

World Youth Day Lisbon 2023

This August I went with around 30 young Catholics from the Clifton diocese to Portugal to take part in World Youth Day. At first, I was quite apprehensive as I didn't know anyone else that was going and I would be one of the youngest people there. However, we had a few formation sessions before the trip where we met up in different places and talked about our faith, prayed together and just generally got to know each other. As the group bonded, my worries were eased as we all got along so well with each other. Coming from a small parish in a rural area, I don't see many young Catholics, so it was lovely to get to know the Clifton people, and it was incredibly inspiring to see so many young people gathered in Portugal for their faith. During the various Masses/ main events, there were at least a million pilgrims, and we were all chanting "This is the youth of the pope" in Portuguese. The crowds filled the entire streets and flooded over the hillsides- it made me think of the feeding of the five thousand.

As well as the main events which the pope attended, there were lots of talks, shows, concerts, and booths you could visit, and there was opportunity for confession. I went for confession in the "City of Joy" and had a very profound experience. Another of my favourite experiences was during the overnight vigil, when groups of American and Spanish young people got out their musical instruments and started playing and singing, and others started dancing in a circle, which grew into four large circles as more people joined in.

After the official World Youth Day closing mass, we headed to Fatima, a much more rural and peaceful area in contrast to Lisbon, although there were still many pilgrims. The quieter atmosphere allowed us to reflect on our experiences during WYD and think about how we would take what we learned back into our everyday life when we got home. The first and second night we went to the square between the old and new basilica and did the rosary and candlelight procession. Every 5 Hail Mary's the people leading it changed language, and for some of it everyone was praying in their own language. During the day we explored the area, visited the old and new basilica, attended international Mass, visited relics, and had many opportunities for adoration.

Throughout the trip, I spent a lot of time talking to the other pilgrims from Clifton, (and some people I met in an ice cream shop!) about the Bible and faith and I really learned a lot and was inspired by them. Although the large events were good, I was surprised by the impact of just being able to chat to so many other young Catholics and learn from and encourage each other. The atmosphere was so friendly that it was easy to just strike up a conversation with another pilgrim, even if you didn't have the same first language. And many people also managed to bump into old friends that they hadn't seen in many years.

Overall, it was a fun but also profound experience, and I am incredibly grateful I had the opportunity to go.