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INTERVIEW / SAVANNAH DUDZIK

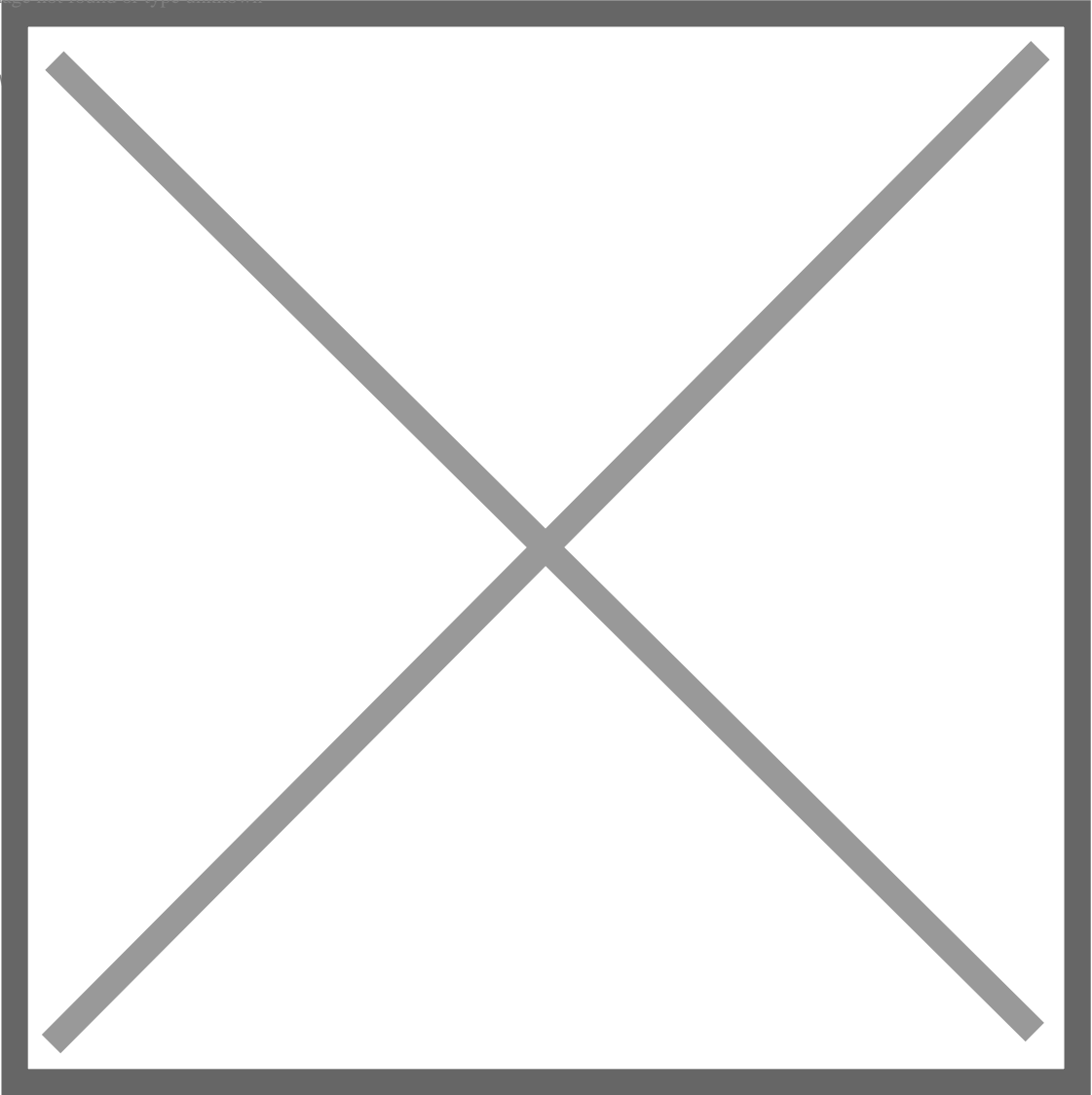
WYD: "Praying before Jesus closed... in a plastic container"

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That the “youth are the hope of the Church”, as the Second Vatican Council teaches ([Gravissimum educationis , n. 2 : EV 1/825](#)), was clearly demonstrated at the WYD. Not so much - or at least not only - for the extraordinary participation with over one and a half million pilgrims. In fact, one of the iconic images of this year’s event is proving to be that of three youths kneeling in prayer in front of three grey boxes stacked one on top of the other. In those ordinary plastic containers someone had decided to place the Holy Eucharist without much dignity. But, the indignation at how the Body of Jesus was being treated, was redeemed by the testimony of faith of three young American Catholics. By the time the shot had gone viral on social media, 22-year-old Savannah Dudzik, who arrived in Lisbon from Florida, realised she was the girl in the white dress in adoration and claimed the gesture on her Facebook profile, moreover not hiding her indignation at having witnessed of what she considers such a lack of respect for Our Lord. The Daily Compass contacted her for an interview.

Savannah, did you expect that photo of you praying at WYD to go viral?

Absolutely not. I didn't even know that photo had been taken! Least of all did I expect it to go viral. In the days immediately afterwards, I knew nothing about the photo nor did I imagine that so many people were as offended as we were at that treatment of the Most Holy Eucharist. I found out only a few days ago when I saw it circulating online.

Can you tell us what happened?

On Saturday evening my friends and I were returning from Eucharistic Adoration when we saw some people kneeling inside a tent at what looked like a plant resting on top of some grey boxes. At first we were confused, we didn't know what they were praying to. So I asked one of the kneeling ladies and she told me that Jesus was in the boxes. That was when I realised that Jesus had been placed inside those grey containers.

What did you think?

I thought it was disrespectful, I didn't understand how they could have chosen to expose Him for worship like that. My friends and I were very angry. Initially we left, then we decided to go back and we recited a rosary of reparation.

Did anyone else join you?

Later in the night many more people came to worship, but at that time it was just the three of us and the two other people who were already there.

Is it true that you reported the episode to the ecclesiastical authorities?

Yes, four days ago I sent an email to the Holy See, the US Bishops' Conference, various

bishops and secretaries, as well as the WYD organisers. But so far I have received no response.

During your stay in Lisbon, did you see any other episodes of disrespect for Christ in the Eucharist apart from that one?

I heard other people talk about abuses, but I didn't see any other abuses myself so I can't offer any other information.

In general, what impression did your experience at WYD leave on you?

I think it was a beautiful event. It showed how universal the Catholic Church is because almost every country was represented at WYD. It was good to see that the opening Mass was very solemn. The City of Joy was beautiful, there were hundreds of confessionals, priests hearing confessions in an open field. And there were many different organisations from all over the world.

Any downsides?

I would say on the last night, in Campo da Graça where the box episode happened, showed the downsides. There were a lot of abuses, not necessarily against the Eucharist but still there were a lot of liturgical abuses that took place there.

Would you go back?

Yes, I would go back to WYD because I think overall it's a wonderful opportunity for young people from all over the world to meet. I think some aspects could have been done better, but I understand the difficulties of organising an event with over a million people. So, overall I think WYD was beautiful. It is true, there have been liturgical abuses but this must not stop anyone from going in the future.

The images of Don Guilherme Peixoto, the DJ priest at the console who played techno music on Sunday morning before the Pope's Mass, have revived the theme of how the Church can bring young people together. Do you think that's the right way?

On Sunday mornings, when young people go to church, they are not looking for a disco atmosphere. And this is what was given to us on the last day of WYD. Young people are looking for something sacred, something that brings them closer to God. And we have had this for thousands of years in the Catholic Church through beautiful music, traditional music that has always been played at Mass. So don't think we need a priest who tries to appeal to young people. It's not what we want. It's not what we think is beautiful. All we seek is the tradition of the Catholic Church.