

## **WYD08 – WORLD YOUTH DAY, part 3**

DAY 25 – 18<sup>th</sup> July 2008

Today had a similar theme to the previous days – starting with Catechesis in the parish of Our Lady Star of the Sea in Kirribilli where Mass was also celebrated and lunch provided by the kind parishioners.

Sadly the day was spoilt by the Ugandan group. I questioned them why they were top-heavy with priests – they had some 27 priests and only 50 lay people with them. The excuse that I was given was that 140 lay people had been refused a visa by the Australian authorities. Nevertheless, during the period dedicated for putting questions (ideally on the theme of the Holy Spirit, which was the title for World Youth Day), the priests monopolised the questioning as they had done on the previous two days – and with the same questions that had little to do with the Holy Spirit. They had a political agenda that they wanted to get over! But today the others were fed up of them, and when they were asked to look after the Mass again, many people took time off and hid elsewhere, returning for lunch afterwards.

The Ugandan priests were also on the lookout for placements anywhere outside Africa! Although they complain about the situation in their home, they are not prepared to stay and sort things out, preferring to make their way to Europe or the US where they can stay and make a fortune for themselves. However, none of the other priests (from the UK, Australia or the US) were offering any such possibility. At least the last bishop did suggest that they stay in Uganda to solve the problems that they complain about, but do not want to sort out! [A moan, I know!!]

We then returned to the city centre and took up a position near the Cathedral for the start of the Stations of the Cross. His Holiness started this on the steps of the Cathedral, and the scenes were acted out at various places around the city. However, we were unable to follow them, and one of the complaints that many had was that there were far too few “big screens” around the city where the events could be seen. That meant that the best place to see the whole things was actually in homes or hotels, in front of the TV screen.

Afterwards I was scheduled to start hearing confessions in Hyde Park at 5.00 pm, but after waiting for almost an hour with no-one showing up to open up and put lights on, I guessed that timings might be wrong. However, by then I was frozen, so I returned to Darling Harbour, where I had been for the last two nights (in the warm) and heard confessions from 6.10 pm to 9.30 pm, with a short break to get a drink. Yet again, this was the most humbling part of World Youth Day, and the most encouraging.

I returned to the hotel later, and found people trickling in over the next hour or so.

DAY 26 – 19<sup>th</sup> July 2008

This morning started with Mass at 7.00 am, but most people (including yours truly) were unaware of this arrangement, so that only six people turned up! Gradually people arrived during breakfast to discover what had happened.

We were then told that we would be setting off to join the thousands of pilgrims walking to Randwick Racecourse, which for World Youth Day had been renamed Southern Cross Precinct. However, our set-off time was broadcast as 1.15 pm. Had we known that earlier we would have had a later Mass, and a later breakfast too!.

So, Sr Angela, Dominic and I went out for an early lunch and returned to the hotel just in time to join the others. Welsh flags were in great number, along with sleeping-bags and other essentials ready for the walk.



We headed for Central Station, and after those who had missed out on lunch had stocked up on supplies, we all set out, joining pilgrims from every country under the sun. It was a wonderful atmosphere, with singing, praying, laughing – as well as a few sore feet!



We eventually found the section assigned to us, but it took a while to find enough ground to roll out sleeping bags for everyone. Soon, however, everyone had sufficient room and while some dozed, others started eating the meal package that had been handed out to everyone (to cover three meals – supper, breakfast and lunch).



Gradually, it became dark, and as soon as the sun had disappeared the temperatures began to drop. However, dancing, singing and even the conga in between those sleeping seemed to warm everyone up! Fortunately, there was a big screen near our group this time, so they could see what was going on without much difficulty!

At 7.00 pm, the Vigil started with the arrival of Pope Benedict XVI. Once again he received a tremendous response. It is clear that the young people love their Pope.



The Vigil was beautifully conducted, with prayers and hymns and songs, readings, and a homily from the Holy Father. The details of that can be found elsewhere, but suffice to say that his words of encouragement were not likely to fall on deaf ears. The youth hang on his every word – in spite of what the media may say!

I was told that the BBC had said that the Pope had had a “cool response”. The only thing cool about it was the temperature or the terminology that the young use when they say “cool”. It was rapturous, enthusiastic and wonderfully respectful.

The Sydneysiders have also warmed to the Pope and Youth Day. Some were looking for an apology for the abuse of children by clergy, but they had received that earlier in the day. The only complaints that have been voiced are concerned with the speed with which the Pope has passed the crowds – they would have liked him to go slower – or that there were not enough big screens to watch what was going on. They would have liked to have been able to join in too!

Even the police have been amazed. They were fearing a week of events that are similar to New Year’s Eve in Sydney, but they have had no drunkenness, no-one on drugs and no fights. The police are delighted, and have joined in World Youth Day!!

The vigil moved into Adoration and Benediction with the Pope. I wish I could convey how everyone behaved during this time. To have complete silence from over a quarter of a million young people, all kneeling and praying is really something that one has to experience. It was beautiful. And I think more young people will seek out occasions for Adoration in their parishes when they return.

The Pope left at 9.00 pm, followed shortly by yours truly and Father Phillip. The others, including Father Neil (who had not brought a sleeping-bag with him), stayed

on the field. The two of us returned to the comfort of the hotel and a good night's sleep!!

DAY 27 – 20<sup>th</sup> July 2008

This morning the penalty for going back to the hotel was that we had to leave early. Father Phillip, Sr Angela (who felt unable to attend the Vigil without a chair to sit on) and I met up at 6.30 am and took a taxi as far as we could to the Southern Cross Precinct. We managed to get into the ground, though we had a long way to walk across the field to join the others, but after manoeuvring around people in sleeping bags on the floor, I was able to show Sr Angela where the group had settled down.

Father Phillip and I then made our way to the priests' enclosure, which was almost full by 7.30 am when we got there. It was still rather cool, and a cloud cover kept direct sunshine from being a problem all day, but as soon as we had put on our vestments we were warm enough.



The whole complex prayed Morning Prayer together at 8.00 am, after which we had a little while to look around and see who was about. It was then that we spotted Father Pius Jones, who had spent some time in the Diocese of Menevia, particularly helping our in the parish of Haverfordwest, before he was summoned back to his home of Melbourne. (Dominic and I will actually be staying with him for the rest of the week!)



I had been trying to find him all week, and was pleased to see him in Sydney.

The final event of World Youth Day (on the actual day) started with a fly-past by His Holiness, who flew over the site in a helicopter – which they are now calling the “holy-copter”!! He was able to appreciate the number of people gathered there – the lowest estimate was 400,000, but it was suggested that the number might be much higher!



Then he passed through the crowd in the Popemobile – though this time he was noticeably slower, so that people had an opportunity to see him. On three occasions he stopped the Popemobile to kiss children that had been passed over the heads of the crowd and over the security cordon. It was a reminder why Dominic has such a great love of the Pope – he too was kissed when he was a baby by Pope John Paul II, and responded by stroking the Pope’s cheek. [However, he was rather embarrassed when I told everyone!!]

Eventually Pope Benedict XVI reached the main altar and Mass started, though there were plenty of interventions from Cardinals, singers, commentators, etc. In all the Mass lasted for almost 3 hours! But no-one noticed the time pass.



He also confirmed 24 individuals at this Mass. The second person took the name “Dominic”, so you can imagine the grin that someone had!!

After Mass there were several messages of thanks before the Pope finally announced that the next World Youth Day would take place in 2011 in Madrid, Spain. Several in the group have already booked their places!!

It was uplifting to see the young people say farewell to Pope Benedict XVI, then, after a short firework display, everyone headed for the exits. Moving almost half a million people, of course, took a while, but most people were patient enough, and having darted in between the security barriers, Father Phillip and I were able to make our way back to the hotel, expecting to be first there. Imagine our surprise to find that we were actually the last to arrive!

Most people were tired this afternoon and took the advantage to catch up on lost sleep, though Dominic preferred to catch up on eating, so I had to find a restaurant to satisfy him. We found a pizzeria which gave him what he needed. Then, as soon as he was back at the hotel, he fell asleep, while I started on this three day report.

Finally, at 7.00 pm we gathered as a group to go out for a meal together – and ended up back at the pizzeria where we had lunch. But since the food was good, we were happy. It was good to have one night together, and the young people presented Father Neil, Father Phillip, Sr Angela and yours truly with a memento of our trip to World Youth Day 2008 – a framed photograph of the group, complete with a clinging koala toy! It was a touching moment!

We have now arrived back at the hotel and said our farewells – Dominic and I will be leaving here at 6.30 am, but the rest will probably take advantage to stay in bed a lot longer. This blog will therefore continue in Melbourne, as soon as I find an internet connection.