

Bellahouston Park

Papal Mass

16th September 2010

Upon being asked to be part of the CYSS presentation at the Papal Mass in September earlier this year, I did not hesitate to say 'yes.' My role in the presentation changed from initially being stand-by cross bearer to being the reader. I was simultaneously excited and anxious about being asked to perform this role; it was a huge privilege but also a momentous task as I would be reading to tens of thousands of people at a historic event. However, it proved to be a wonderful experience, one I would not change for the world. The people I met through the CYSS were so enthusiastic and friendly which made the whole day even more enjoyable. The actual presentation itself ran smoothly and faultlessly on the day thanks to the hard work of our team leaders and the combined effort of all the young people involved. It was an unforgettable experience – one that I shall be speaking of for years to come!

Laura McLoone (20)

London: Westminster Piazza and Hyde Park

18th September 2010

My experience of the Papal visit to the United Kingdom has been one which has meant a great deal to me and I'm glad to have this chance to share my thoughts and feelings throughout this time.

Although I was at Bellahouston when the Holy Father came to Scotland, the highlight of the weekend was undoubtedly the time I spent in London with Catholic Youth Service Scotland (CYSS). Although we spent less than forty eight hours together as a group, I felt that the group of us bonded really well and there was a true sense of togetherness among us. I know for certain I speak for each of us when I say that we thoroughly enjoyed the time we spent together and we each gained something valuable from our time in the presence of the Holy Father, something we will treasure for a long time to come. As for my own experience as an individual on the trip, I'm not too sure where to begin...

Recently, as a result of different happenings in my life, I have come to realise the full value of my faith and what it means to be a Catholic and a young Catholic at that. Within the Church there is a great focus on the youth and you only had to be in London on the Saturday to have first hand evidence of this. I am very thankful to have the opportunity to be a part of the youth of the Catholic Church as it reassures me that I am not alone in my faith and there are plenty people who are young, like myself, who cherish the faith God has given them. I undoubtedly feel that my time with CYSS during the visit of the Holy Father has strengthened this notion and gave me the confidence not to be embarrassed to stand up for what I believe in and be proud to have that gift of belief. This was something that Pope Benedict himself encouraged me to feel when he addressed the youth outside Westminster Cathedral. To be in the presence of the Holy Father, only yards away from him, is something I will never forget and the way he inspired me to live a Christian way of life is something that will remain with me forever. There is no denying that the time he spent with all the young people in the piazza that morning was indeed something special but for me, the highlight of the whole visit was the Vigil on Saturday night in Hyde Park. As I sat along with 80,000 other pilgrims

and saw on the screen the magnitude of people lining the streets for the Pope's journey to Hyde Park, not to mention those who had turned out in their thousands wherever he went over the weekend, I felt a real sense of hope for religion in today's ever controversial society, as I often used to wonder whether enough people really cared anymore; I've now realised I could not have been more wrong.

After all the presentations and speakers that had been on the stage throughout the day, some of whom moved me to tears with their stories of how the Catholic Church has benefited them and helped them, Pope Benedict finally arrived and the Vigil began. He led us in prayer and the service concluded with Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament. I attend Exposition regularly in my own parish and I find it emotional then, so you can well imagine how emotional I was when praying with the Holy Father. For me, those moments where thousands were united in silent prayer, was without doubt the crowning moment of my whole experience.

Although there were many occasions of happiness, union, love and warmth throughout the time when Pope Benedict was in our country, I also felt myself being saddened by those who opposed his presence here. As I reflected more upon these feelings I realised that I felt sorrow because there are people in the world who for whatever reason, do not know God. I would like nothing more than to help some of these people realise that the Church never closes doors but instead, opens them and I would encourage them to find out the true facts behind what they protest about and to seek the true teaching of the Catholic Church; not a version picked and edited by media. After all, leaders of many religions and of many political parties, as well as the Queen herself, stood united with the Pope when he was here, can people not see the true message of unity that is present there?

In summary, my time with CYSS during the Papal Visit has meant a great deal to me and has encouraged me to further grow in my faith and to hopefully help others to do the same. I am thankful to those who organised the trip to London and to all who took part for making it a truly special and memorable experience. I hope it is something none of us will ever forget. Also, to those who protest and oppose, I would ask them to go out and to seek God, for they are sure to find Him.

Anne Marie Clements (19)

London: Westminster Piazza and Hyde Park

18th September 2010

Pope Benedict XVI's visit to the UK in 2010 was an experience I'll cherish for the rest of my life. From the Open Air Mass in Bellahouston Park, to being part of the Scottish youth group who greeted the Pope at Westminster Cathedral; and taking part in the Procession before the Vigil with the Pope at Hyde Park – it was a truly memorable experience! It was an honour to represent the Diocese of Motherwell as part of the group, and a privilege representing Scotland's young Catholics at the various events in London. Feeling the range of emotions of 3,000 young Catholics in the Piazza outside Westminster Cathedral was overwhelming. It was so uplifting seeing that all these other young people have such great Faith. The Vigil at Hyde was very moving too, the highlights for me were greeting the Bishops on the Altar at the end of the Procession and the silence that fell over the park during the Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament.

I didn't manage to speak to any young people from other dioceses due to the constraints of time but the youth in our group were a real credit to Scotland. It was great to be part of the group and very encouraging to see that the Catholic faith is alive and well in Scotland.

Martin Burns (18)

London: Westminster Piazza and Hyde Park

18th September 2010

I feel that the papal visit has benefited many young Catholics including myself, this was due to the very inspirational message that the Holy Father reiterated that Cardinal Newman had once said "Heart speaks unto Heart". Words really can't describe the way you feel when you are in the presence of the Holy Father, I mostly recall a sense of awe and I felt proud to be a catholic, this was because the Pope was there in front of me but also the fact that when in the Piazza at Westminster Cathedral and at Hyde Park for the vigil the amount of young people that I seen has made my faith stronger because I realised I wasn't alone in my faith.

I was inspired by the way that people got the message across to me I believe that this visit has changed my life in many ways I feel that during my normal everyday life I try my best to get the message of the Papal visit across to everyone. I believe that the opportunity to go to the papal mass was an honour and a massive privilege for me and it has truly changed my complete outlook on life. Once I came home from London I felt sad about the Pope leaving and leaving all the people I had met from over Britain, but then I realised that it wasn't over and that we have the memories and the message from the visit that will always stay with me.

Kieran Hamilton (19)