

## Protesters, pilgrims face minor confrontations on Madrid streets

Gretchen R. Crowe Catholic News Service | Aug. 19, 2011



### MADRID

A paradox was alive in the streets of Madrid as hundreds of thousands of World Youth Day pilgrims shared the sidewalks with local protesters frustrated over Spain's hosting -- and, some believed, funding -- of the weeklong event in a time of economic turmoil.

A group of protesters broke into a run the night of Aug. 18 when police descended on a square near the historic Puerta del Sol (Gate of the Sun) plaza, causing bystanders to duck into the doorways of local bars and cafes. Police then barricaded the Calle Mayor, a main street in Madrid's historic district, as a procession of black-clad pilgrims walked slowly, bearing a giant crucifix.

Flanked by police, participants holding tall candles and arranged in two long rows led the procession. A large group of pilgrims followed, holding the crucifix above their heads and pausing at intervals. Bringing up the rear was a band, in full uniform.

Crowds on the sidewalk -- pilgrims and locals alike -- snapped photos and took videos; some applauded.

The scene served as a preview of the 11th station of the Way of the Cross the evening of Aug. 19, in which pilgrims carried "pasos," or statues, used in Holy Week processions across Spain. Each statue originated in a different Spanish city, with the 11th station, Jesus Is Nailed to the Cross, sculpted in 1942 by Francisco Palma Burgos of the seaport town of Malaga.

At various times throughout the Aug. 16-21 World Youth Day, protesters -- largely young out-of-work residents of Madrid -- confronted young Catholics from around the world. Reactions to the protests among the pilgrims were mixed. Some chose to counter the demonstrations with chants of their own; others prayed.

Dave Myszkiewicz and Robert Zygadlo, both from Edmonton, Alberta, said they responded with chants of "Viva Papa" and "Benedicto" when a group of protesters entered Puerta del Sol with anti-papal signs and a mock popemobile.

"It's nice to see that all of the youths, all of us pilgrims are going to unite and kind of fight back against it," Myszkiewicz said. "I'd rather see that than see the rest of us kind of stand there and not do anything about it."

"Everyone has their own opinion," Zygodlo said. "Sitting there and praying there for them would be a good idea."

"I pray for everybody," agreed Maylis Du Plessis, 22, of France. "It's sad that when we are all gathered for Jesus, that people are still protesting, even if they don't have the choice. I didn't expect it for my first visit to Madrid, to see all the protests."

Lilly Cozzoleno, 21, of Naples, Italy, called police when she witnessed protesters in Puerto del Sol Aug. 17.

"Sometimes we were very afraid ... but they did not attack me," she said.

Despite her fear, Cozzoleno said the only way to react to the protests is "with peace, only peace. ... Jesus taught us this, so I think this is the better way of life."

Delegates from the Philippines were not so lucky. Some experienced a "jarring" cultural shock after being harassed by hostile protesters, reported the Asian church news agency UCA News.

The report said the harassment ranged from chants to obscenities, with some incidents leading to a verbal confrontation.

"I just cannot understand that they brought the Christian faith to the Philippines, but there are now so many anti-Catholic Spanish people. What happened?" asked delegate Jan Dell Posion.

Two Filipino delegates from Dubai -- Chris Asero, 28, and Rome Jarlego, 27 -- said they were walking in Madrid Aug. 17 when they saw protesters harassing Italian, German and French pilgrims.

"Some were already cursing. Their placards were really derogatory," Asero said.

Jarlego said the protesters were against government spending for World Youth Day. They wanted that money to be given to poor countries like Somalia or even Spain itself, which is facing its own economic crisis over debt.

The Spanish government has said the cost of hosting World Youth Day, including extra security, was being paid for by private funds and donations.

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