give thanks for the World Youth Day, which is a gift for the Church as a whole, for those both old and young. At World Youth Day the Church appears as she truly is, alive with evangelical energy... We therefore pray for a new outpouring of the Holy Spirit. May it begin with the young men and women who will receive the Sacrament of Confirmation at your hands. But may it not end there. May it not end with those here present, who will soon renew their baptismal promises. May it not end with these pilgrims, who will carry new graces home with them. May it not end in this Great South Land of the Holy Spirit. May this new outpouring continue from Sydney to the ends of the earth, that we might be more faithful witnesses of Jesus Christ!"

Questions for discussion

1. What are the most vivid memories you have of the events of World Youth Day?
2. What are some personal experiences you had that you would like to share with others?
3. What can we learn from the way the Church and the community came together to make World Youth Day a reality?
4. What can we do to incorporate more young people into the life of the Church after World Youth Day?

"Standing before me I see a vibrant image of the universal Church. The variety of nations and cultures from which you hail shows that indeed Christ's Good News is for everyone; it has reached the ends of the earth".

(Address at the Welcoming Ceremony, Barangaroo, July 17)

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Days to Remember
WYD08



Saturday night vigil - Randwick Racecourse, Sydney

After three years of intense preparation, World Youth Day 2008 has come and gone. And Australia will never be the same. It is not just that Catholic youth or the Catholic Church in this country will never be the same. The country will never be the same.

The events in Sydney, and those of the Days in the Dioceses the preceding week, affected everyone, even if they only saw snippets on the nightly news or read about them in the daily newspapers. The scenes of the hundreds of thousands of young people from all over the world – there were 113,000 Australians and 110,000 overseas pilgrims registered – so full of joy and faith, made it clear to everyone that, in the words of Pope Benedict, "The Church is alive; and the Church is young."

A contagious spirit

The joy and sheer goodness of the pilgrims affected the people they encountered by their very presence. In many workplaces, the whole environment was transformed. People, whether Catholic or not, talked positively about the events and a spirit of good will prevailed everywhere. Fellow workers who were not known as Catholics manifested their religious affiliation for the first time. Once again it was good to be Catholic. Indeed, people were proud to be Catholic.

One of the most impressive aspects of the week was the joy of the pilgrims, even when they were enduring hardship. On a television news bulletin at the beginning of the week, thousands of pilgrims were shown entering a large cold building in Olympic Park where they would spend the week sleeping on a hard floor with only a thin mat for comfort. When asked for their reaction, one girl simply smiled and said this is what World Youth Day is all about.

Whether the pilgrims were waiting in long queues for food or transport or accreditation, tired after short and sleepless nights, or exhausted after long walks, they always seemed to be happy. Everywhere – on train platforms, in Hyde Park, in Darling Harbour, or waiting for the catechesis in the suburbs – there were groups of pilgrims singing and even dancing.

The happiness was contagious. Bus drivers who had finished their shift were moved to pick up stranded pilgrims and drive them to their destination. Policemen and women bent over backwards to accommodate the pilgrims.

On one occasion, a woman and her daughter approached some pilgrims and asked: "Are Catholics always this happy?"

Thousands of volunteers worked long hours to serve meals, direct the crowds, or simply clean



up after the gatherings, putting themselves out at the service of people they had never met, but who were fellow members of the Church, fellow human beings. Many of them were up until the wee hours of the morning waiting for pilgrims and looking after them with great generosity.

Sydney's Police Commissioner reported several days after World Youth Day had ended that the crime rate had been the lowest in a long time.

The effect of the Pope

Pope Benedict, sometimes thought of as the tough enforcer of Catholic doctrine, was now seen for who he really is – a gentle, compassionate, humble servant of the people of God. He quickly endeared himself to everyone. Some 500,000 people came out to welcome him on Thursday during the "Boat-a-cade" on the harbour, at the official welcome at Barangaroo and afterwards along the route of the motorcade back to St Mary's Cathedral.

A typical response was that of a girl who had never liked the Pope. When she saw him she was totally transformed, eager to listen to him and to read his writings. A father commented how his usually tough 15 year-old son said he had cried three times when listening to the Pope.

A non-Catholic who had never shown any interest in the Church accepted an invitation from a Catholic friend to attend the final Mass at Randwick, and now wants to find out more about the Church with a view to possibly becoming a Catholic.

A married couple too old to be pilgrims themselves, with children who were too young, were so captivated by the environment and by what they saw on television that they are now eager to go to Madrid for World Youth Day 2011.

And numerous young Catholics who had not taken an active part in the life of the Church were moved to become involved once again.

Personal stories like these can be multiplied beyond counting. Pope Benedict took the youth and the country by storm. Led by the Italians, the huge crowds chanted "Benedetto" followed by rhythmic clapping, or "Viva il Papa!" For the Australians it was "Beni, Beni, Beni, oi, oi, oi."

In the parishes and the city

Parishes across greater Sydney poured themselves out looking after the pilgrims, putting them up in the HomeStay program or providing accommodation in parish and school halls. It was the occasion for an outpouring of generosity and for the renewal of parish life.

The catechesis sessions on Wednesday, Thursday and Friday mornings attracted large crowds, as bishops from all over the world explained basic teachings of the faith in many languages. These were usually followed by the celebration of Mass. Lunch followed and on Wednesday a "big Aussie barbecue" showed the pilgrims an example of Australian hospitality.

Then it was into the city until late at night for the youth festival of talks, concerts, testimonies, plays, films, and other displays of Catholic culture.

The WYD Cross and Icon of Our Lady, which had travelled throughout the world and then Australia in the years leading up to World Youth Day, remained a focus of special veneration and prayer throughout the week.

The Vocations Expo at Darling Harbour was a phenomenal success. More than 2500 pilgrims passed through its doors every hour and crowded around the hundreds of booths, examining the numerous vocations and other ways of serving the Church. Meanwhile, a continuous succession of speakers and musicians entertained the pilgrims on the stage of the Expo.

The relics of several saints and blessed were also the focus of attention throughout the week. The body of Blessed Pier Giorgio Frassatti, which lay in St Mary's Cathedral, was the scene of a constant stream of visitors who came to pray before the mortal remains of a true faith-filled hero of youth.

Among the most popular speakers were Christopher West, who explained the Church's teaching on marriage and sexuality to thousands of enthralled young people at Notre Dame and in the Convention Centre, and John Pridmore, who went from a life of crime to become a powerful evangeliser of youth, following a big conversion. Their books and tapes were much in demand after the talks.

"Dear friends, life is not governed by chance; it is not random. Your very existence has been willed by God, blessed and given a purpose (cf. Gen 1:28)! Life is not just a succession of events or experiences, helpful though many of them are. It is a search for the true, the good and the beautiful. It is to this end that we make our choices; it is for this that we exercise our freedom; it is in this – in truth, in goodness, and in beauty – that we find happiness and joy. Christ offers more! Indeed he offers everything! Only he who is the Truth can be the Way and hence also the Life. Thus the 'way' which the Apostles brought to the ends of the earth is life in Christ. This is the life of the Church."

(Address at the Welcoming Ceremony, Barangaroo, July 17)

Other popular figures were singers Fr Stan Fortuna, a rapper from the Bronx, and Matt Maher.

Eucharistic adoration and confessions

One of the outstanding features of the week was the number of young people in Eucharistic Adoration and Confession.

While outside in Darling Harbour and in other places around the city bands were playing and the pilgrims were having a good time, there were always hundreds of young people in the Eucharistic Adoration sites, sitting in silence, often on the floor, absorbed in prayer.

People who perhaps had never done so before, discovered the joy of being still in the presence of God, reflecting on the importance of the events of World Youth Day, and opening their hearts to the God who had become man out of love for them, now truly present in the monstrance in front of them.

From adoration, many of them went to confession in the numerous Reconciliation sites around the city. There were continuous queues at most sites, with hundreds of priests hearing

confessions in a variety of languages.

For many of the pilgrims, it was their first confession in years, and it represented a moment of conversion, accompanied by a sense of great joy and liberation. Thankfully each confessional booth was equipped with a box of tissues!

After the Vigil on Saturday night the adoration sites and confessionals were busy all night.

The main events

Some 150,000 people attended the Opening Mass, celebrated on Tuesday afternoon at Barangaroo by Cardinal Pell, assisted by numerous bishops and thousands of priests. A parade of 168 flags from as many nations brought a colourful introduction to the Mass, and the 300-voice WYD choir and orchestra provided uplifting music. It was a fitting way to begin the week.

On Thursday the Holy Father was welcomed at Rose Bay by aboriginal elders. He then boarded the Sydney 2000 along with hundreds of fortunate young people and dignitaries, to make his way across Sydney Harbour to Barangaroo, surrounded by a flotilla of other craft, with a boat constantly spraying jets of water into the air in front of him. It was a magnificent sight.

At Barangaroo the Pope was welcomed by elders of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. He expressed his joy on being in Sydney for World Youth Day and recalled the sacrifices of the pioneering priests, sisters and brothers who had come to Australia to spread the faith, mentioning particularly Blessed Mary MacKillop and Blessed Peter To Rot. He challenged the youth to use their God-given freedom to seek the true, the good and the beautiful in order to bring God back into public life and to build a better world.

The Stations of the Cross on Friday afternoon were truly one of highlights of the week. They began at St Mary's Cathedral with a presentation of the Last Supper, with Pope Benedict leading a prayer, and then proceeded down Macquarie Street to the Domain, for the Prayer in the Garden, then to the Art Gallery of New South Wales and the Opera House. From there, the procession went under the Harbour Bridge by boat to the pontoons outside the Sydney Convention Centre in Darling Harbour where an aboriginal Simon of Cyrene helped Jesus carry his cross.

