

SEARCHERS OF HAPPINESS



Cluj – Napoca, a city in the North – West of Romania, has been hosting several events of a cultural, social, political, economical and spiritual nature, especially in the past few months, since it has been nominated “The European Capital for Youth” for 2015. One such event was the 13th edition of “The National Gathering for Catholic Young People”, which was organised by the Romanian Bishops’ Conference, held between 22nd and 26th July 2015. There were approximately 2,150 young people, up to 10 bishops, over 100 priests and the same number of Religious, who all went to Cluj in search for authentic happiness.



Our Congregation was represented by Sisters Tereza Ciuchin and Cecilia Bordea. On entering the places of accommodation, every participant was handed “The Pilgrim’s Bag” containing a booklet for the five days, a rain coat, a badge and various other materials which had been purposely sent in by some Congregations, including ourselves.



Like in other years, one of the purposes of this gathering was to give Catholic young people from all over Romania the opportunity to meet and get to know others who share the same faith and beliefs, to take part in all sorts of workshops related to human and spiritual development, to witness to their belief in moral and spiritual values and to a life lived according to these values.

The theme of the event – Searchers of Happiness – had its root in the Gospel quotation “Happy are the pure in heart, for they shall see God” which was meant to awaken in the participants the longing for the true happiness revealed by Jesus Christ and the desire to be open to this divine happiness. Pope Francis has also been quoted on one of the bookmarks we found inside the pilgrim’s bag, “Have the courage to go against the tide! Have the courage to be happy!” The participants were all offered the opportunity of attending daily Mass and catechetics, of taking part in small group discussions, of attending and/or taking part in concerts, of joining in the procession with the Holy Sacrament through the streets of the city. They could also choose what workshops to attend in the afternoons or whether to join the city tours or visit museums and other historical buildings. There was a variety of topics for the workshops, such as: friendship, love, marriage, the gift of life, prayer, social networks, antitrafficking.



Fr. Daniel Ange, a 82 year old priest from Belgium, was the one who had been invited to give the talks. He is well known for founding in 1984 the school for prayer and evangelization called “Jeunesse Lumiere”. One could tell that this priest was a man of God, who spoke the word of God from the heart and with great conviction and enthusiasm. During his talks he touched three main topics:



1. Happiness and Holiness. Father stressed the importance of being grateful for the gift of life and creation and the gift of prayer, which we should use to pray not only for ourselves but especially for others. We are meant to search not only for our own happiness but for the happiness of others too. When we pray for a person, a country or a situation, one way of praying is to repeat the mantra “Jesus – Anca”, “Jesus - Romania” or “Jesus – the conflict in Syria”.

2. “Happy are the pure in heart”. In connection with this theme, Father Daniel referred to each one’s sexuality and invited us to be aware of all aspects that distort the true meaning of sexuality, as well as all sorts of environments (homosexual couples, the transgender community, single parent

families etc.) that can influence in a negative way or confuse a child, an adolescent or a young person, making boys wish to become girls or the other way round, or to have a particular sexual orientation. We should help people who find themselves in these difficult situations to reach a balance in their lives, by loving them, praying for them and providing a loving environment. Each one of us should be happy with the sexual identity given to us by God, and not try to change it.



3. The Holy Eucharist and Sexuality. The definition of the Holy Eucharist and of sexuality, according to Fr. Daniel, is the tight connection between LOVE, LIFE and BODY. Jesus gives himself totally to each one of us in the Holy Eucharist. I cannot do whatever I like with His body because it does not belong to me. In the same way, I cannot do whatever I like with my body because it does not belong to me, but to God who created me. We should often ask for the “Healing grace of the Holy Spirit”, which is given to us in the Holy Eucharist. The Belgian monk also said that, if it comes to this, we should be able to witness to Jesus with our own life, as so many of our ancestors have done in the distant but especially more recent past. He said that we were “the children of our martyrs” and we should be proud and worthy of the blood that they shed for their faith, and then went on to talk about children and young people from all over the world and from every age who chose death rather than let their body be desecrated. We were all very touched by their testimony.

Father Daniel ended his third talk with some questions addressed to each one of us, “Are you ready to give witness about the true happiness? Are you willing to make Jesus Christ and His Church known in the world? Are you ready and willing to protect life whatever the cost?”

On the Saturday (Day 4 of the gathering), Congregations and Associations of lay people were invited to put up displays in the Central Park of the city of Cluj, as part of promoting vocations to the priesthood and Religious life during this Year of Consecrated Life. All through the afternoon, young people participants in the event, priests and bishops and many passers-by were able to ask questions and receive answers to queries of every kind. We were delighted to see so many of them interested in who The Sisters of Saint Paul are and what we are about. We have planted the seed and hopefully some of it will bear fruit!



The following is the message that came very strongly across all through the five days: “Don’t be ashamed to call yourselves Christians, but be proud of it! Pray in such a way that you will be prepared to lay down your life for your faith or at least be able to cope with others’ criticism or irony! Be content with what you have and with what you are! Be happy because God loves you! Spread happiness all around you! Be a true Christian!”

The gathering in Cluj ended officially with a solemn Sunday Mass, after which the 250 of us belonging to the group from the Archdiocese of Bucharest headed for the train station, where we started our journey back home, still wearing the sun hats received as gifts from the Diocesan Youth Ministry Centre, hats that only left our heads every night before going to bed! The intense wave of heat that never left Cluj for the entire five days, the sometimes “fatty” food, the conditions in the students’ hostels where we got accommodation, were all soon forgotten and we were left with the happy memories of a very worthwhile and unforgettable experience where the atmosphere all through the event was conducive to good humour and friendship. The long journey back from Cluj to Bucharest was intertwined with sing songs, jokes and laughter, and ended a very happy week of our summer holidays!



Sisters Tereza Ciuchin and Cecilia Bordea