

## Sr Catherine's story



Sr Catherine began by talking about the Holy Spirit, present at the beginning of time, at the annunciation and among the disciples in the upper room, where it moved fearful men to lay down their lives. She told her audience that the same Holy Spirit came to them at baptism:

“Confirmation completes that baptism. It brings security because it confirms your identity as a son or daughter of a living, caring, faithful God who sees you, knows you and is always with you.”

She quoted Pope Benedict at WYD in Madrid in 2011. “God loves you. This is the great truth

of our life; it is what makes everything else meaningful. We are not the product of blind chance or absurdity. Instead our life originates as part of a loving plan of God. Dear friends, may no adversity paralyse you. Be afraid neither of the world, nor of the future, nor of your weakness. The Lord has allowed you to live in this moment of history so that, by your faith, his name will continue to resound throughout the world.”

She went on to explain how a pilgrimage to the shrine of Our Lady of Fatima when she was 16 had helped her discover God's plan for her life.

“It was completely unexpected. On the first day at the shrine, I heard a voice in my heart say ‘You are going to be a sister’ – and I felt a rush of peace and joy. I walked into the chapel of adoration and found tears of joy rolling down my cheeks. I knew that Jesus was real, alive and truly present there in the Eucharist.”

When she went home, she found herself praying the rosary, felt much more devout at Mass and prayed that she might do well in speed skating – she was trained by her mother who herself had been a very successful skater. “Things began to go very well and I qualified for the elite team, travelling on the World Cup circuit. I became the

National American Champion as well as the Junior Champion and went to the 1998 Winter Olympic Games, coming 6<sup>th</sup> in the 3,000m and 7<sup>th</sup> in the 5000m.”

During that year, though, she started to feel restless. “I thought there is more to life than sport – and money and success.”

She graduated, went to the Art Institute in Chicago and got a degree in photography. During those years, however, she forgot about that call at Fatima. “I went to Mass but didn’t have any Catholic friends. In a way, I turned my back on the Lord.

After university, though, she moved home to live with her mother again, who got her involved in parish events. Through those events, she met a group of young people who were going on a Pro-Life walk across America. “I was intrigued. I was sitting there seeing radiant joy on their faces and thinking ‘What do they have that I don’t?’ Then I thought, they have a relationship with Jesus – that is the difference. They are giving of themselves in a selfless way. That moved me and a prayer came into my head: ‘Lord, what do you want with my life?’”

There was no instant revelation, she recalls, but it was as if she had opened the door just a little bit. “I felt called to join the walk and it transformed my life through daily prayer and the young people I was with. They were living disciples – they evangelised me through their lives.”

She realised things had to change in her life and after a sincere confession that summer, she started to remember the call she had received at 16. “I walked to Toronto for WYD that year, the last one with Pope John-Paul II. There with 750,000 young Catholics, I was blown away by the beauty, the joy of the Church.”

She came back a different person, she says. She soon went to visit the Franciscan Sisters of the Renewal, whom she had met at WYD, in New York. “I saw the sister coming to meet me and felt a deep, deep peace. I knew I was home.”

She assured her listeners: “What God has created you for is happiness. It is to be in relationship with him to journey through life and to be in heaven with him.”

As a sister, she said, she had taken a vow of poverty, chastity and obedience. “We say there is more to life – we are made for heaven. And in Hebrews we are told Jesus is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow. So this means Jesus is faithful and will always be there for you. He sees every tear that falls, gives meaning and purpose in life and looks upon you with love, saying ‘come, follow me’.

“How can we believe this? Because Jesus rose from the dead. Everything is different: now we have hope, life, freedom – and know we are loved.”

She ended by quoting Pope Francis’ Easter homily 2017: “Let us think for a while, each of us, think about the daily problems, the illnesses we have been through or of one that a relative has; let us think about wars, human tragedies and with simplicity, with a humble voice, without flowers, alone, before God, before us, let us say, ‘I do not know how this is, but I am certain that Christ is Risen and I have put a wager on it’. Brothers and sisters, this is what I wanted to say to you. Go home today repeating in your hearts: ‘Christ is Risen’.