
« A MIGHTY WIND AROSE »



The first few moments of the papal Mass in Toronto, July 28 at Downsview Park, were a little difficult: a near-tornado with strong, driving rain shook the papal platform, drenching the approximately 800,000 young people attending the XVIIth World Youth Day celebration. This was followed by a soft warm breeze and, like a curtain slowly rising in a theatre, the blue sky gradually emerged, with the sun's rays drying the clothes, ground and buildings. This mini tornado could very well serve as a striking image of the unique event in the history of our country and the Church. With the liturgy, we could truly say: "A strong wind has risen! We hear the wonders of God proclaimed in every tongue. Harken, nations, and sing! Blessed are you, Creator Spirit who renews the universe! Kingdoms of the earth, sing to God, sing to the Lord! He it is who gives strength and power to His people." Can we not affirm with some of the observers: "Hasn't a new Pentecost happened for us and the whole world?"

PRELIMINARY EVALUATION

It is still too early to evaluate the preparation and realisation of the 2002 World Youth Day. Nevertheless, a first impression is very positive, when we consider everything that was experienced both in the individual dioceses and in Toronto itself, as well as what was heard and seen in the media. Considering all of this, we can say that the World Youth Day was very successful both in the number of participants and in the quality of the activities. It remains the task of each young person, of each person directly involved, of every family, parish, diocese, bishops' conference, and country to evaluate the celebration, to benefit to the utmost from the precious lessons retained, and to plan with the youth interesting and lively priority projects.

BOLDNESS AND VISION

For over five years the Canadian bishops had been preparing for the event: several bishops had attended previous World Youth Days and had expressed the desire to hold one in Canada. A unanimous vote of the bishops' plenary meeting had picked up on contacts with the Holy See, but it was only on August 20, 2000 that there was official confirmation of the venue by the Pope. After telling the young people at the closing Mass that they were the "watchmen of the dawn", and repeating the words of St. Catherine of Sienna: "If you are what you are meant to be, you will set the world aflame!" – Pope John Paul II gave the world's youth a date to meet with them in Toronto, in 2002. On Palm Sunday, 2001, the Pope gave the Pilgrim Cross to a group of Canadian youth and announced at that moment the theme of the 2002 World Youth Day: "You are salt of the earth and light of the world!" In June, 2001 I appointed Mrs. Manon Ruest-Bourgoin, a person experienced in pastoral ministry to youth, diocesan World Youth Day coordinator for the Diocese of Edmundston. A steering committee was quickly set up to promote the WYD in every parish, to prepare to welcome the Pilgrim Cross among us, and to set up and ensure the smooth functioning of many sub-committees: welcome committee, spiritual formation, finance, publicity committees, as well as a committee of volunteers, etc., and this, while establishing contacts at both interdiocesan and national levels. On behalf of our diocesan Church and in my own name I want to express my deepest gratitude to all those who were implicated in this great event, whether at the parish, deanery, or diocesan levels. I am grateful to the thousands of volunteers who gave unstintingly of their time and energy for the success of these activities. I also want to say how much I admire the 68 youth of the diocese and those who accompanied them on pilgrimage to Toronto. As I looked out on the immense Toronto gathering I gave thanks to God for the faith and courage of these young people who journeyed to the very end of the pilgrimage, one that was very demanding on them, but so beneficial, too.

FIVE CHALLENGING EVENTS

If I remember all that was beautiful, good, and edifying during these months of preparing and actualizing World Youth Day, I especially recall five events which challenged me in a special way. The first was the coming of the Pilgrim Cross. A year ago, between July 30 and August 5, I, Mrs. Manon Ruest-Bourgoin, coordinator, and Mr. Robert Dubé, the driver, had the privilege of accompanying the WYD Cross throughout the parishes of our diocese. This was an extraordinary pilgrimage, for me, it helped me see for myself the faith of our people, whether in the Restigouche, Southern Victoria, Upper Madawaska, Grand Falls or Edmundston deaneries; it was everywhere with the deepest respect that the Cross was greeted and venerated. Even now I can easily recall the different stages of the Cross's itinerary. A second event, seen by the Canadian bishops as connected with the WYD preparations, was the coming to us of the Great Reliquary of Saint Thérèse of Lisieux, one of the WYD protectors. What a wonderful welcome was reserved for her in our midst and throughout the country! The third event was the publication of the *Salt and Light* WYD booklet, an outstanding tool for the spiritual preparation of the future pilgrims. The booklet was a source book for me on seven different occasions as I prepared the Lent 2002 *Bishop's Journal* texts. The fourth event was the July 22 celebration at the Cathedral, in Edmundston, so joyful and faith-filled! What a welcome was given to all the youth coming through, by the local population and especially by the diocesan delegation and all the volunteers. Our parents and grandparents would be proud to hear how the cathedral was full, but especially that there was such a "contagious" vitality, there with all the youth. The fifth event was my taking part in the papal Mass, in Toronto. Through the goodness of three volunteers I was able to get to Toronto for the closing Mass, to join my brother bishops and all the youth. There were some six hundred bishops and five thousand priests, attending; I was told that one-seventh of the world's bishops was there, and that all the Canadian bishops attended. And I, the only Eudist bishop in North America had the opportunity to meet four other Eudist bishops, at the WYD: Bishops Michel Dubost and Clément Guillon of France, and Juan-Francisco Sarasti and Jorge Jimenez of Colombia; I was glad to be with them at the closing Mass and to join with them in the Eucharist. What a joy it was to be with all the youth of the diocese and the one million from across the world!

CHALLENGING WORDS

A lot of activities took place, at the WYD: greetings, teachings, celebrations, celebration of forgiveness, way of the cross, vigil, Eucharist, and the unforgettable actions of John Paul II, his courage and determination, his prayer, faith and trust in the youth, his affection for them. However, I want to mention the importance of the Pope's messages to the youth. My hope is that everyone in the diocese have the chance to relive these extraordinary days by watching the video of these momentous historical events, and that the Pope's speeches be available to our youth. May the witness of the pilgrims themselves be to our faithful a greater stimulus to their faith.

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