

Random Reflections of a Pensive Pilgrim

I have, it seems, become a world traveler. As you read this, I will have just finished up a week in Paris, where Dominican doings take me to a priory founded in the 13th century. This, however, is the second workout for my passport: you see, I was in Madrid for the recent World Youth Day. So many thoughts, so little space! Here's a sampling:

- Europeans are much more conscious of the environment than we, and they are less wasteful with scarce resources: needless to say, it is quite a shock to find oneself in a dark bathroom after the timed light has gone out! Stewardship takes many forms.

- Byzantine Divine Liturgy in a hotel room is quite a challenge, yet it is nonetheless very inspiring when committed young people contribute heartfelt intentions at the appropriate point in the fervent ektenia.

- Young people seek acceptance of their peers, and thus tend to act as a group: all are expected to "follow the leader" lest they be looked at askance. (Do adults exhibit this behavior as well?)

- Our young pilgrims were encouraged to find Christ not only in the explicitly religious events, but also in the mundane tasks which filled their day, seeking Him where He seeks to be found rather than where we think He ought to be. One particular incident speaks volumes. Our pilgrims gave out icons of Christ the teacher as souvenirs to other pilgrims they met. One day as we waited in a huge line to get into a restaurant, someone gave one of these icons of Christ to a Mexican pilgrim, who asked "Qien es eso?" – "Who's that?" Do we likewise have trouble recognizing the Christ Who comes to us in unfamiliar guises?

- Imagine the challenge for this shy introvert overwhelmed by 2 million of his closest intimates! (Jesus got away from the crowds to pray alone; such divine wisdom!) Most of the pilgrims, I suspect, were there to see the pope, who seemed like a rock star: they clambered to see him, pushing and shoving to get closer. In our Churches, we can encounter Christ, the Son of God, Who – it seems to this poor theologian - is greater than the pope; why, then, are our churches empty?

- Given the anti-American feeling rampant this millennium, we were warned not to "show off" with flags or chants of "U-S-A!"; meanwhile, we were surrounded by crowds waving a vast array of flags and boasting of diverse homelands. Pardon me for wondering whether the goal of their participation was spiritual or nationalistic. (HmMMM...)

- Ukrainian Catholics attended Divine Liturgy in a modern Roman Catholic Church which was dutifully transformed by a beautiful portable icon screen. This brings home the fact that we as Church - not unlike the young visitors and the Ukrainian guest workers

in Spain – are a pilgrim people whose true homeland is with God no matter where we happen to find ourselves.

· Bishop Bryan of Saskatoon preached not only in Ukrainian, but also in Spanish and English. In so doing, he reinforced an idea dear to both +Lubomyr and +Sviatoslav – namely, that we are a worldwide Church. Moreover, the Ukrainian Catholic Church is not “our” Church, but rather Christ’s, and He has only lent it to us. After all, He directed His disciples to “Go forth and baptize all nations” – not just Ukrainians.

The next World Youth Day will take place in Brazil in 2013. People kept saying to me, “see you in Rio!” I’m too old; any takers?

-Fr. Jim Karepin, op