



WORLD YOUTH DAY 2008 A Pilgrim's Diary



Ashley and the Sydney Opera House

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Acts 1:8 says *“You will receive the power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you and you will be my witness.”* This was the theme of World Youth Day 2008. I would come to find through my WYD experience that this statement had more truth to my life than I could have ever imagined.

We arrived after 30 hours of travel to Sydney International Airport Friday night. As we walked out into the receiving area we were greeted by the SFO Regional Minister of St. Clare Fraternity NWS & ACT, Barry Blake, holding a sign saying “Kathy Taormina and others.” I thought “Cool, I’ve got an airport sign - I’m ‘others.’”

We walked out of the airport and into an entirely different world, steering wheels were on the opposite sides of cars, people drove on the left side of the road, toilets flushed counter-clockwise, and it was winter in July. It truly was in an unfamiliar place, but it didn’t stay unfamiliar for very long. Soon we arrived at the St. Francis of Assisi school, where we would be staying. We were warmly greeted by the school’s principals,

Louise and Kathryn, who made sure we were set up, as quickly as possible, so we could rest after our travels. The next morning, I awakened from my first night of sleeping on an air mattress in a room where our sleeping areas were outlined in masking tape. My clock said it was still yesterday - Aussie time is 15 hours ahead. I walked down to breakfast and was no longer in another world. Sure, all of the above mentioned was the same, but I had walked into a room full of energy, smiles, and warmth. This was the joy I remembered from other YouFra gatherings. That energy is within us no matter what country we’re in.

The first three days of our journey was the Franciscan Youth International Gathering. It included amazing discussions within our work groups, a pilgrimage to the Poor Clare’s Monastery, singing, dancing, and most importantly, building fraternity. Fr. Ivan Matić, OFM, CIOFS Spiritual Assistant to YouFra, spoke to us during the Monday morning session about a topic that I would carry through the entire week. He spoke about the *fullness of time* and how, within every moment there is something significant. Every second of every minute of every day there is something to be absorbed in us. We as YouFra, and as Catholics, need to embrace these moments to get out of them all we can. I took this message to heart because in my life, I have to admit, there are days when all I want is to get through it and move to the next, I know we all do. However, this idea Fr. Ivan was speaking to us about really made me step back and think. I needed to embrace my time, and try to cherish my moments, all of them.

On Tuesday the YouFra gathering ended and the World Youth Days began. We were fortunate to be able to keep most of our group together for the entire week, so we were still one fraternity.



Franciscan YouFra Group



Dale Anesi, SFO, Kathy Taormina, SFO, and Ashley

The Catechesis sessions consisted of music from a local Youth Group, a presentation on the theme of the day by a Bishop, a Q/A session with the Bishop, then closed with the celebration of Mass. Our topics for the week were on the Holy Spirit. Day one was **water** lead by Archbishop Charles Balvo, Papal Nuncio to New Zealand; day two was **light** with the Seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit lead by Bishop Justin Bianchini of Geraldton, Western Australia, and day three was **fire** lead by Archbishop Brendan Michele O'Brien of Ontario, Canada. I was most taken by two messages in these morning sessions.

Bishop Justin said that the Church is like a body, Christ is the head - the mind, and we are all the parts that make the body complete. No matter the importance of the individual, the body is not complete without them. The Holy Spirit is the soul of this body and it holds is all together. This was intriguing because it was a great visual, but even more importantly because it was so true, and I could understand why. *We are one body.*

The second topic that stuck with me was a story within a story of Christ on the Cross. Bishop Justin started his story by stating that in most cultures, when someone goes away, we offer them a gift of some sort as a farewell present. He said that in the story of the crucifixion it was Christ who was going away, and instead of the people (us), giving Him something, He gave us the greatest gift possible - the gift of forgiveness and the gift of salvation. Christ said, "I must go, for unless I do the Holy Spirit cannot come upon you." There it hit me. I'd heard it a million times before, but now it really hit me: *Christ died so that we may truly live.*

The rest of my week consisted of an amazing opening Mass that looked back on the previous World Youth Days and a great welcoming address from Archbishop

George Cardinal Pell of Sydney. The Papal welcome was on Thursday and I got within 50 feet of the Pope driving by. It is an indescribable feeling. Another most touching experience was to sing the World Youth Day song, arms waving in unison with 200,000 other people. Friday was Stations of the Cross, the most dramatic version I'd seen. The highlight for me was that they had an Aboriginal to play Simon of Cyrene. He was a "local guy."

The highlight of the WYD activities was the evening vigil and final mass with the Pope. We made a Pilgrimage to Randwick Racecourse with all our stuff on our backs. We reached our section, set up camp, (essentially unraveled all our sleeping bags on a tarp), and it was time to reflect and just spend time with each other. I was able to spend some time by myself and really reflect on what I had taken from the week, the messages that had been resonating in my head over the week: *"The fullness of time. We are one body. Christ died so that we may truly live."* and it finally really hit me. For the first time I understood the theme and how it related to me.

These topics were memorable because it was how the Holy Spirit was coming to me; it was how I was to "receive the power." I realized that this message, this theme, was not generic, but individual, and WYD gives each individual youth their own opportunity to get what they can take out of it. Before He ascended into heaven, Christ preceded it by saying that time and dates are irrelevant to His return, but take the Holy Spirit and be His witness.

After everything, my final thought is this: it doesn't matter if you're a youth or not, (in Christ's eyes we are all God's children), so the messages from WYD can be shared with all. *"You will receive the power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you and you will be my witness."* Go be a witness; it's easier than you may think.



The Pope at the Welcoming on Thursday

Complete Photo Diary can be found at
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