

Report

„From Krakow to Panama – the synod journeying with young people”

International Conference, Rome

4 April to 9 April 2017



Just before the most sacred of feasts, the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ began this year, the new dicastery of the Vatican for the Laity, Family, and Life organised a conference in Rome for the national delegates of episcopal conferences' youth ministries and other various international youth associations. The Foederatio Internationalis Juventutem has also received an invitation to this event, and I took it upon myself to represent our federation. Accompanying me was the newest member of Juventutem Magyarország, and a fervent organiser of youth events in the Hungarian diocese of Vác, my friend Ervin Dér.

The conference was held at the International Pontifical College Maria Mater Ecclesiae, one of the seminaries of the Legionaries of Christ.

Initially Ervin and I had mixed feelings about the conference, since we didn't know much about it, other than the program we received beforehand via e-mail. We didn't know how many people to expect, how the work was going to be conducted, and if there actually was a real possibility for a fruitful time spent together. Thanks to Our Lady, who I think heavily interceded for this event, all our worries turned out to be completely unfounded, and the conference turned out to be a success.

Wednesday, April 5th, marked the beginning of our long, and to be honest, extremely exhausting journey. We began, as on every subsequent day, with Lauds according to the books of *Liturgia Horarum*, and then continued with several lectures. The topic for our first day was the evaluation of 2016's World Youth Day festival in Krakow. Both of us who represented FIJ in Rome had been present in Poland, and had our own experiences with the organisation of the event, but it was interesting to hear about the experiences of young adults who came from other nations.





We heard several talks given by H.E. Cardinal Kevin Farrell, Fr. Joao Chagas, H.E. Cardinal Stanislaw Dziwisz and several representatives of the Krakow WYD organising committee. After we heard a few talks about the „inside” of the Krakow organising committee, there was a long open discussion session, which gave an opportunity for the delegates to briefly introduce themselves and share their experiences. I also had an opportunity to talk about how

FIJ was founded, and to explain that the main reason for the existence of our federation is to bring young people attached to the Extraordinary Form of the Roman Rite together at World Youth Day. I had very little time, so I couldn't go into much detail, but I hope that I was able to get our message of gratitude across.



The first day's official program concluded with Mass offered by Cd. Farrell, prefect of the Dicastery for Laity, Family, and Life. I had the chance to briefly meet with Cd. Dziwisz, and express gratitude in the name of young people attached to the Extraordinary Form for his support of *Summorum Pontificum* and our cause. He smiled, and told me to continue no matter what!

After dinner we accidentally found out that the seminarians of the hosting institution gathered for a Holy Hour with Benediction every evening at 9pm. All of the liturgies of the seminary were very reverent, the seminarians chanted the hours of the Divine Office together, some parts in Italian and some parts in Latin. We quickly found out that a number of priests who are living at the seminary offer the EF Mass also as their private masses, and once a month as the conventual Mass for the seminarians. It was

quite an uplifting experience to see these young men taking part in this reverent liturgy, and getting a formation that is not afraid to make use of the treasures of the Church.

Ervin and I began our second day in Rome with the seminarians, taking part in their morning prayers. After Lauds we had breakfast, and the conference sessions started. The theme of the second and third days shifted from WYD to the upcoming Synod on Youth. The Synod document was presented by H.E. Cardinal Lorenzo Baldisseri, General Secretary of the Synod of Bishops. After the document was presented, delegates from around the world





gave their input about the preparatory document, the questionnaire attached to it, and about the work they have done so far in preparing the work of the synod in their dioceses.

In the afternoon, after a few interventions from the delegates, we were broken up into discussion groups based on preferred language. Fortunately Ervin and I were part of two different groups, so we had twice the opportunities to talk about the unique experience of traditional communities regarding youth ministry/pastoral care.

I was assigned to English Group #4, which had representatives from the Holy Land, Poland, Canada, USA, Malta, India, Belarus, Malaysia, Japan, Malawi, Slovenia, and Nigeria. Ervin was with English Group #5, with delegates from France, Slovakia, Indonesia, USA, Korea, Greece, New Zealand, Denmark, Malawi, Nigeria, Switzerland, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Vietnam.

All of the delegates in my group, and as it later turned out, in the group of Ervin, spoke from positions of similar experience: despite their best efforts, in many cases they had found it difficult or nearly impossible to effectively reach young people for any length of time, to get them to join a church activity or to form a community. Even if they manage to somehow get the attention of youth, it soon dies out if the pastoral caretakers don't continually provide for something new or interesting.



This was an opportunity for me to talk in detail about the universal experience of communities preferring the Extraordinary Form liturgy, that contrary to initial fears, the *usus antiquior* does not only attract nostalgic old people, but first and foremost young persons, who have discovered this ancient form of liturgy for themselves, and have learned to love it, and cherish it.



Before I continue, I have to be perfectly clear: it was in no way my intention to be a vacuum cleaner salesman, what I tried to do is to share my experience, and to somehow communicate the fruits of our communities, where the liturgical teaching of Pope Benedict XVI is put into practice. As Cardinal Robert Sarah, Prefect of the Congregation for Divine Worship appointed by Pope Francis recently quoted Pope Benedict's statement: *"Immediately after the Second Vatican Council it was presumed that requests for the use of the 1962 Missal would be limited to the older generation which had grown up with it, but in the meantime it has clearly been demonstrated that young persons too have discovered this liturgical*

form, felt its attraction and found in it a form of encounter with the Mystery of the Most Holy Eucharist, particularly suited to them.” (Colloquium “The Source of the Future”, Herzogenrat, 29 March 2017).



It was a refreshing thing for me, to have an opportunity to talk about the many gifts that God gives us through the traditional forms, and also to speak with people who proved to be very open minded towards us.

In preparing to speak, I tried to think about how to properly communicate, or better said, how to boil down our experience into a few suggestions or observations that could be useful for other communities, or even the universal Church. The idea was, that the traditional forms in and of themselves are only tools. Just to be specific, I am not talking about liturgy, because liturgy is not a tool, but the „source and summit” of our lives. In talking about the forms, I explained how they act like a hook for young people who are searching for something that is serious, that does not treat them like children, which isn’t sugar coated, and which they can call their own. Young people, especially during

their teenage years look for something that isn’t imposed on them, but rather what is completely their own business. Traditional liturgy, with its sometimes even-difficult-to-understand rites and forms provides an excellent opportunity for a young person, to find something that is not pre-digested, where the bar is high, and where great effort can be needed to learn to appreciate this form of liturgy.

So two things: beauty and difficulty. We should not be afraid to talk about the difficulties of living the Christian life. To be Christian is very difficult, and without the grace of God it is impossible. The Church shouldn’t be afraid to talk about this, and shouldn’t be afraid to advertise with this. A lot of young people are drawn to Islam because of its strictness, and its mystical atmosphere. To be Christian is very difficult, and requires continually making decisions that involve sacrifice. So the evangelisation of young people should begin with beauty, should continue with the bar set high, and must always communicate the truth: it is not going to be easy, nobody is going to hand it to you!



The remaining days of the conference were a little bit lighter in their mood, mainly due to the overall fatigue all of the participants was experiencing, and of course because of the newly forming friendships between the attendees.

On Saturday, I had the chance to have a wonderful lunch with members of Juventutem Rome. Apart from WYD in Krakow, this was the

first time I have met with a Juventutem chapter outside of Hungary since I became president of the federation in February 2016. We had a very good talk, and it was reassuring to hear that the same things are happening to the Roman community as is happening with the Hungarian community in terms of spiritual growth and in numbers of vocations.



Our visit to Rome concluded with a Marian Vigil at Santa Maria Maggiore with the Holy Father. He spoke in Italian, so I couldn't make out most of his talk, but it came across strongly that he is very enthusiastic about next year's synod, and for 2019's WYD festival in Panama.

We sadly could not attend the Palm Sunday Mass at Saint Peter's square, nor the pontifical liturgy at Santissima Trinita Dei Pellegrini, due to our flight leaving very early in the afternoon.

All in all, I have to congratulate the organisers of the conference, for doing their best in keeping almost 300 people together from at least a hundred different countries, on such a tight schedule for four days. Also it was an extraordinary gift from God, that the world wide community of traditional minded young adults in Juventutem were also invited, and had an opportunity for their voices be heard. I am confident, that the suggestions I have made, and the contribution we both gave during these days, will be of help to the bishops next year.



It was also fantastic to meet all these people, from all these different countries, and live and pray together with them for a few days.

I hope and pray, that Our Lady covers the upcoming synod with her mantle, and protects it from every interference of the devil, and his agents.

Bertalan Kiss

President FIJ