

## **LOFTers attend World Youth Day 2011! (Sept 2011)**

Attendees: Catherine Dyan Uy, Janille Dyan Uy, & Poli Pelington

*Photo caption: Accidentally bumping into our fellow CMCC pilgrims on La Rambla in Barcelona. Imagine spending your summer with two hundred and fifty young people, accompanied by fifty priests, religious sisters, and seminarians, on a thirty-day pilgrimage across Spain. Imagine that group joining two million other individuals from 193 different countries in just one city--despite heat and rain--to celebrate one Mass with the Vicar of Christ.*

*That's what Janille, Poli, and I did this year!*

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Three of us are members of CMCC LOFT, and this summer we went on a month-long World Youth Day (WYD) pilgrimage organized by the North American religious family of the Institute of the Incarnate Word (IVE)--a community of religious with the unique charism of evangelizing all cultures. World Youth Day is an international week-long event started by Pope John Paul II in 1985, and since then, young Catholics from around the world have gathered every few years in one city to celebrate their Catholic heritage. This year, Pope Benedict XVI chose to celebrate it in Madrid, Spain, a modern, cosmopolitan city that continues to preserve its rich Catholic history and tradition today.

To better appreciate the Catholic roots of Spain, our group first went on a pre-WYD pilgrimage to visit Fatima (Portugal), Lourdes (France), and other Spanish sites like Santiago de Compostela, Covadonga, Montserrat, Toledo, Torreciudad, Segovia, Avila, Barbastro, and Barcelona. We culminated the pilgrimage in Madrid, where we participated in various specific WYD events that were being organized all around the city. This included a Catechesis session with Cardinal Francis George of Chicago, volunteer-guided tours of the city churches, and a large-scale Stations of the Cross that showcased Spain's best new and old sculptures of Christ in different stages of His Passion. The WYD events eventually ended with a final Prayer Vigil and a Closing Mass presided by Pope Benedict XVI at Cuatro Vientos airfield, where two million people gathered in dry, 40-degree weather during the day and braved a cool, light shower during the night just to pray together and show solidarity with each other, our Pope, and Christ.

It was unforgettable to be part of this, and be among millions of youth from around the world proudly waving their countries' flags while chating, in unison, "¡Esta es la juventud del Papa!" - "Here we are, the youth of the Pope!"

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I believe the pilgrimage also helped us develop a greater love for what the IVE calls the "three white things" of the Church.

The first is the Eucharist, the body and blood, soul and divinity of our Lord, and the Source and Summit of our faith. Every morning of our pilgrimage started with Mass, and doing this for thirty days made me appreciate the habit of starting each day with prayer, before things got busy with our various excursions and pilgrimage activities. Time with the Blessed Sacrament, especially at Communion, invited us to collect ourselves and speak to Christ from the heart, and to offer the rest of our activities of the day to Him. At the Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament during the final Prayer Vigil, I was moved when we all sang "Tantum Ergo" along with the Pope and the crowds. I remember reflecting on how many of us around the world knew this hymn, and adored Christ in the Blessed Sacrament so lovingly and reverently. The thought made me feel grateful for Christ's gift of the Eucharist, as it unites all of us in Him, in His True Presence--whether in Spain, or at my own home parish at CMCC.

The second is Mary, to whom our pilgrimage group offered our daily Rosaries. Spain has such a beautiful devotion to our Lady, and many sites we visited honoured her by her various titles, like

Nuestra Senora del Pilar, or the Black Madonna of Montserrat. Being on this pilgrimage opened my eyes to many facets of her relationship with Christ--and her relationship with us--that I had not reflected much on before. The religious sisters of the IVE the (Servidoras - Servants of the Lord and the Virgin of Matara) also all took on a Marian name with their vows, so it was extra catechesis for us to learn their names and what those titles of Mary signified. Some of sisters' names, for instance, were Sr. Lily of the Valley, Sr. Inmaculada, Sr. Peace (Our Lady of Peace), Mo. Mary of the Blessed Sacrament, and Sr. Nikopoeia (Our Lady of Victories)--all beautiful names of Our Lady! Finally, the third is the Pope. Because of this pilgrimage, my friends and I read "Jesus of Nazareth" and "Light of the World" to better get to know our Holy Father through his books and writings. Seeing him in person at WYD--just two meters away from us!--and hearing him read his homily to us himself, was a surreal experience. Imagine seeing the Pope wave and smile at your direction, and listening to him talk gently onstage, while surrounded by two million people excited to hear every word he says to us! His presence made me feel the "bigness" of our faith, yet also how personal it was to choose to believe it and stand by it in our world today. I also loved the Pope's personal gift to us, the "YouCat" (youth catechism). The breadth of the book proved to me that our faith can be understood, and that every aspect of our lives definitely has something to do with our faith--from our personal struggles, to big questions about war, suffering, and even economics. It provides a beautiful way for our generation to get to know our faith and pass it on to others, especially after coming home.

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One other thing I took away from this pilgrimage was how we learned about the many holy men and women in Spain. My friends and I spent a lot of time on the pilgrimage looking at religious art, and trying to identify scenes from the life of Christ and the lives of the saints in various paintings, murals, sculptures, and tapestries at the holy places we visited.

It was amazing for me learn how ordinary many of these saints once were, how different they were from each other, and how long ago they lived! Some of these holy people were fishermen, others noblemen, some religious, some married, and a few were young people, just like me. St. James dates all the way back to the time of our Lord himself, and St. Ignatius, St. John of the Cross, and St. Teresa of Avila were already writing amazing books on spirituality even before Christianity reached Canada! (In fact, St. Ignatius was partly responsible for bringing Christianity to our country!) Many Spanish saints even lived as recent as this past century: the martyrs of Barbastro, St. Josemaria Escriva and St. Maria de Maravilles, for example. Another special patron for WYD was also Blessed Pope John Paul II himself, who, though not Spanish, started the first World Youth Day just after I was born.

It was amazing to me that Spain, just one country, can produce so much fruit over the centuries, with many generations of men and women who love and pledge allegiance to Christ. I realized, too, that the more I saw these images of Christ and the saints, the more I thought about them--and the more I felt challenged to "do something" about my knowledge of them, as Pope Benedict XVI had challenged us. How do I learn from them, and follow their examples today?

That is the challenge I brought back home with me after World Youth Day and with the help of Christ in the Eucharist, Mary, the Pope, and our Church, I hope I can find ways to live out the answer.

### **Basil Choy:**

My most memorable experience was when I saw Pope Benedict during the closing ceremony at WYD. I was very blessed because I was chosen to be one of the pilgrims to sit at the reserved area. It was breath taking that I was able to sit at the first row, where as the rest of the pilgrims from my group have to sit close to two kilometres away from the stage. When the Pope started to walk up the stage, people around me started to cheer and waved their hands. I have never felt so close to God. At that

moment I felt that millions of youth are here for one purpose: We are here to be with God, firm in the faith. I will forever remember that moment as I live and follow the path of our Lord Jesus Christ.

**Bensen Kwong:**

As a relatively new Catholic (Baptism in 2009), I was relatively unaware of the existence of World Youth Day until I heard about it by word of mouth and circulating emails regarding Madrid 2011. My decision to go was not easy; the trip itself was slightly cost-restrictive as the event was being held in a European country. However, over the course of the year between WYD and my baptism, I struggled in my newly-found spirituality. Although I never felt as if my faith was "leaving," I was experiencing a period of dry faith for a majority of the year of 2010. However, I recall conversations with other Catholics, both Priests as well as those involved in ministries, that always pointed to me to "hold on" to my faith. Though I can say that I wasn't entirely sure of what God was telling me to do at the time, I simply kept myself involved in the Sacraments, prayer, and parish ministry as much as possible. The reason for my dry faith seemed to be due to my own insecurity about God's plan for my future.

I had at first not many expectations of World Youth Day before I had gone, being that it would be my first of such an event. In part, I told myself that such an event is at the least a trip to Europe if I ended up not liking what the WYD events were. Of course, I was wrong about that. To be entirely honest, as a result of my faith issues prior to departing for WYD, I can safely say that my own spiritual preparation in the few months before departure were insufficient. That being said, travelling with a group of friends was a first for me and seemed to be a challenge from God to step outside my very comfortable comfort zone. And so I departed Vancouver on August 6, 2011 with 19 other parish youth to Spain to have some fun and, more importantly, experience what God had waiting for me.

The experience of WYD is, for those who have never gone, somewhat like opening one of those presents which has another present inside it, of which you keep opening and there are further and further levels. I remember distinctly my own excitement as we stepped off the bus the first morning of activities into the metro station in Madrid and saw a huge group of Europeans. There were even two Chinese from Yun Nan (雲南)! God's presence truly extends around the world! Every day of being in the heat and the tiring walking through the city was the "unwrapping" of the presents which God kept on giving me. These presents are like odd trinkets that one might not seem to need until the time comes what one realizes he doesn't have one. I did not know it at first, but the gifts God gave me over the trip would become evident when I returned. The feeling of unity of the Church is almost entirely the same as the unity I feel when I take Communion--Jesus tells us we are His hands and feet, and that we are the Church--when we Commune with Jesus through the Eucharist, we are indirectly Communing with the entire Church on Earth as well.

I was selected from the group to be seated at the front of the Vigil during the night. I remember that to get a good view of the Pope, we had to enter and seat ourselves at 2:30pm, when the Vigil started at 8:30pm. The Madrid weather consistently went over 40 degrees, and obviously between 2pm to 6pm was the hottest time of the day. I remember that over the course of the day I was wishing for God to give some cloud cover, but nothing happened. Ironically when the Pope arrived it started to rain hard--and I mean hard--there was water on the chairs we were provided after 15 minutes. I believe I share many of the first-timers when I say that inside my heart, I knew that Pope Benedict was undoubtedly Christ's Chosen Successor--there was no question, especially after the rain stopped when the Pope started to pray, presumably for the rain to stop. The crowd's reaction was ridiculous, nobody who was present at the airfield was not praising God at the time.

I would like to keep this short, but the experience of coming back to Vancouver after WYD was one as I had mentioned: discovering the gifts that God had given me. While God has also presented me

with some difficulties, I have also had some amazing gifts in the form of both spirituality as well as my prayer intentions. At Camino, the event for the Archdiocese of Vancouver for pilgrims going to WYD, one of the speakers told us that a pilgrimage is meant to be self-sacrificing. I would like to alter the phrase: "A pilgrimage is meant to be self-sacrificing, but is also meant to be rewarding in the long run." I can testify that since coming back from my pilgrimage to WYD to celebrate our wonderful faith with others and Pope Benedict himself, I have felt God fully in my daily life. I now know God had intended to give me the period of dry faith to not only test my trust in Him, but because He wanted me to be unprepared for my trip so that I could fully see and appreciate what He can do to my spiritual life.

My dry faith is over, at least until the next WYD!

Father, please let me know if this needs to be shortened. I will gladly remove some parts.

**Isabelle Cheng:**

Before embarking on this memorable pilgrimage, I was already thrilled at the opportunity of attending the Vigil Mass at such a close proximity to the Holy Father. However, I was not prepared at all for the troubles we would encounter leading up to the Mass that day. In fact, I would complain about overcrowding in the metro, withstanding the stifling heat, and waiting almost 30 mins in line for the concession stand. But my frustrations didn't linger for long because I was overcome by the positive energy from fellow pilgrims at the airfield. We would chat, take pictures, sing, share water, and chant "Benedicto" together. If anyone saw us from far away, they would've assumed that we were a large group of friends based on the way we interacted. I began to realize that the reason why we became friends so easily was because we were all Catholic. What struck me that night was the image of us praying together in unison; in hopes of seeking Christ and living by His words while pursuing our own desires and tackling our difficulties in life. At that moment, I began to experience God's love in a deeper manner for myself and I felt obligated to relay that love to all the pilgrims, and to my family and friends in Vancouver. I believe that God gave me this opportunity as a means to mature and learn to be more sympathetic and to rejoice in other's happiness in order to truly understand what it means to "love thy neighbour". Without such love, I do not think it would be possible for us pilgrims to share such a close bond with each other in prayer and as brothers and sisters of Christ on the night of the Vigil.