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**2017 Day Five - Wednesday, 6/28 – Holy Family Retreat Center, West Hartford to St. Mary Magdalen Parish, Oakville**

I have to say I made a mistake about Gary leaving last evening, He did not.  He is still with us on Day 5.

We started Day 5 with 7:00 am mass with Fr. John.  Today's gospel was about St. Irenaeus.  Today is his feast day.

Irenaeus' name means "lover of peace" and that is what Fr. John preached on today.

We took St. Irenaeus with us today.

After our breakfast we got ready for the hills we would encounter today.  Everyone know they would come so the prayer this morning was extra special.  We would need this prayer and many other to get up those hills.

We hit the first bad hill in Bristol, long, steady climbing, long, long, tiring.  I prayed many Our Fathers and Acts of Contritions to get up that hill.  And I thought of the poor struggling with their hills everyday.

We got to Memorial Drive in Bristol.   I've been here a few times going to Noah's basketball or baseball games so all was familiar.

We were a bit tired from the hills.  Not only the "ups" but the "downs".  We had to be on our toes going downhill.

We wanted to take a small break and decided to stop at St. Anthony of Padua church in Bristol.  We were hoping it would be open so we could use the restrooms.

As we entered the parking lot it looked totally like no one was there.  We cycled around to the back.  As we did so we were all Amazed when we saw a life size statue of Mother Teresa!  Here we are most of us from St. Bridget parish now called The Church of St. Teresa of Calcutta.  Coincidence?  No, The Holy Spirit brought us here.  Another Holy Spirit moment. And to top it off as I was about to check to see if the door to the church was unlocked I said out loud, "Okay Holy Spirit, do your thing".  And, the door was unlocked.

We all used the facilities.

Gary had left us to go to the bike shop down the road to get his bike checked.  He had been riding using limited gears and did not want to have to challenge more hills like that.

He returned as we were having our snacks.  He informed us he had his bike repaired and that his break cable was only being held together by two strands.  Yikes!! What could have happened on those downhills.  The bike shop fixed his bike and took no payment.  Another Holy Spirit moment!!

What a day thus far.

Finally Fr. Alphonso Fontana came out to greet us.  We had a nice discussion with him, told him about our mission and kind of set him up for next year's ride.  He would be the pastor of the merged community of St. Anthony's parish and St. Ann's parish now to be called St. Francis de Sales.

Before we left we wanted a photo with the statue of Mother Teresa and we asked Fr. Fontana to join us.  I am sure that photo came out quite nice.

We challenged the next hill, and the next.  I kept praying.  I though of Claire and knew she made the right decision. These hills would have killed her.

I could not wait for our lunch break.  John was up ahead scouting out a place for us to stop.

He and Wendy came upon the coolest place, Hillside Equestrian Meadows (Building God's Kingdom) in Wolcott.  We were really curious about this place.  There were statues of life size horses and a multitude of other animals.

There were religious quotes all throughout the place.  Even a quote form Mother Teresa.

A giant cross welcomed you as you entered.  It could be seen form three directions.

Where we ate lunch, in a little barn, there was a sign hanging on the wall.  It read, "If your enemy is hungry, give him food! If he is thirsty, give him something to drink!  This will make him feel ashamed of himself, and God will reward you! " Proverbs 25:21-22

Kind of cool.  Reminded me of Matthew 25.

Before we left, Eric jumped up on one of the life size wooden horses, had put on a cowboy hat and the cameras started shooting.  Some fun was had!

Just before leaving when we were do our next photo shoot thee proprietor asked us if we wanted some of the bread her baker friend left with her.  There was too much for them.  We said yes and knew we could give to the shelter.

Okay.  Now the serous hill climbing.  We would be entering into the Waterbury area.

The hills were as we expected.  The folks on the streets were making comments like "you guys are crazy!" Some gave us encouragement but still though we were nuts.  It did inspire us to keep going.  Slow and steady.  We all made it up those hills.

The scary part was when the downhills came to an end at a stop sign.  Here you are cruising down a nice hill, doing 30, 40 mpr and you have to stop suddenly.  Wow!  I sure used a lot of my breaks.  I will probably need new pads.

I did clock myself doing 42 mpr on one downhill outside of the city and chickened out because it was getting too scary.  Johnnie hit 51 mpr.  You are dead if you ever hit a bad spot in the road!  Thank you Holy Spirit!!

Eric set up an appointment at the Salvation Army Shelter prior to us getting to Oakville and St. Mary Magdalen's.

We met with Sophia, the executive director of the shelter.  She and her assistant, Bree gave us a tour and provide us with a lot of information.  We were being educated quite well.

Here are the notes Pam took while we got our tour.

Just reopened

Center Park indoor playground

Only open 2 days a week due to cuts

Used by community - parents must stay with children

Family Shelter

40 beds which is approximately 9 families

May stay for 90 days and do not need to leave shelter during the day

Shelters are being underfunded - need to apply for many grants but those are giving less money.

More work - less staff and money

The business community is very supportive

Only 4 full time workers

Homelessness is higher in the summer

Vulnerability index is given to clients to qualify for supportive housing not everyone qualifies

More help needed for 18-24 year olds who are struggling.

Chronic Homelessness is not over in CT as Gov. Malloy implied

Also, about 25% of Homeless want to remain homeless believe it or not.  They do not want to be told you have to do this, or do that.

Problem really is lack of education to know there are ways to get help.

Sophia was excellent!  Very informative.  We all left feeling so grateful for people like her that do wonderful things for so many with so little.

I gave her a bunch of the Free Meals Cards and flyers to use.  She thanked me.

Wendy gave her half of the bread we had received from Hillside.

Now for some more hill climbing.  I kept thinking we were close to the church.  Deacon George had asked me to call him before we got too close to the church because he would have the Bible Camp kids at the school greet us.

When we got to the school, struggling to get there, we all put on our happy faces, our not too tired faces for the kids.  They had drawn pictures and welcome signs for us.  So nice!  Kind of weird to be treated in a celebrity type roll when you are doing something for poverty awareness.  I think of the people who cannot ever get a chance to enjoy this kind of thing.  It makes me sad.

Now the church was just down the hill.  A quick turn to the left at the bottom of the hill.

Funny, talking to Deacon George he told me he could have gotten us there with us avoiding most of the hills.  When Eric heard that he felt a little bad.  But, the hill experience is humbling and teaches us about the struggles of the poor.  We endure for a few hours.  They endure 24/7.

We had to rush to the showers at the Watertown high school.  I forgot my soap and toiletries but not my towel and clothes.  It worked out fine.  Pam felt funny because she had to be escorted to the other side of the gym for the ladies showers.  She was our only female rider today and tomorrow.

All worked out well.  Nice a clean and shiny.  We got back to the church.  Church members and part of their social justice committee were there with Deacon George to set up for our potluck diner.  The food was awesome! I got stuffed.

We did not get many more folks other than who was there for the dinner.  Maybe there were 12 to 15 people.

Deacon George had lead us in prayer before dinner and now lead us off before the presentation with a little Matthew 25 of his own.  Nice start.

The presentation went off very well.  Everyone did their part well.  The themes of CST really seemed to work for us this year.  The Solidarity slide came into play even with this parish as we found out that their pastor had just learned he was being transferred to another parish and St. Mary Magdalen would be getting a new priest.  They were not happy about it but would deal with it.  It is what it is.  So many changes.

We were all tire and cots had been provided from one of the shelters.  Joan and I decided to sleep on our blowup mattress instead.

Before we bedded down for the night we did the word/phrase of the day.

**Pam** - Blessed

**Wendy** - Farm; Cross;  Bread

**Lou** - Amazed/Surprised - want to be homeless

**John** - Loving it!  - he seems so much more relaxed and enjoying the ride as part of support

**Jim** - Changing perspective

**Eric** - no word - too tired

**Johnnie** - joy in the community - riding up hills

**Gary** - coincidence - Not!

Not meant to understand, just believe

**Tom**- Solipsism

**Mary** - Dependence

**Joan** - caring for other people

Done by Lou