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150 Russians Come for World Youth Day

Over 150 young people from every diocese in Russia are in Madrid. They have come with a great desire to be with the Pope and to strengthen their Catholic faith.

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Maria Isaenko: to see the Pope is one of the great desires of my life.

Maria, 23, lives with her mother in Kemerovo, a town in Siberia. She has finished her degree in history, and in

September will begin graduate studies in Spanish history.

Her love for Spain began as a teenager when she saw a film about Spain. “When I heard the Spanish language for the first time, it struck me as a marvelous and very musical language.”

“I also became interested in Spanish history,” Maria continues, “and started studying Spanish. When I had to choose my major, I chose history with the intention of specializing in Spanish history—even though my mother is an engineer, a professor in the university, and has always been interested in technical subjects.”

Maria has a great love for the Pope. “It doesn’t matter who he is. I paid close attention to everything John Paul II said, and now to Pope Benedict’s words. For a Catholic, the Pope is the Vicar of Christ. To be with the Pope, to see and hear him in

person, has been one of the great desires of my life. I think this is also a wonderful opportunity to be with other young people from all over the world.”

Maria has prepared very well for World Youth Day by attending the youth days sponsored by her parish back in Russia. She has also organized gatherings with her friends to talk about religion, the history of the Church, and what it means to have faith and hope in times of confusion, when so many people think life is only about working and making money.

Mary is also trying to decide on her vocation: “I’ve felt for some time that God is asking me to get closer to Him, to give myself more fully, but I also have a lot of enthusiasm for my professional career. At World Youth Day, near the Pope, I hope to discover

my vocation—what God wants for my life.”

Mark Baginsky: the beauty of Catholicism

Mark, 21, is in his junior year of electrical engineering studies. He comes from Tyumenskaya Oblast, two hours by train from Moscow. He is the only child in his family, which is Catholic. His parish organized a 10-day course to help those eager to come to Madrid to prepare for World Youth Day.

“During those days,” Mark says, “I realized that I had to strengthen my spiritual life and I thought a lot about the beauty of Catholicism, whose teachings do so much good not only for Christians but for all of society.”

Mark continues: “I have a great love for the Pope and I think that for any Catholic to be able to be with the Pope is a dream come true. I’m also

sure that this World Youth Day will improve my spiritual life and help me to ground my life more firmly in Christ, as the motto for these days says. I hope my life will change for the better, and make me a better person, closer to God.”

Sponsored by the Russian Bishops’ Conference

The Russian Bishops’ Conference has encouraged and promoted this pilgrimage. The main organizer has been Most Rev. Clemens Pickel, assisted by four Russian priests who are accompanying the young people, as well as Fr. Fernando Vera, a Mexican priest of Opus Dei, who is pastor of the parish of St. Peter and Paul in the Russian capital.

Fr. Vera says that these young people, from all the dioceses in Russia, have a great eagerness to be with the Pope and “a great faith. They have prepared themselves very well and

made many sacrifices to be able to be here these days.”

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