



Raven's Bread

Food for Those in Solitude

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Raven's Bread is a quarterly newsletter (FEB-MAY-AUG-NOV) for hermits and those interested in the eremitical life published by Paul and Karen Fredette. The newsletter seeks to affirm and support this way of life. ***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 Site offers an **ABBREVIATED** version of our full printed newsletter, which also includes a **Bulletin Board**, a **Reader Forum** featuring responses to a quarterly discussion topic, and a **Letters** section from the readership.

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

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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).

zzzzzz Thoughts On Solitude zzzzzz

Edited by: A.M. Allchin
Condensed from
Solitude and Communion, Papers on the Hermit Life.

Underlying a discussion of the solitary life is the faith that it is not only humanity which is involved in this creative work, but the whole universe. The cosmic dimension of prayer and life is very strongly developed in the solitary tradition, expressing itself in many ways, not least in a particular closeness to the animal creation.

But the meaning of this way of life is to be apprehended not only in terms of God's purpose in creation. Its full significance begins to become apparent when we see it in relation to the work of redemption, when we begin to understand it in terms of the cross and the empty tomb. The solitary life is not only characterized by the quiet of the sabbath. It involves the single-handed conflict with the powers of evil, the way of the cross, which necessarily precedes entry into the peace of God.

At a Conference with the theme of "Christian Responsibility in the World" one speaker chose to speak on the "Calling to the Solitary Way" for he saw the hermit as in some sense representative of us all. The speaker used the image of Bardsey Island, off the tip of Lleyn Peninsula which is referred to variously as the "island of saints; the island of hermits; the island of the solitude where one is least alone." Each one who comes there seems immediately to make it his or her own. You don't need anyone else with you; you do it each in your own way, everyone in a different way. And this which is true perhaps of every island is especially true of this island where through the centuries men longed to be buried to await there the day of judgment.

Welsh poets wrote longingly of the Isle of Bardsey, revealing the mystical pull of this place. First it is a place of seclusion. The Welsh term translated "desert" was one of the regular terms used in medieval Welsh for the dwelling place of a hermit. And yet, at the same time, the island is a place of assembly, of coming together, a place where one who is facing the solitude of death is supported by the communion of Mary and saints. "The island of solitude where one is least alone." Secondly, the island which is a place of death and burial, is at the same time the place of resurrection. The island itself is represented by the poets as being in eager expectation of the resurrection of those who sleep within it.

Here we find the paradox of *solitude pluralis* at its starkest - in the hour of desolation, the Lord is nearest to us and to all men. "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" In that word we find Christ closest to us, and know him to be God. And out of this identification with the Christ on the Cross, the Christ in the darkness, the Christ in the loneliness, there comes paradoxically a new discovery of our fellow human beings.

What is the nearest way from me to my brother or sister? The closest of human attachments must always recognize, if it is honest, the clear line of separation which sets the boundary between two souls...but there is a shorter way from my soul to my brother's or sister's. The Christ by his Holy Spirit is in the innermost shrine of your heart and mine. There, where I do not penetrate, in that Holy of Holies, where the Holy Spirit is enthroned in our baptism, there Christ is. And when we reach him there, we are closer to every human soul than we can be in any other way.

And when we are serving our brothers and sisters in everyday life, there is something missing in our way of doing it unless somewhere at the roots of our being, there is that prayer which turns inward to the Christ and finds him there. And by doing so, we are enabled to look out and see them, see the Christ in them and see the Christ looking in upon us through the eyes of those around us. Not only those who are outward and consciously Christian, but everyone whom He loves.

We are reminded of the word of the Lord to Staretz Silouan, 'Keep your mind in hell and despair not.' We are reminded of the apparent utter failure of Charles de Foucauld dying in his desert hermitage, and of the way in which life has come forth from that tomb. We are reminded of all that St. Paul says about our dying and rising with Christ, our union with him in his death no less than in his resurrection, which is true for every Christian, indeed, for every human being. It is true in a very specific measure for those who are called into the particular confinement of this narrow way (of solitude). The Cross is outside the city, the tomb is in a hidden garden; but indeed they are at the true center of the world.

A Word from Still Wood

The view from the window is startling today. All the leaves are turning such rich shades that the air itself shimmers with a golden glow. It is not sunlight because the clouds are low and rain is drifting through the branches. It is... leaf-light! Even the forest floor is bright for among the yellowing weeds are luminous drifts of new fallen leaves. It is that rare moment when autumn trees swim in liquid gold, a fleeting time that can be all too easily missed because we are not sufficiently "at home" to notice.

As the seasons shift from summer through autumn to winter, we savor the simple pleasures that spell "home" for us - baskets of fresh apples on the porch, the fragrance of stews and breads permeating the house; the delight of the first fire in the hearth. All of this is part of what spiritual writers call the Spirituality of Place. We have now spent eleven autumns on this mountainside and appreciate ever more fully what Thomas Merton meant when he wrote: "*It is essential to experience all the things and moods of one good place.*" By implication he meant that it is also essential to **stay** in one place long enough to notice all the subtle shifts of light and color and sound surrounding us.

Hermits are, almost by definition, homebodies. They have an obligation to the place where they live. The Buddha said: "*Wherever you live is your temple if you treat it like one.*" We believe that one strong determinant of whether a dwelling place is truly a hermitage is the reverence with which the inmate treats it. We use the term "inmate" on purpose because a number of hermit-readers of ***Raven's Bread*** are guests of the extensive prison system that distinguishes our country. They write to us of how they convert their cells into a genuine hermitage by the simplest of means. Their "place" can leave much to be desired but they have given it the essential quality of a hermitage by treating it like a temple.

It is the attitude with which we care for our place that makes it a hermitage, and not simply a house or apartment. We are meant to be sacristans who turn a simple abode into a sanctuary where prayers rise daily and where, yes! burdened hearts can find a

place of rest and healing. Someone has said of the true hermit that s/he welcomes all who come with charity and sends them on their way in peace.

As we write this, our house is filling with the fragrance of bread baking and apple cake in the making. If that isn't incense to inspire the spirit to praise, we wonder what is! All of us harbor a deep longing for home, either one we have known in the past, or one for which we still seek. Hermits, who cultivate a lively awareness of the space around them, who celebrate every subtle shift of light and weather, who continually rediscover the Holy in the place where they live, are genuine homemakers for their spirits.

This issue reaches you as Christians are about to celebrate the brief but rich season of Advent when our longing for God is given liturgical voice. Much to our surprise we realize that God is asking something of us but we may only hear that request if we shorten the list of things we are asking of Him! What is the Great One soliciting? We are being asked to give Him a home...again. The simple story of a poor, displaced couple seeking shelter for the birth of their Child is the dramatic way God has used to get this point across to us. The Christmas ritual among Hispanics of *Las Posadas*, where children go from house to house begging for shelter and are turned away time after time, sadly enough, often mirrors our own attitude much of the time.

Although we are people who appreciate solitude, we need to remember that among the early hermits, hospitality and compassion were sacred duties. As caretakers of God's temple, let us beware of turning God away from His own home. We have been given a holy trust - may we prove worthy by opening our heart and home whenever we hear that tap on our door. Then shall the place where we live shimmer with holy Light.

**With Grateful love,
Karen & Paul**

**There are seasons in our souls:
times of withering, times of coldness,
times of renewal, times of sun and light.
May the force which drives nature to its fulfillment
be brought forth in us, too.
from Cycles of Reflection
by Robert E. Senghas**

zzzzzz Walking to Bethlehem zzzzzz

By: Craig D. Larson

Here is a ditty to turn over in your mind as you walk. Written by W. H. Davies it goes: **"Now shall I walk or shall I ride? 'Ride,' Pleasure said; 'Walk,' Joy replied."** I owe many things to my parents, not the least of which is my love for walking. Today I invite you to come along with me on one of my walks. Here is something to think of as you walk...this time from Gandhi: **"There is more to life than increasing its speed."**

I carry three things with me when I go for a walk: water, a space blanket, and my thoughts. The water I use regularly. The space blanket I have never used but it represents a great comfort factor should an emergency ever arise. But my thoughts...now those I regularly and slowly ruminate as I walk. When I walk, it's as if my mind relaxes as I hit my stride, and all at once the ideas fall into place. And that is how it was when I started thinking about Mary this week. Having read Luke's words recently, I was out for a walk across the valley and suddenly there she was, walking alongside me, on her way to Bethlehem, great with child. As nice as images are of Joseph leading a donkey with Mary riding, there is no evidence to support the image. So I found myself pondering whether, as she walked, things weren't perhaps becoming more focused in her own life?

Here's yet another saying to think about as we journey together...this time from the mouth of an angel: **"Greetings, you are highly favored. The Lord is with you."** I see Mary as she walked to Bethlehem...mulling over the ways of God as she moved step by step across the earth ...and being stunned that out there, under the sweep of

the universe itself, she was...special!

And another quandary to mull over as we walk to Bethlehem: **"How will this be, since I am a virgin?"** As we walk, in due course we start dreaming of truly wild places. I am reminded that the real barriers to entering uncharted territory is the unknown itself. I once read a story of a young man who had hiked a trail until it came to the edge of a wilderness. Beyond that point there was only thick, dark undergrowth. To him it looked impassable. As he rested before heading home he heard a noise. Suddenly two men emerged from that impossible country carrying backpacks. Tanned and sinewy, they appeared extraordinarily happy. He spoke with them briefly and one commented, "There's some beautiful country back there." They parted and our hiker was left sitting, staring at that huge black mysterious wilderness...within which was some beautiful country. Learning to walk anywhere is not so hard, really, once you have broken through that formidable, first-barrier. It is then that you are truly free - free to walk toward some distant goal that captures your imagination. **"How will this be, since I am a virgin?"**

Here is a final thought to ruminate as we walk to Bethlehem: **"I am the Lord's servant."** When walking there comes a deep satisfaction of being conscious of diverse body parts, each working with singular purpose. Conversely, ordinary annoyances also get amplified when you walk. But pleasure or annoyance, something about moving slowly across the landscape brings a re-remembering that happiness really has something to do with just being who God made one to be as you begin to own your life's journey more and more. Walking to Bethlehem, how impossible was it for Mary to harbor any crude or crass assumption that the world was made for her! Instead came the realization that she had been chosen because of the overly-ordinariness of her trust in God - which any walker can testify is miraculous.

Luke's story is, objectively speaking about Mary. But I found myself deeply considering what it opens up in my own daily life as I walked with her toward her destiny? What about my journey...or your journey? If you desire to go for a walk between now and Christmas, if you choose to mull over God's words to Mary, if you choose to finally break free on your walks, if you desire to plunge into the undergrowth of your own spiritual life, some things always seem to weigh on one's mind at the start of such a journey. What if I run out of water? What if I fall? What if...What if I don't hear God? Some good words to use in response to these concerns are: **Experience cures nonsense.**

How much closer Mary must have been to God as time wore on, as things began to work themselves out...as she saw Jesus grow, enter ministry and be revealed in glory. But it all came from first steps, first steps on a journey down an unfamiliar path that looked like it led into a wilderness. Walking to Bethlehem was only the beginning of her journey, both as an adult, and as a person of faith. And she learned what every walker knows: the less there is between you and the environment, the more immediate and real life becomes.

We may choose to hold back familiarity with God. But if we loosen the restrictions of how much we choose to trust God, we come closer to connecting the ciphers of our own lives. Once you begin to connect - only to connect - it becomes easier and easier to seek God day by day by day in all things, in all places, right here and right now. Not surprisingly then...we shall be making our pilgrimage once again to Bethlehem, looking for God in, of all places, a manger!

Discussion Topic for February 2007 Issue:

Please describe the situation of your hermitage: type or style;
advantages and disadvantages of your site;
any changes you would make.

(Please limit responses to 300 words or less)

Deadline: January 1, 2007

**Silence is not the absence of sound
but the absence of self.**

*an anonymous spiritual master
thanks to Robert Blakesly*

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Annotated Readings in Spirituality - by Sharon Jeanne Smith **21pp. \$5.00**

Solitude & Union: A Select Bibliography on the Hermit Way of Life by Cecilia W. Wilms **26pp. \$5.00**

Annotated Books on Solitude - **4pp. \$2.00**

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Commentary on Canon 603 from "The Law of Consecrated Life" by Jean Beyer SJ, 1988 Translated from the French by W. Becker, 1992 **10pp. \$2.50**

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Four Articles by Kenneth C. Russell. Reprinted by permission from "*Review for Religious*" (excellent footnotes & references)

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To email Fellowship of Solitaries directly click on this link: solitarities@onetel.com

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BOOK NOTICES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

An Eclectic Almanac for the Faithful: People, Places and Events that Shape Us

by W. Paul Jones.

This book is an exuberant month-by-month guide that describes saints ancient and modern in short, lively summaries. Jones stretches beyond official church saints to include personalities from the world of contemporary politics and the arts. He sees God's hand at work in the lives, not only of varied persons but goes even further, listing spirit-shaking events - some somber, others playful. Each day's roster ends in a prayer of passion and zest. This eclectic collection includes space to record the names of mentors and luminaries in your own life.

2006. Softcover. 440 pp. \$17.00 (US).

The Upper Room, P.O. Box 340004, Nashville, TN 37203-000

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by Peter N. Borys, Jr.

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