

World Youth Day

In 1984, over 300,000 young people gathered in St Peters Square for an international jubilee of youth, when Pope John Paul 11 entrusted to the young people the World Youth Day Cross to be carried throughout the world as a symbol of the love of Christ for humanity. The following year, His Holiness initiated World Youth Day.

The first international World Youth Day was held in Buenos Aires, Argentina in 1987 which attracted more than a million young people.

Pope John Paul said at the time, “I imagined a powerful moment in which the young people of the world could meet Christ and could learn from Him how to be bearers of the Gospel to other young people”.

In 1989 Santiago de Compostela played host to WYD, followed in 1991 by Czestochowa, and 2 years later by Denver in the USA. In 1995 a record 4 million attended World Youth Day at Manila in the Philippines. Since then the event has been held in Paris, Rome, Toronto, Cologne, Sydney, Madrid and Rio de Janeiro.

At the conclusion of the event in Rio, Pope Francis announced the 2016 World Youth Day would be held in the Polish city of Krakow. Two of our young Parishioners, Rebecca Wilson and Amelia Jessop, were among forty young people from the Leeds Diocese who travelled to Krakow this Summer.

Rebecca recalls: “I had the most unforgettable twelve days of my life where I met amazing people, learned more about the family of the Church, and saw my own faith in a whole new light.

I felt so lucky to be Catholic. When describing the trip to others, I found myself finishing most sentences with “but with Catholics.” I felt so proud to be a Catholic, and especially proud to be a young Catholic when I heard that Pope Francis wanted to recruit one million young Catholics to do the work of



the Church. I immediately thought “Me, I’ll do it. I want to be part of this.”

I just felt so hopeful for the future- the future of my own faith and the future of the Church. Even when I was feeling discouraged I kept this hope with me. The walks to and from the field for the Pope’s vigil were tough, and they reminded me that we all have a cross to carry.

When I wasn’t caught up in my own joy I would think about friends and family I had left behind: who would I be when I came home and the festival atmosphere had gone? I prayed about it a lot, but what really helped me was the people that surrounded me: speaking together and listening to each other I knew that with any issue I might encounter, God would be there for me. Another thing I took away from my pilgrimage to Krakow was the desire to do it all over again. I’ve met with God in fields and arenas, celebrated mass with millions of others, and hopped over a fence I wasn’t supposed to in order to get closer to the Pope. If I can experience even a fraction of the joy I felt in Poland when we go to Panama in 2019, where the next World Youth Day will be held, I’ll feel like the luckiest person in the world.

Meanwhile, Amelia and I are so grateful to the Parish for every prayer and pound donated that helped us to get to Krakow, and to Helen Kington and Father Lawrie for their support. We would recommend World Youth Day to anyone that wants to get involved and hope we can inspire other young people to do just that.”

Amelia too spoke of the “unforgettable experience” and of the “incredible sense of a growing closeness to God, His very real presence, and the sheer overwhelming feeling of being among a million friends from all over the world”. After Amelia and Rebecca spoke at Mass recently, I overheard a Parishioner say “The future of the Church is in good hands”. I for one wouldn’t argue with that!

Joe McGuinness



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