Bishop Anthony Fisher’s WYD blog for Friday and Saturday, 26 & 27 July

We awoke yesterday (Friday) morning to sunshine at last! I was, again, driven to a 'hub' parish in a mini-van with various cardinals and bishops, and from that hub by car to my particular catechesis site, which turned out to be a school hall in a poorer part of Rio.

The school's facilities were very simple by contemporary Australian standards. But the parish priest and parishioners were wonderfully hospitable.

There were pilgrims from Indonesia, Texas, Barbados, Canada, St Vincent (in the Caribbean), Poland, Vietnamese-America, the Philippines, East Timor, the Cook Islands (near Australia and New Zealand) and elsewhere – as well as many locals.

I spoke about the mission of our young people. The young people asked important questions and were engaged throughout.

We celebrated a beautiful Mass for the New Evangelisation. These are very privileged moments for a bishop and I really treasure them.

Next stop was a briefing about the changed arrangements due to the new venue for the Vigil and the Final Mass. Then it was time to get ready for the Stations of the Cross – in company with an estimated 1.5 million young (and not so young) people.

Rio's hedonistic Copacabana Beach might have seemed an improbable location to enact Christ's saving Passion. But there it was.

The reflections and dramatisations related each of the 14 moments of Christ's journey to death to some issue youth face in today's world:

- How young people can be missionary;
- What it means for them to experience conversion;
- Substance-addicted youth in recovering communities;
- Youth speaking in the name of mothers;
- Youth preparing for a priestly vocation;
- Young religious fighting for life;
- Young couples and the importance of marriage;
- Youth speaking for women who suffer;
- The challenges of students;
- Youth in social networks;
- Young prisoners and prison ministry;
- Youth suffering a terminal illness;
- Youth with disabilities such as deafness; and
- Issues for young people in the various regions of the world.

These stations ended on a beautiful note with the pieta and the cross
being carried forward by young people to the haunting Albinoni’s *Adagio in G Minor* (a la the film *Gallipoli*).

Then the Pope preached an excellent homily. Citing the famous incident in which St Peter, fleeing persecution in Rome, saw a vision of the Lord asking him “Quo vadis?” Pope Francis said that “at that moment he understood that he had to follow the Lord with courage, to the very end. But he also realised that he would never be alone on the journey: Jesus, who had loved him even unto death, would always be with him.

“Jesus, with His Cross, walks with us and takes upon Himself our fears, problems and sufferings, even the deepest and most painful. With the Cross, Jesus unites Himself to the silence of the victims of violence, those who cannot cry out, especially the innocent and defenceless. With the Cross, He is united to families in trouble, and those who mourn the tragic loss of their children ... On the Cross, Jesus is united with every person who suffers from hunger in a world where tons of food are thrown away each day.

“On the Cross, Jesus is united with the many mothers and fathers who suffer as their children become victims of the artificial paradise of drugs. On the Cross, Jesus is united with those who are persecuted for their religion, for their beliefs or simply for the colour of their skin. On the Cross, Jesus is united with so many young people who have lost faith in political institutions, because they see in them only selfishness and corruption. He unites himself also with those young people who have lost faith in the Church, or even in God, because of the counter-witness of Christians and ministers of the Gospel.

“How Jesus suffers for our incoherence! The Cross of Christ bears the suffering and the sin of mankind, including our own. Jesus accepts all this with open arms, bearing on His shoulders our crosses and saying to us: Have courage! You do not carry your cross alone! I carry it with you. I have overcome death and I have come to give you hope, to give you life ... [to give you] the certainty of the unshakable love which God has for us — a love so great that it enters into our sin and forgives it; that enters into our suffering and gives us the strength to bear it; that enters into death to conquer it and to save us. The Cross of Christ contains all the love of God, it is His immeasurable mercy. This is a love in which we can place all our trust, in which we can believe.”

Pope Francis then noted that many people were with Jesus on the way to Calvary: Pilate, Simon of Cyrene, Mary, the women ... and he asked our young people directly: “Which of these people do you want to be like? Do you want to be like Pilate, who did not have the courage to go against the tide to save Jesus’ life, and instead washed his hands. Tell me: are you one of those who wash their hands, who play dumb and turn away? Or are you like Simon of Cyrene, who helped Jesus to carry that heavy wood, like Mary and the other women, who were not afraid to accompany Jesus
all the way to the end, with love and tenderness. Which of these do you want to be like?"

The Pope concluded by asking the young to bring their joys, their sufferings and their failures to Christ's Cross, as "there we will find a Heart that is open to us and understands us, forgives us, loves us and calls us to bear this love in our lives, to love each person, each brother and sister, with the same love."

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Today (Saturday) we woke to more rain to begin with but happily it was fine from midday onwards. The bishops and priests joined the Holy Father at his Mass with seminarians and young religious — a relatively low-key affair in the cathedral.

Though I did not get to meet him, Pope Francis passed very close by and so I have lots of photos! The warmth of his personality was especially evident in this Mass and I am sure all present found this Mass a great encouragement in their vocation.

The Pope suggested that bishops, clergy, religious and seminarians regularly reflect upon their divinely given calling. "It is not creativity, meetings or planning, however pastoral these may be, that ensure our fruitfulness, even if these are greatly helpful. What assures our fruitfulness is our being faithful to Jesus, who says insistently: ‘Abide in me and I in you’ (Jn 15:4). And we know well what that means: to contemplate Him, to worship Him, to embrace Him, in our daily encounter with Him in the Eucharist, in our life of prayer, in our moments of adoration; it means to recognise Him present and to embrace Him in those most in need."

The Holy Father then reflected on the missionary aspect of every vocation. He noted that Jesus did not keep His disciples indefinitely under His wing but "sent them out! We cannot keep ourselves shut up in parishes, in our communities, in our parish or diocesan institutions, when so many people are waiting for the Gospel! ... It's not enough to open the door in welcome to those who come: we must go out through that door to seek and meet the people wherever they are!"

He asked us to listen attentively and patiently to the dreams, successes and difficulties of the young, as they too discover how to be missionary disciples. "I ask this of you with all my heart! In the confessional, in spiritual direction, in accompanying, let us find ways to spend time with them. Planting seeds is demanding and very tiring ... But Jesus asks us to sow with care and responsibility. Let us spare no effort in the formation of our young people! ... Let us form them in mission, to go out as itinerants who communicate the faith."

Finally, the Pope criticised the economic rationalism that promotes a 'culture of exclusion'. In such a culture “There is no place for the elderly
or for the unwanted child; there is no time for that poor person in the street ... Have the courage to go against the tide of this culture of efficiency and waste ... [promoting instead] a culture of solidarity and fraternity ... Be servants of communion and of the culture of encounter!"

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Next stop: the Vigil. The change of venue meant a change of pilgrim walk. The new, shorter walk to the place of the Vigil started close by our accommodation site. A seemingly endless stream of young people – two or more million of them – made their way to Copacabana Beach singing and publicly testifying to their faith. Our pilgrims' spirits were very high.

The Vigil ceremony was very beautiful indeed, and will long remain in my memory. The five mile long beach was a sea of young humanity, full of faith and hope and love, an extraordinary site to behold with the ocean to their right, the volcanic formations behind them.

After a warm-up concert of several hours, the orchestra played *I vow to thee my country*, the World Youth Day cross was carried in and the flags of many nations displayed by young flag bearers. The atmosphere was electric as all awaited the popemobile.

The very clever centrepiece of the Vigil was the story of St Francis – obviously chosen in honour of the Holy Father- including friars and young people receiving the mandate from God to (re)build the Church. They literally built a chapel on stage before our eyes and in between gave testimonies of word and music.

In his preaching the Pope was very animated and alternatively jested and jousted with the crowd. His message was full of challenge and hope. Then a splendid monstrance was borne in by four young people and there was Eucharistic Adoration. Altogether I think the Vigil was the best part of the week.