



Raven's Bread

Food for Those in Solitude

Vol: 3 No: 1 February 1999

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:

Raven's Bread, Karen (Karper) Fredette

P.O. Box 562

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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.

To E-mail Karen directly click on this link: [mailto: 103517.210 @ compuserve.com](mailto:103517.210@compuserve.com)

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

By: Sharon Jeanne Smith, Santa Fe, NM

"The sadhu (hermit) lives at the very Source, and it is not his duty to look after the water-works and canals further downstream. His work, if one may put it so, is to make sure that the water flows plentifully and unceasingly from the Source itself."(Abhishiktananda, [Henri Le Saux, OSB] *The Further Shore* p. 8). The hermit, then, sits at the Source and lets the Divine flow through to all creation, for everything is connected in the One.

But where, when and how is this done? The where is both inner and outer. It is "within the temple," the meaning of the word contemplation. This temple is both the outer space in which we live our vocation--our cell, whatever its actual architectural design--and the inner space of abiding Presence, what Abhisiktananda called the *guha*, the cave of the heart. Like Simeon and Anna, the hermit stays in that holy place where Ezekiel saw the living water flowing out to every point of the earth (Ez 47,1-12.)

The root of the word for temple is time. We, as hermits, stay in the present moment which is eternal for it is neither past nor future. And in that Temple of here-and-now, we empty out every movement toward separation that comes to us repeatedly.

We maintain that emptiness, which is union, by living our ordinary life in an extraordinary way; not compartmentalizing, but letting everything flow from and back into the Source.

We constantly re-member the union that is ultimate reality. The love and compassion that emerges from our deep realization of not being separate from God in any thing flows from us. We fill our lives only with what is essential to this remembrance of union, this essence of relatedness.

In this consciousness of Presence we make it available to all through our interconnection with all. Abhishiktananda points out that as soon as we awaken to this essential union, "on account of the essential

An American Desert Mother

Nazarena: Camaldolese Recluse

A Book Review by Fr. James Kennedy, Obl. Cam.

Born in Glastonbury, CT 1907, the youngest of seven children, Julia Crotta died as Sister Nazarena of Jesus in Rome, February 7, 1990. She had lived a life of full reclusion in the abbey of the Camaldolese Nuns for forty-five years.

Julia was an ordinary Italian American girl, pious but not overly so. She enjoyed sports, especially basketball, showed real talent for music, dated occasionally and waited tables at resorts in the Catskills during the summer. After high school, she moved to New York City where she got a job as a chorus girl and studied dance and music, especially violin. She entered the Hartford Conservatory in 1926, transferring from there to the School of Music at Yale in 1929.

An inner prompting led her to transfer in 1932 to Albertus Magnus Women's College where her spiritual life began to develop. While keeping vigil on Good Friday night, Julia heard someone call her name. She saw a man who stood before her weeping with outstretched wounded hands. He called her to the desert and promised her his abiding presence. She answered with an unspoken yes.

Thus began her long journey in search of the "desert" that led her into and out of several communities, in the States and finally to Rome where her director sent her. Eventually Julia received a papal indult to return to the Camaldolese Nuns on the Aventine (where she had once been a novice), not as a nun but as their guest, as a lay-anchoress. Pius XII blessed her and approved her Formula Vitae, through noting that it seemed very severe. In 1947, again by Apostolic Indult, Nazarena was allowed to make solemn vows as a Camaldolese nun and recluse.

Her stark cell, where she lived, slept, prayed and worked (at weaving palms), contained only her box bed and two benches. In an adjacent vestibule, the nuns left her meals, other necessities and materials for manual labor.

Among her life-long friends were Don Anselmo Giabbani, her confessor and spiritual director; her own abbess, and the Benedictine scholar, Cardinal Augustin Mayor, OSB. She maintained friendships, deep, warm and life-giving, via notes passed under her cell door, with the other nuns. She embraced most of the ancient ascetical disciplines of the desert. These practices ö whose purpose was only to center and focus her on the "one thing necessary" ö were always subject to the supervision of her spiritual father.

"The anchoritic life is the one most subject to delusions and to the crafty conspiracy of its two greatest enemies, the devil and the ego," wrote Nazarena a few months before her death. "If one has not been severely tested and has not suffered a great deal, there are reasons to doubt whether one could persevere in solitude for very long."

This is a remarkable book about a remarkable woman. The author's description of her dying - of the final touching moments in which Nazarena and Don Anselmo, her spiritual father, finally see each other face to face --silently sitting, grasping each other's hands, is a virtual ikon of monastic affection and friendship. It sets before us in the flesh the meaning of the old Gaelic words *Anam Cara* ö soul-friends.

From: Nazarena: An American Anchoress by Thomas Matus, OSB Cam.

Paulist Press. Mahwah, NJ, 203 pp. Paper 1998, \$16.95

Question for May 1999 Issue:

RB is requesting copies of a "Plan of Life" from those willing to share theirs.

We hope to publish some as time and space permit in our sharing column.

Deadline: April 5, 1999

Fellowship of Solitaries

Raven's Bread was recently contacted by Eve Baker from Wales, UK. She is correspondent for a ten-year-old organization: **Fellowship of Solitaries**. **RB** suspects that many of its readers may find the **Fellowship** of special interest so we are reprinting this excerpt from its brochure.

What is a Christian solitary? Someone called by God to share on friendly terms in the life of God, in solitude, the simplicity of "no-need" and silence. What if such a call comes to someone living an ordinary life on an urban street, with clear obligations to other people that cannot in all Christian charity be renounced? The call to solitary life does come to people so placed, and it is such people that the **Fellowship of Solitaries** hopes to help and encourage.

The life of the Christian solitary, whatever form it takes, is essentially something to which God calls a person - it is not a thing that anyone can choose for her-or himself. Perhaps the genuine solitary falls in love with God. This kind of sharing in the life of God by people living ordinary lives is not easily understood in Christian congregations today, where the norm is to be involved, to be ministering and to be seen as doing so.

Because such a life is solitary, it is unique to each; no two follow the same path. For that reason the **Fellowship** has no rule of life; it is most unlikely that it ever will. How we can pray best is for each to discover for her- or himself. All that is asked of members is that they pray for each other, and for all others living the solitary life, and that they pay the modest subscription that enables the Newsletter, issued three times a year, to be produced and distributed. Members are encouraged to contribute items to the Newsletter so that we may profit by sharing each other's experience of the solitary life.

The solitary life is essentially hidden--there is no badge or habit, no special title, nothing to suggest a corporate identity. The **Fellowship** has none - it is not a community or a society, just a fellowship of people each pursuing his or her own path but banded together for support and encouragement.

There is no entrance test for admission to the **Fellowship of Solitaries**. All who find themselves engaged in a deeply personal search for God may join. The **Fellowship** is ecumenical but has no official connection with any church and is thus in no way committed to decisions churches make about religious issues.

People may join the **Fellowship** either as Members or as Associates. All receive the Newsletter and pay the annual subscription, £3.00 (£5.00 for overseas members.) In addition Members receive the list of other Members, so that they may be prayerfully aware of each other in their different paths and make contact if they so wish. Associates do not receive the list of Members and are not mentioned on it.

For further information contact:

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Bronllys, Brecon, Powys, LD3 0HN, UK

The great work of the solitary life is gratitude. The hermit is one who knows the mercy of God better than others because one's whole life is one of complete dependence, in silence and in hope, upon the hidden mercy of our Heavenly Father.

Thomas Merton

Resources Available from *Raven's Bread*

Readings in Spirituality - Annotated Bibliography by Sharon Jeanne Smith **31pp. \$10.00**

Solitude & Union: A Select Bibliography on the Hermit Way of Life by Cecilia W. Wilms **26pp. \$8.00**

Commentary on Canon 603 from "The Law of Consecrated Life" by Jean Beyer SJ, 1988 Translated from the French by W. Becker, 1992 **10pp. \$3.00**

Hermits: The Juridical Implications of Canon 603 by Helen L. MacDonald, Researcher Novalis: St. Paul University, Ottawa, ONT **24pp. \$8.00**

Notes to Guide the Beginning Hermit by A Hermit of Mercy **15pp. \$5.00**

Discernment Survey 1996 **6pp. \$1.00**

Raven's Rest

A retreat space (small apartment with private entrance) is available to persons seeking an experience of solitude and silence while discerning a call to eremitical life. Spiritual Direction available upon request. Situated at **Still Wood** on a forested mountainside in the rural Smokies. \$10.00 per day donation requested. For information, contact:

Paul and Karen Fredette

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BOOK NOTICES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Wonder: a way to God by Eugene Stockton. *This book offers a way to reach out to God through the environment of nature and society.* St. Paul's Publications. Australia, 1998 Paper, 155 pp. AUST RRP \$15.95

Paths In Solitude by Eve Baker. *This book examines various aspects of solitude: solitude and society, the artist as solitary, and physical solitude. Part II looks at the historical roots of the solitary life, the monastic path, travelers and wanderers, hermits and institutions. The final part is a guide to contemporary Christian solitary life.* St. Paul's, UK ISBN 085439 513 X, UK price £5.95

A Lenten Hobo Honeymoon - Daily Reflections for the Journey of Lent by Edward Hays. *To spend Lent as a honeymoon might seem to be a contradiction in terms. Yet these forty days call us to a renewal of our romance with God. Jesus journeyed through life as a hobo, as one with "nowhere to lay his head." Lent, likewise, calls us to be hobos.* Forest of Peace Publishing, Inc. Leavenworth, KS 1999, Paper, 143 pp. \$12.95 (Available as an audio tape, retreat-style conferences with music. \$29.95)

The Ascent of the Mountain of God - Daily Reflections for the Journey of Lent by Edward Hays. *For the 40 days of Lent Father Hays takes us on a sacred mountain climbing expedition - the mountain being a universal symbol of the presence of God, the place of awe-inspiring encounters with God.* Forest of Peace Publishing, Inc. Leavenworth, KS 1997, Paper, 133 pp. \$10.95 (Also audio tapes - eight conferences given in a retreat setting. \$29.95)

For those who asked: Books by "A Carthusian" are obtained from Cistercian Publication, St. Joseph's Abbey, 167 North Spencer Road, Spencer, MA 01562-1233. Tel: 508 885 8730



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