

# BCYS Lourdes 2012

Dear Reader(s),

This article, where I define article in its loosest possible sense, describes my first experience in Lourdes having accompanying the Brentwood Catholic Youth Service's (BCYS) Pilgrimage. I would like to start with the fact that I composed this article at the request of Father Martin whom gave me free reign in what and how to write. Therefore I authored this, my version of events, entirely biasedly as to dispense to you the reader the emotion that I experienced throughout the Pilgrimage, because without emotion there is no Pilgrimage. As many bibliophiles know well the forwards of books usually contain the author's beg for forgiveness for how bad his or her writing is; claimed due to having their cat died or bruised their thumb during the design stage, so in order to be considered author like I use this as a sort of forward and will be fully honest and admit that writing this intimidated me but after having started writing I found I couldn't stop, though in doing this I may have possibly exchanged quantity for quality. With that in mind I do ask that you please bear with me. Following with my affirmation of honesty I readily admit that I was a tad apprehensive about departing on this Pilgrimage because it was my first time and I didn't really know anyone, it sort of felt like starting a new job, not that I would know. And in further honesty I admit that having gone on this trip has quite substantially changed my views about the world. To explain it I quote one of the BCYS leaders - Brenden - currently a seminarian, for some reason we had quite a few of those and one might begin to suspect that this trip was a religious outing or something, he said, repeatedly, "If you go on a Pilgrimage and you don't change, even a little, then it wasn't worth you going at all". To which I have already admitted it was definitely worth going, I really hope that my mother doesn't appraise section this lest I admit defeat to her.

I was placed in the year 13 group, made up of everyone who has now finished school and A-Levels, bequeathed with the name *Seals of God* which was given to us by our main leader Eamonn Hyde. Our motto ~~stolen~~ adapted from the Navy Seals' motto, whereby Eamonn would shout "Seals" and our group would reply "The easiest day was yesterday", he would then follow with "Dehydration" and we responded with "Is the enemy" lastly more he would scream "Sunburn" and again we shouted "Is the enemy". It is well known that in nearly all martial arts shouting is used to scare the opponent during a fight; though I am not quite sure who our opponent was I am relatively confident we were able to scare the locals, as well as frighten those poor old and sick people who had fallen asleep in the wheelchairs.

On the first night really was a quite night as not much happed we were gathered at a 4 star hotel's bar for drinks and some fun, informally I would like to mention we stayed in a 2 star hotel. We were then briefed on our group's mottos and such and then informed on our jobs for the week.

On the second night was the fun, we had a pub quiz where I was in the winning team, I do distinguish between *in* and *helping* because about half the team including me just drunk beer and laughed, the rest of the night was a blur. Our team was led by Father Paul, the RC chaplain to the University of Essex, and Sherwin the other leader for the *Seals*. Oddly enough Father Paul really helped a lot with those pesky bible references and Sherwin remained silent because he had realised

on every other year he opened his mouth his team lost. After winning we were all awarded medals that we wore every day following. On subsequent nights we had a lot of fun but due to limited space I must refrain from describing them in too much detail; a talent show and a party.

Our main job, as Seals, was to help Father Bob's special needs group, I am just going to call it *the group* from now on, around on their visit to Lourdes. This, to me at least, was an especially important group because these are people whom society forgets, and for a week they can feel like they matter. For 5 days in the year these people can feel like someone cares about them, for 120 hours these people can experience a great friendship with someone and often they become attached. They can listen to someone and have someone, who really cares, listen to them. I myself became particularly attached to a gentle woman named Dorothy and the thing to remember with her is her mother, who was the main caring force in her life, had just died the previous Sunday.

The next day we went to visit the graves of important people - I forget who - and suddenly Dorothy starts shouting for Tina, the groups carer, and runs to her dragging me along. When she gets to Tina she starts crying and then Tina takes me, Dorothy and herself out of the graveyard to a nearby doorstep so we can sit down. This is where I learnt that her mother had recently died; Dorothy rests her head on my shoulder and starts to weep suddenly Tina starts sobbing. Now there are two people on my shoulders shedding tears and I now start to get something in my eye. They're crying and I'm starting to cry, but importantly I hold myself together, and after this interval for what seemed for an hour I reunited with the group holding Dorothy firmly in my arm. You could imagine what the first questions were when I re-joined to excursion "What's wrong", or "How is she", but you would be wrong. Upon gazing at my shoulders in 34 degree weather and a cloudless sky they asked "Has it been raining". We then left the town and travelled to a lake where everyone had ice-cream and drinks all generously funded by Father Bob. I went out in a pedalo with Sherwin; a leader of the *Seals*, and without me paying attention took control over the pedalo and purposely drove me into an overhanging bush whereby I was attacked by a wrath of bugs and prickly leaves. So from then on I made it my purpose to get him back, I start rocking the boat to make it capsize, even though I can't swim, because I know he is scared of falling in the lake. There were some other people in pedalos who were in with some of the group and as there were pedalling their "partner", whom was not pedalling, concurrently shouted "Faster, faster!"

Thereafter we travelled to the supermarket where we all made bets that there would either be a Londis, Tesco or Starbucks there. During the 45 minute coach journey me and Dorothy were laughing away at what now seems pointless and trivial things when Father Bob, a Welshman, on the loudspeaker proclaims "Silence please, we are just about to approach the fourth most holy site in Lourdes" I was trying to hold my giggles while simultaneously Dorothy was trying to make me laugh. As we passed the "fourth most holy site" a great burst of laughter erupted from the coach, because it was Lourdes rugby ground and Father Bob being a huge rugby fan. Then we followed a mostly routine day of wheelchair pushing and things to which I have limited space to characterise.

In subsequent days I went to the baths, which were freezing I might add, and I carried the banner of Brentwood diocese for the evening precession. My holding of the banner holding was not asked or planned for though, all I did was volunteer to relieve Eamonn of it for a few moments while he sorted some things out and before I knew it I was at the front of the diocese and walking to somewhere unknown to me. Throughout the procession my speed was wholly dictated by a short

bald man who zigzagged in front of me why routinely pausing for no obvious reason thereby stopping both me and the whole diocese behind me. About half way through and out of nowhere he then takes several pictures of me, says something in Ukrainian, smiles and turns around leaving me with the questions of legality and privacy. He then leans his candle back while taking pictures of the scenery almost igniting the banner, so I decide to blow his candle out and hide my face behind the banner. When I did this he looks with shock and hell it was funny, well you had to be there to laugh about that. After what felt like 6 hours of holding I arrive at the apex of the steps of what I'll call the *stage* for lack of a better word admiring the most beautiful sea of candlelight below, which stretched back for what seems like a mile. I then look at the many hundreds if not thousands of wheelchairs and I remember that my things which I have lent to people to hold for me are scattered out there and I wonder if I am ever going to get my things back? Thankfully after the worlds hardest scavenger hunt I do manage to reacquire my possessions.

Purposely I am omitting a large portion of things but I must wrap this up, this is possibly the saddest part of the trip, saying goodbye to Father Bob's group. With the longest saying our farewells in BCYS history the group starts to cry, and my world changing epiphany hits me; their week of having a friend, if not a best friend as I would like to think, is ending, their week of mattering to someone is coming to a close and they will have to go back to a world which ignores and suspects them. They will have to go back to feeling lonely, because they are people who have lost brothers and sisters, husbands and wives, mothers and fathers, sons and daughters they have no one and the only thing they have going for them is their faith. This is what changed my view of the world, this is if I dare say what changed me, these people have nothing yet they have the motivation to get out of bed and continue to believe they continue to hope that someone out there will be thinking of them, someone will care they continue to have faith that tomorrow will be better. I remembered what St Paul said "Man is justified my grace alone", and it is quite evident that true grace is true Shibboleth. The group, our group, starts crying and resulting in the girls of the Seals crying and suddenly Rick, one of our leaders, starts to tear up then Dan, a friend of mine, starts to tear up and then darn it I start to tear up. We had to get out of there as quickly as we could or else we would end up losing what little and precious water we had left in our bodies.

I must finish now, I could continue to write much, much more but I have no time and no space. A well-known adage is a picture is worth a thousand words and scientists predict your brain registers about 20 frames per second therefore Lourdes was more than 12 million pictures and 12 thousand million words but I don't have room or patience for that many. I would like to thank you for reading and reaching this far, and being a Seal I must ultimately end with "The easiest day was yesterday".

Yours Sincerely

Terry Moorton