

THE ST. MARGUERITE D'YOUVILLE PARISH  
2005 WORLD YOUTH DAY EXPERIENCE

## **My World Youth Day Experience** by Teresa Racco

Good morning. I know that my face may be unfamiliar to some of you – going to school and living in Kingston has made trips to Brampton and to our parish a little bit of a challenge – so I'd like to take this opportunity to reintroduce myself to you: my name is Teresa Racco, and less than a month ago, thanks to many people in this parish community, I was able to experience another World Youth Day – another life changing journey.

When I was asked to come up and speak to you about my experiences and feelings from our pilgrimage, I have to be honest, I was somewhat concerned. I didn't know if I would be able to put everything I saw, every emotion I felt and every experience I had into words to share with you. But somehow, something worked through me, helped my pen to move, and allowed my emotions to come out on paper. I don't want to make this reflection a period of me standing here recounting all of the things that we saw, or the itinerary of our pilgrimage, because I could be here all day. Rather, I'd like to share with you the things that the World Youth Day journey taught me. You see, this pilgrimage was about so much more than what people often think. While it is true that the main event of World Youth Day is the celebration of the Holy Eucharist with the Holy Father, every part of the journey that we took, from our preparations here at home in Brampton, to the train rides, to the walking and everything else leading up to the Papal Mass is what really had the greatest impact on me.

The theme for this year's World Youth Day, which was made public prior to our pilgrimage, was set by the late Holy Father, Pope John Paul II based on Matthew's Gospel of the birth of the Baby Jesus. The theme chosen was "We have come to worship Him", which was only appropriate considering that the Cathedral in Cologne holds the relics of the three magi who went to worship the baby Jesus. Whenever I thought of World Youth Day, it was immediately associated with the man who loved youth – the man who started this celebration for us just over twenty years ago, Pope John Paul himself. Therefore, his passing was rather difficult for me with the thought of this journey ahead. I always knew that he might not make it to Cologne with us, but the thought of him not being along on the journey was something difficult to consider. With his passing, many books and articles were published with some of his thoughts and stories about his life. While I was in Indigo Books one afternoon, I picked one up and began to look through it. When I opened the book, the title, printed in bold at the top of the page was **SEEK JESUS**. When I read his thoughts, the late Holy Father had this to say:

"Seek Jesus, let your life be a continual, sincere search for Him, without ever

tiring, even though darkness should fall on your spirit, temptations beset you and grief and incomprehension wring your heart. These are things that are part of life here below, they are inevitable, but they can also be beneficial because they mature our spirit. We must never turn back, even if it should seem to you that the light of Christ is fading. On the contrary, continue seeking with renewed faith and greater generosity.”

I thought that this fit perfectly with the late Holy Father’s theme for World Youth Day 2005. For myself personally, I in the 12 priests who traveled with us, who celebrated mass with us, laughed with us, joked with us, shared stories with us, smiled with us, and roughed it out with us at the Vigil during the cold, damp night in the field at Marienfeld with the field mice. I saw Christ in the eight other St. Marguerite d’Youville pilgrims every time we shared a meal, a bus ride, a wait in line for a bus, a walk, a bedtime talk, “an adventure”, always learning something new about them and finding something to appreciate in them that I had never noticed before.

I found Christ in our Holy Father Benedict the 16<sup>th</sup> who came into this World Youth Day with big shoes to fill. I found Christ in the way he waved and smiled and greeted us from the boat on the Rhine River, in the way that he assured us that God loves each and everyone of us, just as we are, and in the way that he celebrated the Holy Eucharist with us. Everything that the Holy Father did and said, touched me deeply, however, I was most affected by his opening remarks when he joined us on that overcast morning of August 21st. He said;

“I would have liked to tour the hill in the Popemobile and to be closer to each one of you individually. Unfortunately, this has proved impossible, but I greet each one of you from the bottom of my heart. The Lord sees and loves each individual person and we are all the living Christ for one another”.

When I heard him say this, my eyes filled up with tears and my heart was filled with joy, for my journey had come full circle. Pope Benedict confirmed my purpose on this journey, the goal that I had set for myself, to worship Christ by seeing his face in those I met everyday on my journey. All those I encountered were the living Christ for me, and helped me to know Christ more deeply and more intimately. Every single Christ like person I encountered tried to make this the purpose of my journey...what I would strive to live for and search for over the two week pilgrimage. I had put a lot of thought into this idea of worshipping Christ prior to the pilgrimage and I tried to figure out what exactly that meant for me. I quickly learned that in order to truly go, with an open heart to worship Christ, I had to open my eyes and see Christ in all those around me: in my fellow pilgrims traveling with me from our parish, the 300 traveling with me from the office of Catholic Youth, and the nearly 1 million who would be coming to Cologne from their homelands in search of the same Christ. Once I made it my purpose to see Christ in others, it was a rather simple task. Christ seemed to follow me and protect me everywhere I went through my fellow pilgrims and from the very moment we landed in Rome, I was able to see the face of Christ in the face of those around me. I began to feel ill on the bus taking us to our first sight seeing day in Rome – my fellow pilgrims

took care of me, offering me water, Graval, and even a friendly rub on the back to let me know that they were there for me. Just as Christ comforted and healed the sick, my fellow pilgrims comforted and helped to heal me.

Christ again appeared in my fellow pilgrims as we climbed to the top of the Cupola in St. Peter's Basilica. Yes, we climbed the stairs all the way to the top. All 600 stairs right to the top...through the tiny, not well ventilated passages that sometimes curved to the right or to the left making it nearly impossible to stand. For any of you who have been there, you know what I am talking about...and for those of you who haven't, I'm not exaggerating...it's a difficult climb, but very well worth it, for when you get to the top, you have an absolutely beautiful view of not only St. Peter's Square, but also the city of Rome. Christ appeared to me in my fellow pilgrims, for when we felt as though we couldn't climb another stair, which believe me, we climbed a lot of on that particular day in Rome, we smiled at each other and said "only a few more, only a few more, I can see the top". Just as Christ encouraged his disciples to continue on their journey, no matter how difficult, my fellow pilgrims encouraged me to climb every last step to the top.

Christ continued to appear to us as we made our journey to Cologne. He appeared in the pilgrims who I met at the airport in Milan, who approached me with the little French that they knew, since they saw that my shirt said Canada so that they could communicate with me. I quickly learned that they spoke Italian, which I also speak, so we shared our stories and a bag of Twizzler licorice. Christ appeared in the pilgrims from all over the world who we met on the crowded trains and at the subway platforms who stopped to sing with us, or simply shared a smile and a hello with us in their native language. I learnt how to say hello in so many different languages, and even though we couldn't communicate past hello, we all understood each other. We would exchange hugs and smiles and love. Just as the Holy Spirit descended on the apostles so that they could communicate, the Holy Spirit descended on us so that we could communicate and create bonds of friendship. Christ appeared in the young, German woman, Rebekka, who prevented us from missing the last train out of Pöterborn, since due to language barriers, we were unable to read that sign which told us that the track number had been changed. Without her, we would have been stuck in Pöterborn. The young German woman was an angel who helped to guide us home. I saw Christ in the new friends I met from around the Archdiocese of Toronto who were all welcoming and who actively searched to learn more about me, who shared laughs, stories and songs and lent an ear to listen to me. I encountered Christ shaped and changed my life. How do I know this? In this last month, I have already felt like a different person. I have taken a small piece of each of my fellow pilgrims with me and held it close to my heart, essentially holding Christ closer to my heart. I have taken the lessons of patience, understanding, kindness, and friendship with me. I have taken them and tried to live my life according to them so that just as I saw Christ in others on my pilgrimage, others that I encounter in my everyday life will begin to see Christ in me.

I thank all of you sitting in the congregation from the bottom of my heart. Without

your generosity, your prayers, thoughts and support, I could have never made this journey. I thank Father Wayne for his spiritual guidance, his friendship, his example of patience, his open welcoming arms and his laugh. I thank Jamiee, Eliza, Denise, Crystal, Teresa, Christina and Jason for their friendship and for being my companions along this journey. I thank every pilgrim I met from every part of the world who somehow left their imprint on my heart. But most of all, I thank our Lord Jesus Christ, for allowing me to meet him, to see his face and to worship him.