

**Day Two - Sunday, 6/22 - St. Anthony of Padua, Litchfield to St. Bridget, Cornwall to Holy Family Retreat House, West Hartford**

We pack up the car, pump up the tires, load up the water bottles, say a prayer and are on the road by 6:30 a.m. Wow great job getting out the door everyone!! Something tells me this is going to be a great day because we are on the road on time! I’m riding alone again today but more support to the rescue tomorrow. I really don’t mind since I stop every 5 minutes to take a picture of a cow – a holy cow (my favorite joke that my kids hate). It’s quiet and peaceful on the back roads this beautiful Sunday morning. I’m grateful that the riders have on their fluorescent green jackets because it is hard to see them in the early morning shadows. Let the hills begin!

We are headed from Litchfield to St. Bridget’s church in Cornwall to speak after Mass. Unfortunately, I go right by the church because it is just around a corner and set back from the road. I pull up next to a person walking to ask directions and ask him where the church is. His answer to me indicates to me that he appears to be perhaps homeless and/or have some kind of mental illness or on some substance because we didn’t share the same reality. I thought about how if I were writing a screenplay for a movie, this is exactly how I would write it. It brings Brake the Cycle advocacy work to life for me. A man outside welcomes us and tells me that this adorably small church surrounded by a stone wall is the most photographed church in CT and over 100 years old. A bit of online searching tells me that P.T. Barnum is rumored to have donated a lot of money to build it. The service at St. Bridget’s begins. The magnificent sound of the organ and the organist’s voice fill the air. I sneak in next to John Ryan who always and forever makes me feel welcome in the spot next to him. The Fr. Francis Fador begins his homily and before you know it I’m in tears. His words touched me in a way I can’t describe. I wish I could remember it all. He talked about dependency on each other, on the church, on community, solidarity and addiction. He also spoke about the passion of the people and being there for each other. We settle in the basement of the church to do a condensed version of our presentation. The State Representative comes to hear our presentation which is a win. There were many people who stay after Mass to hear the presentation and they were very engaged and passionate. The State Rep also talks to the crowd and seemed genuinely concerned and addressed people’s concerns. A man from Germany was very vocal and expressed his concerns.

After the presentation, I took a walk to look at the Housatonic River that runs behind the church with Wayne and Eric. I was, of course, taking pictures of the beautiful river and I spoke to God and said “God can you give me something beautiful and special to take a picture of like an Eagle or a hawk or something?” Probably 10 minutes later while standing in the parking lot of the church, everyone starts to get all excited and I turn around and there is a Doe and her Fawn running across the church yard. Thanks! I wish all my prayers were answered so quickly! I take a picture of the organist per Claire’s request and off we go again.

I stop across the street from the church at the gas station to get ice and I see there is a man on a bicycle with his bike completely packed up with gear. I approach him and to ask him if he could use any ice, food or water. We strike up a conversation (of course…my husband says I’ll talk to anyone and here is evidence of that yet again). He was traveling by bike from New Mexico to Bristol, CT (over 2000 miles) to see his daughter and his first grandbaby. He told me about his bike being stolen and some guy he ran into just gave him his because he said that this guy (the guy I met) needed it more than him. He told me that he got hit by a car and the woman was drunk. He wasn’t seriously injured but he took the keys out of the ignition and took her back to the bar where she had come from. He handed them to the owner of the bar and the owner of the bar said that was his wife and he appreciated him bringing her back. The owner said he was so appreciative that he let him pitch his tent in the middle of the bar after it closed and told him he could drink whatever he wanted. He said that he’s been on the road for 7 ½ weeks and hopes to get there tomorrow. Then some guy just offered to take him quite a ways down the road so he wouldn’t have to deal with the hills and was hopefully going to come back for him while he waited at the gas station. He also said that at one point on his journey he flipped over his handlebars and the bridge for his teeth fell out and he ran over it or someone ran over it so he had to ship it back to his dentist. His dentist fixed it and he had his dentist ship it to his friend in OH and then when he finally reached his friend’s house in OH, his friend told him that he wasn’t at home any longer because he had a bad accident and broke his back and was being taken care of by someone else. When I left him, I asked him if he believed in God and he whips out some rosary beads and medals around his neck. We exchanged contact information and I wished him safe journeys.

After that we (oh I mean “I” – I guess I feel like one of the support team is with me in spirit) chased riders up and down hills as we made our way back to Holy Family Retreat Center. We stopped for lunch in Litchfield and had salad and pizza. Thank you support team for saving me some salad. I really appreciate it. The group is noticeably exhausted. Once back, a welcome shower feels stupendous. Mary and Tom Breen arrive. They were tasked with driving my car from St. Bridget church in Manchester to Holy Family and only brought the keys due to a misunderstanding – it’s hysterical really how many things go wrong but then are put right again. But you know what? It is absolutely, perfectly, fine. To quote Lou Terzo at some point today he said “Don’t worry about it. The Holy Spirit will take care of it.” It seems to be this week’s theme. Thank you Pam for teaching me F.R.O.G. (Fully Rely On God). Suzanne Ryan and her mother arrive to join us for dinner. Steve DiMotta joins us to help with support. Thank you Steve!! We gather for an incredible dinner that Holy Family prepared for us.

Then with some spirits, we recap the day. Everyone expresses one word to describe their day and says a few words. I like this tradition we are establishing!! What a great and crazy group of people we have here. I enjoy each and every one of them. And I am grateful for the private and open conversations and the chance to get to know each of them individually. Especially when they get in my car for a reprieve after going up those hills. The conversations are often light but sometimes very deep. It feels good to be here. There is a reason we are all here together on this mission. I am also thankful to Tom S. for keeping me from chips and cookies.

Wendy

**Another Perspective of Day 2:**

The morning dawned early and cool, and we got out of dodge (and the rectory) before Father woke up.  Whoops, were we supposed to sleep in the house?  As Wayne said, we took the loose interpretation of "make yourselves at home".  We did all have our windbreakers on, except Tom, and I ditched mine early on that first uphill on Beach Road heading from Litchfield to Goshen.  How beautiful was that country road - no traffic, no heat, just us and Wendy's cows.  I enjoyed riding with Claire, Pam, and Wayne.  Pam slipped a chain twice early - that was a theme for all of us - I think most of us slipped our chain between gears, lots of downshifting I guess.  Rt. 4 in Goshen to Cornwall was gorgeous too, we passed a bison farm by Mohawk Mtn.  The big 9% grade downhill off the mountain did not disappoint.  I'm sorry I missed Johnny's 53 mph, but personally chickened out and road the brakes downhill.  When Pam reached the bottom and stated that she hit 37 mph - you know it's a hill.

What more can be said about St. Bridget in Cornwall?  Perfect Mass, music, homily, presentation.  It all fell into place.  See the pictures Wendy took with Michael, or organist/cantor.  It will bring you right back to "Day by Day".  The presentation was a great success.  Bob's work with the legislators started paying off on this day when the first of the local reps appeared at our presentation.  The condensed presentation was a huge success. I learned a lesson this day.  Knowing this was an after-Mass event - a Social Hour, as the sign said - with "coffee and..." I thought it might be best to informally have discussions with folks about our mission.  But John Ryan and Lou were not to be deterred.  In John's words, we cannot guarantee people will get the message that way.  Sure enough, someone asked us when we were going to start the presentation!!  The crowd of 33 (Mass attendance was about 60, which, by the way, nearly filled the 10-pew per side church) was totally engaged.  We heard shouts of "amen", we had dissent and challenge, respectfully, and we had our local representative.  Exactly the kind of discourse that we need to have.

Did we have our laughs on Sunday?  How about Joan with 3 coats on during Mass?  An enduring image I have of the week is Joan grimacing, holding her side and stifling a laugh.  She was in a catch-22.  It's too easy to make her laugh, and yet it was torture for her to do so.  The "rib" jokes were coming fast and furious.  I remember Wayne bringing her close with an arm around her shoulder and saying, "C'mere McRib!"  Then Joan made us line up and take those funny pictures with our alternating leans.  And Paul Fritz insisted on taking a personal snap shot of each of us.

The hills we mentioned?  I tried to prepare you all.  I remember my note to Lou after Johnny and I did the cue sheet in early June:  Simsbury Mtn (rt 185) on Saturday will look like a bump compared to the rest of the weekend.  And, if it is possible, Sunday will be harder than Saturday's journey to Litchfield.  6,800 feet of elevation gain over the 2 days.  I'm now counting hills not in feet or miles of uphill, but in decades of the rosary.  Route 45 in Warren, CT is a Sorrowful Mystery.  Rt. 118 in Harwinton is a full Novena.  I remember being at a stoplight in Harwinton, thinking the worst of the hills might be over.  It turned green, we set forth, came around a bend and Boom - a huge uphill to the center of town (I looked back and saw it was a 9% grade).  I heard Lou shout a series of expletives behind me when the hill came into view.

We had a classically long BTC lunch stop in Litchfield.  Thanks Kelly, Joan and Wendy so much for getting the pizza and salad.  I remember Lou zonked out in the grass, fast asleep.

I did enjoy the hills, especially knowing what was waiting for us at the end of the day - shower, dinner, drinks, beds at Holy Family.  We've all said this time and again, how temporary is our discomfort compared to those in poverty?  And with that relative security I was able to enjoy the slower pace.  I realized that when your speedometer is hovering between 4-5 mph for 1-2 miles at a time, you can smell the lilacs and honeysuckle, and see the wildflowers and bunnies on the side of the road.

For laughs, nothing beats the move by Tom Sacerdote.  We were on Rt. 4 in Burlington, thinking the coast was finally clear of hills.  Tom took his bike off the van, got on, pedaled about a 100 yards, rounded a corner, saw another huge hill looming and promptly turned around and high-tailed it back to the van - against traffic - hoisted his bike back onto the van and reclaimed his position in the backseat.  Classic!

Riding up one hill I passed John Ryan and Wendy loading beer into the car at a package store for later at Holy Family.  What a welcome sight.

Sunday back at Holy Family, we said goodbye to Kelly, welcomed the Breens and Steve.  Suzanne came for dinner with her mom, and brought bottles of wine!  We missed Fr. Terry, who was away at the same conference as Fr. Stephen - who's birthday celebration (with cake from Mozzicatto's) we also missed this year.

Lou continued his highly successful "one word" sharing prompt that evening.  After a nightcap, most of us hit the rack.  I, for one, was asleep before I hit the pillow.

Eric