

Trek to Toronto

Loads of mud and little sleep were well worth the chance to be with the Pope, for a group of New York-area girls who went to World Youth Day this summer.

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The trip was sponsored by Vancourt Center, an Opus Dei center that offers an array of formational activities for women. The girls had begun preparing in January, meeting to read and discuss the Pope's message for World Youth Day. They

took to heart the Holy Father's words: "Many people are wounded by life: they are excluded from economic progress and are without a home, family, a job." So as part of their preparation for the trip, the girls made visits to nursing homes in the months preceding the trip.

Veteran participants had warned that this would be no weekend at the spa. And indeed they were right. The evening prayer vigil was followed by a night outdoors in rather inclement conditions at Downsview Lands, where the closing Mass was held. Awakening on the edge of a mud puddle the next morning, Noelle groaned, "Where am I?" Carrie responded, "You're in a five-star hotel, but we are experiencing technical difficulties!" Thanks, Carrie.

All this paled, though, as the Pope touched down in the helicopter and

made his way once again through the cheering crowd of 800,000, as he had at the Opening Ceremony and the Prayer Vigil. The girls were eager to show their love for the Holy Father and were buoyed by meeting young people from all over the world who felt the same way. As he passed in the Popemobile, huge television screens registered the emotion on the faces of many young people seeing the Holy Father for the first time in their life.

More than one person commented that the youngest of the whole 800,000 at the Mass was the 82-year-old celebrant. When questioned by a journalist about how he was able to overcome a grueling schedule, debilitating Parkinson's disease and nagging arthritis, the Pope reportedly responded, "Being with the young makes one young." And vice versa — the not-so-young people who found an excuse to go to World

Youth Day discovered that being with this pontiff made them feel young too.

The end of the event was bittersweet —the joy of being with the Holy Father was tempered by the reality that this time was special, but limited. The girls were thrilled that they had been able to see and listen to the words of the Holy Father, addressed specifically to them. One could see how everyone had been “lit on fire” by the Holy Father and had their faith strengthened, as they saw hundreds of thousands of people their own age enthusiastically expressing their love for their faith and the Holy Father. After days of sleeping on the floor, walking until their legs hurt, singing on the street and subway, meeting with young people from all over the world, roasting under the sun and then being doused with rain, each of the

participants joined in the chorus,
“SEE YOU IN GERMANY IN 2005!”

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