

Dear Friends,

Before I take my leave, I wish to say to my hosts how much I have enjoyed my visit here and how grateful I am for your hospitality. I thank the Prime Minister, the Honourable Kevin Rudd, for his words, and I thank the Governor-General, Major-General Michael Jeffery, for his presence here and for graciously receiving me at Admiralty House at the start of my public engagements. The Federal Government and the State Government of New South Wales, as well as the residents and the business community of Sydney, have been most cooperative in their support of World Youth Day. An event of this kind requires an immense amount of preparation and organization, and I know that I speak on behalf of many thousands of young people when I express my appreciation and gratitude to you all. In characteristic Australian style, you have extended a warm welcome to me and to countless young pilgrims who have flocked here from every corner of the globe. To the host families in Australia and New Zealand who have made room for the young people in their homes, I am especially grateful. You have opened your doors and your hearts to the world's youth, and on their behalf I thank you.

The principal actors on the stage over these last few days, of course, have been the young people themselves. World Youth Day is their day. It is they who have made this a global ecclesial event, a great celebration of youth and a great celebration of what it is to be the Church, the people of God throughout the world, united in faith and love and empowered by the Spirit to bear witness to the risen Christ to the ends of the earth. I thank them for coming, I thank them for their participation, and I pray that they will have a safe journey home. I know that the young people, their families and their sponsors have in many cases made great sacrifices to enable them to travel to Australia. For this the entire Church is grateful.

As I look back over these stirring days, there are many scenes that stand out in my mind. I was deeply moved by my visit to the Mary MacKillop Memorial, and I thank the Sisters of Saint Joseph for the opportunity to pray at the Shrine of their Co-Foundress. The Stations of the Cross in the streets of Sydney were a powerful reminder that Christ loved us "to the end" and shared our sufferings so that we could share his glory. The meeting with the young people at Darlinghurst was a moment of joy and great hope, a sign that Christ can lift us out of the most difficult situations, restoring our dignity and enabling us to look forward to a brighter future. The meeting with ecumenical and interreligious leaders was marked by a spirit of genuine fraternity and a deep desire for greater collaboration in building a more just and peaceful world. And without doubt, the gatherings at Barangaroo and Southern Cross were high-points of my visit. Those experiences of prayer, and our joyful celebration of the Eucharist, were an eloquent testimony to the life-giving work of the Holy Spirit, present and active in the hearts of our young people. World Youth Day has shown us that the Church can rejoice in the young people of today and be filled with hope for the world of tomorrow.

Dear friends, as I depart from Sydney, I ask God to look down lovingly upon this city, this country and all its inhabitants. I pray that many of their number will be inspired by Blessed Mary MacKillop's example of compassion and service. And as I bid you farewell with deep gratitude in my heart, I say once again: May God bless the people of Australia!

Benedict XVI

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