

Isaac Liu, Senior

I'm so glad I was able to go to LA Congress this year. Not only was I able to skip school during a stressful week in March, but I was able to learn about my faith. Youth day was alright. I can see why they would have to make it slightly cornier because they need to appeal to kids (albeit they're high schoolers. Maybe it's just because we're from the Silicon Valley that just gives us mild depression 24/7 so we aren't as hyped about singing and dancing our lungs out for Jesus), but the talks were still impactful. Although we didn't get to see Fr. Rob's talk, I found Fr. Mike Schmitz's talk in the Arena to be quite touching. I was able to relate to most, if not all of the messages he was trying to send out. He talks about the struggle of not knowing God's plan for us and about specific experiences dealing with a loss or questioning our beliefs. I actually picked out a good quotation from his talk that was pretty neat: "Even if I don't know the meaning to this moment, I know that this moment has meaning." It's probably not the exact words, but it was something along the lines of that. Kinda interesting cuz I'm always for being able to gather experiences and try and find some meaning behind it. However, in those unique times I can't always find the words to describe it. But I know that it's special to me somehow, or else I wouldn't remember it. It reminds me of anamnesis which for example, if we listen to a really old song we haven't listened to in a while, it brings us back to a memory in our past that we hold really dear to us. And that unique thing, person, place, or thing that triggers that memory every time, is an anamnesis. If you wanna put it in Church or Jesus terms, the Eucharist would be an example of anamnesis. Anyway, the actual talks after Youth day, so the second day, were really good. It was like a mini Justice Summit that really explained some things that the Church dealt with. I liked Bishop Barron's steps to get the youth back in the Church cuz I can definitely see how some Bell kids call themselves Catholic, but don't really practice it. And although I'm a victim of this, hearing the steps Bishop Barron described were quite affirming and motivated me to lead by example, I guess. The LGBTQ talk was better than I thought. Engaging, fun, simple, and the story of the Roman centurion and Zacchaeus were good. Disneyland was awesome, idk if I mentioned that already. But, yea, keep that in there cuz that can help kids get more interested in this trip, cuz who doesn't wanna tell their friends they skipped school to go to Disneyland, and oh yea, we had these pretty good talks about faith as well. I kinda forgot what happened on Saturday, but it was still pretty fun. I only remember getting ice cream. The concert and meeting Fr. Rob felt kinda surreal, good songs, a powerful message, and lots of passion. That was good. Yea, overall, this trip was awesome. It came at a pretty opportune time so it was about ten times better than it was. I definitely would love to go again and I would love to invite my younger cousin to come along. All in all, great experience.

Christine Wouang, Junior

My first time at LA Congress was an amazing experience. I was super excited when Damian said we were going to Youth Day because from what I hear about other Youth Days is that it's really fun and really worth it. The talks in the beginning were very enlightening and I loved the music ones especially. I had two favorite talks. My first favorite talk was Father Tony. He talked a lot about race and how race doesn't define us and how no one should be treated differently. He also brought some of his students with him to LA Congress and their stories made me cry a lot because they really touched me. My second favorite talk wasn't so much a talk but it was Father Rob Galea's concert. This was my first Catholic concert and the stories that went with the songs made me listen to the songs more closely. I loved the songs as well and the concert and signing in the end were both super fun. Also, there was an encore at the end and I felt so happy and excited. I don't think I've ever felt that way about Catholic music before.

Another exciting part of this congress was becoming closer with my class and the teachers. During the Disneyland portion of the congress, it was exciting mainly because of the people I went with. I was able to become closer with all my classmates and the teachers as well. We shared lots of laughs and memories I probably will never forget. I was also able to have a couple of heart-to-heart conversations with some people I needed to talk to. I was able to sort out some misunderstandings and problems and I felt very peaceful at the end.

Another one of my favorite activities was the sacred space. This was a space for people to reflect, meditate, pray, and think. I thought a lot about my life at the moment and my past. I realized a lot of things about myself, such as the fact that I have so much pent-up anger that I haven't been able to forgive those

I needed to forgive and apologize to the people I wronged. I realized that the reason why I'm not satisfied with myself is because I never tried. In this time that I really understood why I do the things I do, why I say the things I say, and why other people treat me the way they do. It's because I'm not trying my hardest to follow God's path for me. I think this was the biggest lesson I learned from LA Congress this year.

All in all, LA Congress was definitely one of the best weekends of my life. I hope I can go again next year!

Cleo Lin, Junior

On March 20, I (along with four other classmates) embarked on what I then believed would be a simple three day retreat with multiple tedious hours in workshops. Instead, what I was met with was an eye-opening congregation that helped me learn, reflect, and reassess my Catholic faith and what it means to be Catholic.

Community. In a society that is ricocheting in all different directions of beliefs and moral ideas, it was refreshing and gratifying to be in an environment where one could feel safe and welcomed to freely express your beliefs and celebrate your faith without fear of being criticized or judged. It was extremely inspiring to see such a large assembly of devout people who shared the same beliefs as me and loved their religion to such a magnitude. The workshops and the faith of those around helped me conceive that God is truly working around us and is present in our everyday lives.

Understanding. The workshops I attended touched on questions I had about Catholic beliefs coming into the congress, such as topics pertaining to contemporary issues, social reforms, and conservative viewpoints I deviated from. Priests help me better understand what the LGBTQ+ community meant to our church and how to properly welcome them into our faith. Many of the workshops also touched on controversial topics that helped me shape my worldview, such as the pros and cons of certain political parties and how that coincides with our Catholic beliefs.

Faith. This congress was also a great time for me to spend more time with God. I especially liked the Sacred Space we attended where there was a guided meditation gallery walk, a prayer circle, a monstrance, and another gallery where viewers could write about their faith and how they were actively trying to become a better Catholic. Many of the workshops touched on questions that I had about my Catholic faith, helping me ascertain my beliefs.

This congress has given me so much to take away and dwell on my faith and I have learned so much about my Catholic faith (even things that I didn't consider to be pertinent to the church) To be honest, I was genuinely and pleasantly surprised when I found that I was enjoying myself. Thank you to Claire, Damian, Becky, and Maddie (lol) for taking such great care of us this weekend, taking us to Disneyland, and organizing such an astounding experience.

Sarah Chung, Junior

If I were to really choose how much I wanted to say, I would honestly have almost no words to describe the trip. The trip was fun, relaxing, exciting, and definitely informational. This year, we not only attended LA Congress, but we also got the chance to attend Youth Day before it. It was really great to get to know our own group better and become close friends, but it was also great that we were able to meet new people that are passionate about their faith and/or want to learn more about it. I was able to relate and connect to many of the stories that were spoken about on both Youth Day and LA Congress.

For Youth Day, I learned that I am not the only one who may feel cast aside or not cared for, but many others do too and the whole point of this years these, "Trust, God's Gotchu" was to implement that we should not worry about the trivial matters and just really enjoy the life we have with those who you love and care about. We also learned what other things we can implement in our lives that can be another form of prayer to God, since praying does not mean "to praise", but "to plead" and we are all asking for God to help, protect, heal, save, etc. Through the use of music, we are not only able to project our words of prayer out to God, but also our emotions that we may have holed up inside of us that may never have the chance to come out until the use of song, melody, and most of all, the interconnection with others just like us.

For LA Congress, all of the talks we attended and speakers we met were all very eye opening to us and how we may perceive things now versus before. Their theme this year, "Thirsting for Justice" was a really great theme to go by because they addressed the many problems that have either been going on for many years or have just arised. They spoke about the reasons why young children and young adults have been drifting away from faith, the question about whether people really matter, the problems with the Church and the LGBTQ community, etc. All of these issues spoken about really took my mind to another level of understanding of how I should perceive and understand things that occur around me and how I should deal with them.

Just for a little spice on top, the additional package deal of going to Disneyland for some fun with the class was probably the best thing ever. I personally have not really gone out with friends before and have made such a closely connected group that I can call another family, and I would definitely have to say that the extra package to Disneyland was definitely worth it since it strengthened my bond with the rest of my class and teachers.

Overall, this trip was all I could ever wish for when it includes creating better relationships with our personal self, friends, and our faith. It really taught me to love myself and the community more.

If I had to say, I definitely believe that my faith has grown stronger in many fields and I have enjoyed, and most definitely will continue to enjoy, my time with God and all of my friends that I have created a deeply connected relationship with.

Ryan Tsia, Senior

LA Congress Reflection

LA Congress is a truly transformative experience and has strengthened my belief and enthusiasm in the Catholic faith. Like many students who go to public schools, I do not have much exposure to Catholicism outside of mass and CM class on Sundays. LA Congress provides a refreshing view of the variety and strength of the Catholic community. Seeing people of all walks of life come together and share in the faith is a powerful reminder of how inclusive the church truly is. For me, one of my greatest takeaways from LA Congress is the reintroduction of standard catholic teachings, but with a refreshing new way to look at it. My exposure to the faith has always been just limited to church on sunday and hearing different perspectives from all around was a new and invigorating experience. I honestly wished that I was involved in more activities like LA Congress and that this opportunity had been offered to me earlier. It is my hope that LA Congress will continue to be offered to future CM classes and for any who wish to share the Catholic faith.