



Raven's Bread

Food for Those in Solitude

Vol: 2 No: 4 November 1998

Raven's Bread is a quarterly newsletter for hermits and those interested in the eremitical life. This newsletter affirms this life style as a valid means of living in deeper fidelity to God and in spiritual union with the whole human race. ***Raven's Bread*** is a collaborative effort and thus depends on the shared reflections, stories, news, notices, letters, and information from hermits themselves. The ***Raven's Bread*** Web page is an abbreviated version of our full newsletter, which also includes a Bulletin Board and Reader Forum.

Please send your written contributions, as well as address changes and subscriptions to:

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The annual subscription to the printed newsletter is \$7.50. Any extra donations will be used to subsidize subscriptions for hermits who cannot afford the full cost.

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Raven's Bread (formerly ***Marabou***) derives its name from the experience of Elijah, the prophet, in 1 Kgs. 17: 1-6. A raven, sent by God, nourished him during his months of solitude at the Wadi Cherith (the Cutting Place).

Thoughts in Solitude

If the solitary were to have a patron saint, it seems to me, it would have to be St. Joseph. He is the one who surrendered himself to *not knowing*. He could not know, for certain, that Mary was with a holy child. She was unmarried and pregnant. He could not prove that any of his dreams were true, yet he followed them. They were not minor dreams. They involved fleeing his homeland at night. They involved his marrying a woman not pregnant by himself. They determined when he would bring Mary and Jesus home -- and not to the home he envisioned.

And he would die before ever knowing if this was, indeed, the Messiah. He would die, not knowing.

Men and women who live solitary lives out of a feeling of vocation, will live that life uniquely. Some will cling to the figure of Jesus; some to the mystery of God; some to faith in the Holy Spirit. There is nothing that "unites" solitaries -- no creed, no covenant, no way of life. Except one thing.

The solitary has one defining characteristic. Like St. Joseph, he or she abdicates their need to know. They say, in essence, "I have a purpose. It is to love the unknowableness of God."

Without Joseph's protection and his trust in his dreams, Mary might have been stoned to death; the child might have been massacred.

Mary died knowing her child was the Messiah; Joseph died not knowing if anything he did was what was needed for the resurrection story to happen.

Solitaries are a state of the heart, it seems to me. There is some final battleground that each faces in his or her own way. If they follow solitude to its source, they will eventually see the unknowable-ness of God in stark unnegotiable terms.

Nothing -- not moments of transcendence, not feelings that prayers were answered, and certainly not church affirmation -- will result, for the solitary, in any certainty. Indeed, it is a severing moment when the solitary accepts unequivocally that affirmation and confirmation, from society, church, or God, will not be forthcoming. But they continue anyway. As Joseph did.

Such solitaries, having crossed this terrible knowing, sink deep into unknowing no longer needing to understand God or God's ways. This is not a callous indifference to evil and suffering. It is not an abdication of peace and

Church a class of persons that are today ever more numerous.

Consecration of life forms the heart of the hermit existence undertaken for love of God and humanity. It includes the practice of the evangelical counsels: chastity undertaken in solitude of spirit and heart; continual poverty in everyday life, experienced in prayer and in manual labor. (Most hermits must live from their labor and do not require alms except in case of necessity.) And obedience, by no means the least of the vows, is always a submission to the "now" of the divine call received as a personal vocation, an obedience that presupposes a regularity of life lived in continual dependence on God. This includes obedience in prayer, by which the hermit follows the divine will - graces, light, consolations, as well as aridity and obscurity (the latter being sometimes prolonged and very painful.)

The three counsels thus undertaken become signs of a love vowed to God and to humanity, centered on Christ's cross which unites all in His total gift for the salvation of the world. The eremitic life so pledged, is, *par excellence*, a consecrated life.

A sacred bond confirms the observance of the three counsels. This pledge can be a vow or a promise, whether reinforced or not by an oath. It can likewise be made by a public declaration, in the manner of the "propositum sanctum" of consecrated virgins (about whom Canon 604.1 speaks). We note that a promise is not made directly to God (as is a vow) but is made "propter Deum" - to the honor of God who calls and gives the grace of vocation, fidelity and constancy. The "propositum sanctum" can be, as a public declaration, a true sacred bond. It is made before God and the Church and expresses a firm will to follow Christ more closely and to imitate Him more faithfully in the solitary life. It should express all the essential elements of this vocation in the formula of profession. It will make reference to the plan of life, which (approved by the local bishop) will provide details for daily living.

(Excerpted from "*The Law of Consecrated Life: Commentary on Canons 573-606*")

The Hermit's Moon

By

Richard Simonelli, Boulder, CO

For those living in the northern tier of the northern hemisphere, the full moons of September, October and November usher in a season of contemplation and renewal. Traditionally, September's *Harvest Moon* was a time of celebration and feasting when the crops came in. When we lived closer to the land, September was a golden time of hard work and agricultural bounty. The air grew cool and bracing after a long, hot summer. Daylight faded with the equinox.

The full moon of October saw most of the crops in, and the game afoot. When the rabbit, deer and grouse gave themselves in a seasonal ritual having little to do with sport, our rural ancestors were keeping faith with the land. In October, the *Hunter's Moon* celebrated a full larder and the coming of deep snow. For the indigenous people of North America, as well as their Euro-American guests, the cold months were a time for storytelling and reflection. Perhaps they didn't express it in quite this way, but the dark season was a time of looking backward in order to go forward. For it was in the full moon of November, the *Hermit's Moon*, that the heart and mind were freed from intense activity and could linger in feeling and introspection, either alone or with other people.

With the *Hermit's Moon* came a more solitary time, a time when the mind turned naturally inward. The *Hermit's Moon* of November began three months during which elders could share their knowledge of the mysterious unseen inner world. But by the full moon of the following February, next summer's outlines and anticipation were clearly visible in longer days and keen expectation. The hermit's time was complete for another year.

Let us celebrate the *Hermit's Moon* of inner knowing. Because we are no longer people of the land, and because the notion of a hermitage is frightening to some, we appeal to the *inner* hermit, which is accessible to everyone. The inner hermit can help a sense of balance return to an excessively extroverted and outer-directed culture.

Meeting the inner hermit under an ascending full moon, we look to our individual and collective futures with internal peace and happiness. The inner hermit awakens equanimity. Equanimity sparks the phenomenon of vision, which is so essential to our lives. Without vision there can be no individual or social purpose; but the seeds of vision always lie with the hermit in silence. We ignore the *Hermit's Moon* only at deep individual and social peril.

Let us find that mysterious inner stop; that quiet place, that stillpoint that is so completely lacking in contemporary life. In joy and caring let us look backward before going forward into a 21st century that is still of our own making. Let us intend and dedicate all our actions to peace in the coming century. Looking backward under the light of a *Hermit's Moon* there are certain ways of

thinking and feeling, certain attitudes and certain worldviews that must be left behind. We must be ready to put down our baggage. To befriend the inner hermit. To have the courage to come to a full stop.

Question for February 1999 Issue:

Visibility! How much is appropriate for a hermit? How does this issue affect matters of dress, work, hospitality, witness, dwelling place?

Please limit your response to 150 words or less so we can print as many as possible. Thanks!

Deadline: January 5, 1999

BOOK NOTICES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Thoughts Matter: Practice of the Spiritual Life by Mary Margaret Funk, OSB *Excellent study based on the Writings of St. Cassian; practical and easy to read.* Continuum Press 1998

Carthusian Novice Conferences Series by A Carthusian. *Transcribed from the actual notes of a Novice Master and not originally intended for publication. Topics now available: The Way of Silent Love, 1993; The Call of Silent Love, 1994.; Interior Prayer, 1996; The Freedom of Obedience, 1998.* Pub. In USA by Cistercian Publications; in England by Darton, Longman and Todd

Silence: Making the Journey to Inner Quiet by Barbara Erakko Taylor. *Practical, highly readable, enjoyable.* Innisfree Press, Inc. Philadelphia, PA 1997, Paper, 152 pp. \$13.95

Silent Dwellers: Living in the Space Between the Heartbeats of Life by Barbara Erakko Taylor. *A gem exploring how one woman progresses into hermit life.* Privately published. Paper, 55 pp. \$10.00. Available from the author - 414 Harwood Road, Catonsville, MD 21228

The Aboriginal Gift: Spirituality for a Nation by Eugene Stockton. *The author writes as a chaplain for Australian Aboriginal peoples and explores the value of their unique worldview.* Published by Millennium Books, Alexandria, NSW, Australia 1995 Paper, 208pp.



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