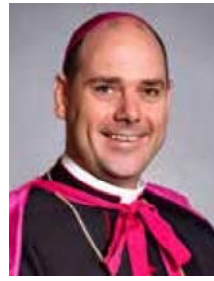


Empty thrills or the power of grace?



The Bishop Speaks

As I write these words I and the twenty pilgrims from the Diocese of Armidale are making our way home from the 2016 World Youth Day in Krakow Poland. We had plenty of sunshine for our pilgrimage but also a few rainy days which didn't dampen our enthusiasm. Though we are now tired we are fired up in faith.

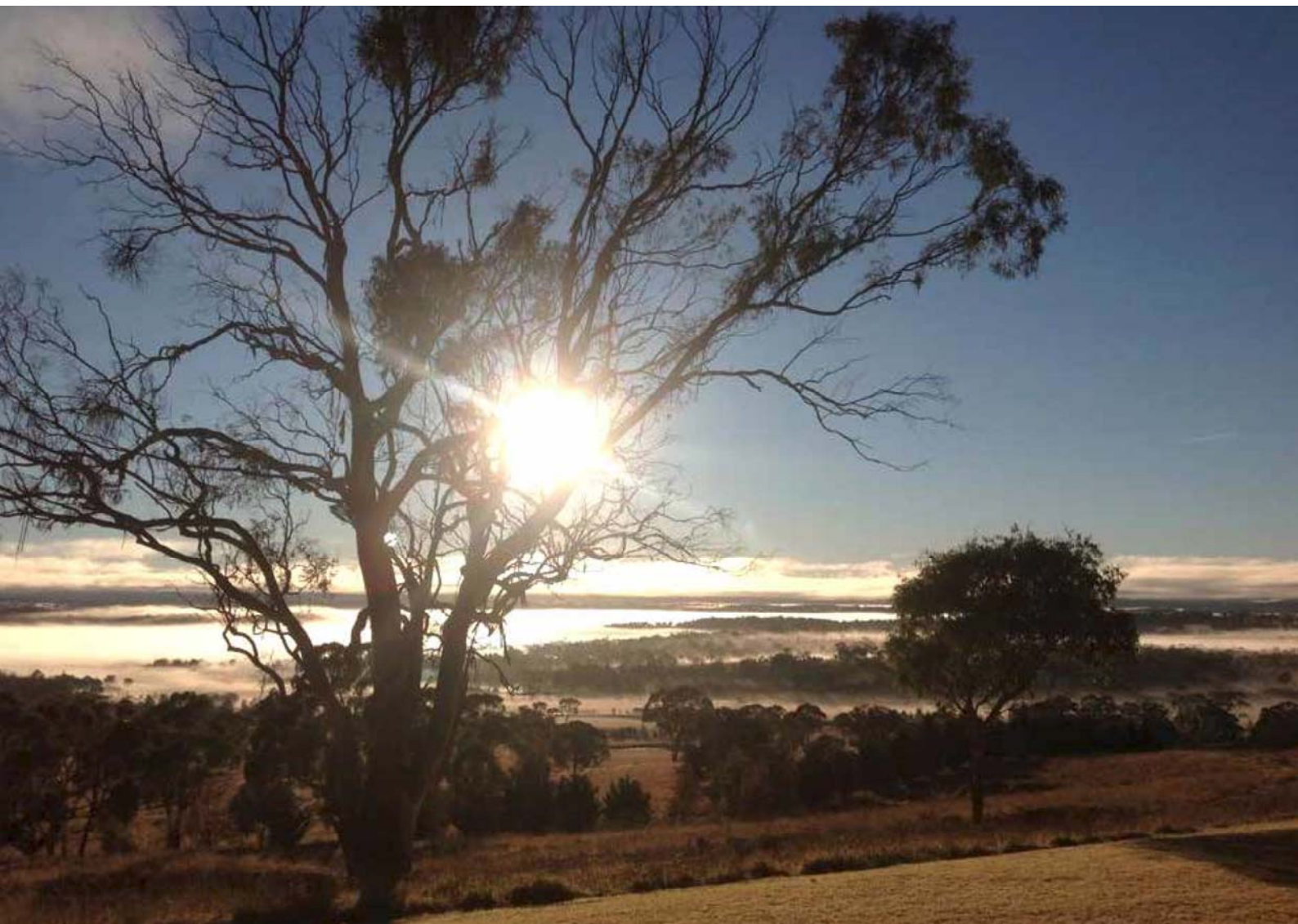
Before the World Youth Day events began we visited Warsaw, the Black Madonna of Czestachova, Auschwitz, John Paul II's hometown of Wadowice, the Divine Mercy Shrine in Krakow and more. We were impressed by the Polish people's deep faith in Jesus Christ, their historical struggles, deep culture, and devotion to the Mother of God.

The Twentieth Century saw this central European nation with strong Catholic roots sandwiched between two of the most ungodly ideologies ever to scourge the face of the Earth. Nazism and

Communism both wreaked havoc with particular savagery upon the people of Poland, Jews as well as Christians.

The inhumanity with which they were treated was dreadful and must never be forgotten. But from this crucible of suffering God raised up some of the greatest saints of the Twentieth Century: Faustina Kowalska; Edith Stein; Maximillian Kolbe; and of course John Paul II. Through these saints God reminded the Polish people, and indeed the whole world, of the immense dignity of *every* human being and of his own immeasurable love and mercy for us.

It was evident that the Polish people are happy and confident to be Catholic. Parish Churches everywhere are literally overflowing with people at every Sunday Mass. And they don't leave their faith at the door of the Church on a Sunday morning when Mass is finished, nor do they leave it at the



door of their home when they go to school and work in the morning. They live and talk their faith openly wherever they go. It was wonderful for our young people to see that this is normal and to realize that our situation in Australia where only the bravest of us are prepared to do this is not normal.

When World Youth Day finally got underway it was, as always, a joyful, colourful, and noisy, celebration of all things Catholic. There were opportunities everywhere to meet other Catholics from all over the world, to pray, to listen, to confess, to celebrate Mass, to dance and to sing. Our group was assigned to morning Catechesis sessions in a huge tent holding thousands of people. We were inspired at talks and Masses given by Cardinals and Archbishops from around the world.

And when Pope Francis arrived there was the simple joy of sheep gathered around their shepherd, of children gathered around their father. Like a good father, his joy at being with us was evident, his love for us was visible, and his teaching to us was clear: God loves us, he loves to be merciful to us, and he loves us to be merciful to each other. He told us not to be couch potatoes but to put on our shoes and go out to be missionaries of mercy.


In particular, Pope Francis told the young people: "Nothing is more beautiful than seeing the enthusiasm, dedication, zeal and energy with which so many young people live their lives. When Jesus

touches a young person's heart, he or she becomes capable of truly great things."

And he asked the youth a question which is poignant for us all: "Are you looking for empty thrills in life, or do you want to feel a power that can give you a lasting sense of life and fulfilment? Empty thrills or the power of grace? To find fulfilment, to gain new strength, there is a way. It is not a thing or an object, but a person, and he is alive. His name is Jesus Christ."

I was impressed by the faith of our young people, by their enthusiasm to practice mercy in their lives, and by their joy amid the challenging circumstances presented by the pilgrimage.

On our pilgrimage we prayed for our families, friends, parishes, and schools back home, and we know that you were praying for us. Please continue to pray for the young men and women who went on the World Youth Day pilgrimage. Please pray that the graces God granted them will grow and bear fruit in faithful and merciful lives.

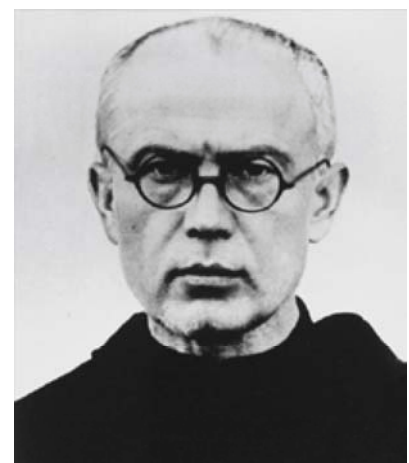
+ 
Most Reverend Michael Kennedy
Bishop of Armidale



St Faustina Kowalska



St Edith Stein



St Maximilian Kolbe



St John Paul II