

A Portsmouth Pilgrim's View of WYD; Universal and United in Christ

Images of World Youth Day are often characterised by joyful groups of patriotic youth, waving their country's flags, and proudly contributing to the universality of WYD, which truly displays the meaning of the word Catholic. It is amazingly affirming to remember that our faith spans borders, cultures and languages and that we are all united through one truth. For me, the international aspect of World Youth Day was enhanced by the rare privilege of being part of an international group, with members from America, England, Ireland, Wales, Austria, Slovakia, Italy, Norway and Malaysia.

The group was run by FOCUS, the Fellowship of Catholic University Students, an American organisation that works on University campuses in 28 states, encouraging and supporting students in their Catholic faith and their relationship with Jesus. Their mission is a direct response to Pope John Paul II's call for a 'new evangelization'. Prior to World Youth Day, I had the incredible blessing of attending the first ever FOCUS International Conference.

The conference was held in a 6th Century Monastery in the town of Samos, in the North of Spain. Over 170 young Catholics from all over the world, who are really alive in their faith, were able to use the time as spiritual preparation prior to the unbelievable graces of World Youth Day. The schedule for each day included Lauds, prayer and worship, five talks, sharing time and mass, with additional adoration and all night vigil events throughout the week. Along with a silent 14km walk on part of the camino to Santiago de Compostela, the place of St James' tomb, these events allowed us to open our hearts and minds to God's work in our lives.

Inspired by the example of St James, the conference dwelt on the duty of *all* of Christ's followers to 'go and make disciples of all nations' (Matthew 28:19-20), including *us* today. As Catholics, we are privileged that we receive Jesus in the Eucharist, but for many, the only vision of Christ that they will see is us. As one priest explained, 'We should go out as an army of walking tabernacles to share Christ with the world'.

The events of the following week in Madrid brought this statement to life. Participating in mass in a stadium of 12,000 young people, literally becoming an army of walking tabernacles, or to be one of 2 million pilgrims kneeling in front of the Blessed Sacrament was exceedingly powerful. The joy of the Holy Spirit overflowed.

Some inhabitants of Madrid commented that they loved to see so many young people with smiles on their faces. We were a beautiful contrast to the youth rioting in London. We were the strongest rebuke to those who suggest that the Church can't survive our secular culture. We are universal but united through Christ. We are the next generation of the church, and we will not let the flame of faith go out on our watch! 'Esta es la juventud del Papa!' (We are the youth of the Pope!)