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World Youth Day trip to Spain to be holy adventure

Kathy Loney

Saturday, Aug. 6, begins the holy adventure, or pilgrimage, that 48 students and adults will take part in when heading to Portugal and Spain, culminating in the many activities that World Youth Day has to offer.

Our pilgrims come from Bathgate, Devils Lake, Fargo, Fort Totten, Harwood, Grafton, East Grand Forks, Grand Forks, Langdon, Rugby and West Fargo. We also have pilgrims from St. Cloud, Minn., Kearney, Neb., and Watertown, S.D., joining us. Father Peter Sharpe and, by then, the newly ordained Father Neil Pfeifer and Father Christopher Markman will accompany the group.

The pilgrims will begin their trek by attending Mass celebrated by Bishop Samuel Aquila at the Cathedral of St. Mary in Fargo. After Mass they will load their luggage onto a motor coach bus, pick up their bag breakfasts and head to the Minneapolis/St. Paul Airport and catch a flight to Madrid, Spain. Landing the next morning, the pilgrims get on another motor coach and take a six-hour ride to Fatima for an early evening Mass Aug. 7 in the Chapel of the Angels of Peace in the Basilica in Fatima.

The pilgrims will have an opportunity to tour all the sights that Fatima has to offer in their three-day stay and be a part of the candlelight rosary procession two nights in the streets of Fatima. The tour includes visiting Lisbon, Portugal, to see the Church of St. Anthony and the Cathedral, Belem Tower and the Jeronimos Monastery.

On the sixth day of our trip, we head to Days in the Diocese, a home-stay program offered as part of the World Youth Day experience. We will be in the Diocese of Merida Badajoz, a quaint area in the southwestern part of Spain that will be hosting more than 1,500 pilgrims.

Many festivities, spiritual gatherings and some touring of their cathedral and other religious spots will take place during these days along with becoming familiar with the Hispanic culture while staying in people's homes. Hopefully, the language barrier will not be too tough and good friendships will be established.

On Aug. 16, the World Youth Day activities begin with registration of the many groups traveling to Madrid and an 8 p.m. opening Mass in Madrid's Cibeles Square. This will be presided over by the archbishop of Madrid and concelebrated by the many bishops and priests who will also be participating in World Youth Day.

The five days to follow will be busy with catechesis, daily Mass, reconciliation time, Stations of the Cross along the famous streets of Madrid, the many festivities in the city put on by many different cultures, long days, possibly longer nights, but all to become closer to Christ and to see the many faces of Christ in the world.

The highlight of World Youth Day is the vigil where Pope Benedict XVI will be on hand for a most beautiful exposition of the Blessed Eucharist with the millions that attend at the Cuatro Vientos (an old airport site no longer in use).

Much activity will happen all night long after exposition comes to an end. Needless to say, not much sleep under the stars will happen, but much international celebrating and bonding happens into the wee hours of the morning.

It may quiet down about 5 a.m., but be assured that everyone who participates will be up and ready for the grand entrance of the pope as all prepare to celebrate Mass with His Holiness, definitely the highlight of the entire World Youth Day trip!

How close can we get to this most holy man will be one of the feats of the trip. Will we hear his most important words for all young and young at heart? Receiving the Blessed Eucharist in Pope Benedict's presence is very powerful, also. We have all of this to look forward to during our pilgrimage!

For two days after World Youth Day comes to an end, our group of pilgrims will be preparing to participate in Mass celebrated by Bishop Samuel Aquila at one of the many Catholic churches that Madrid has to offer.

A private Mass for our pilgrims with Bishop Aquila is also a highlight of the trip. There will be some time to purchase a final souvenir from Spain and take in a few museums or one more church before we pack it up and head back stateside.

This will be my fifth World Youth Day, and as the time comes closer to us beginning this adventure, the excitement and anticipation of this most holy pilgrimage grows bigger and bigger. There's lots to prepare yet, but there are so many graces to gain traveling with this next group of pilgrims to another World Youth Day!

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