



# ***Raven's Bread***

## ***Food for Those in Solitude***

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### ***Vol: 12 No: 1 February 2008***

***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:

***Raven's Bread***  
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***Hot Springs, NC 28743***

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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 In Solitude** ***ZZZZZZ***

**by Richard Simonelli**

**Interfaith Contemplative Order of Sarada in America**

The greatest gift of a hermit's life is the possibility to *know* his or her non-separation from God. It is finally becoming acceptable to say , "God is in me and I am in God." Voicing those words may be the first step in *knowing* them as truth.

The words *know* and *knowing* are italicized in order to emphasize the deeply experiential character of such knowledge. But it is experience of a very unusual kind. It is experience without an "experiencer." It is ego-less experience in surrender. This kind of *knowing* is beyond both intellectual and emotional...beyond both the head and the heart. It is spiritual knowledge.

The fact of our non-separation from God is really true whether we live a life committed to the world , or whether our unique temperament takes us to hermitage. But for most, direct experience of non-separation is most clear in hermitage. It's really a matter of individual capacity.

Those of the highest capacity may *experience* their non-separation from God (and not just say it) while in the ordinary world of hustle and bustle, of this and that. While in the everyday world they are, in fact, still in hermitage. But for most of us, it is necessary to avoid the confusion and delusion of ordinary life because we become distracted all too easily.

In the deepest sense, there is really no distinction between the so-called

secular life and the so-called spiritual life. This is true when one lives in non-separation — we come to know every aspect of our lives as sacred. But there is an enormous difference between *knowing* this without doubt, and the ordinary intellectual knowledge of it. We can voice such an understanding as a personal goal or vision but then we must be clear that we are *visioning* and not yet realizing.

When we begin to actually realize and experience non-separation from God, then ordinary hermitage becomes a hermitage without walls. What allows this auspicious transition to take place? In the deepest sense, perhaps only the gift of grace. As we walk the spiritual path within any tradition, we eventually discover that no amount of effort, hard work or "trying" will make direct knowledge so. Non-separation is taken to heart in a sudden, auspicious moment. It may be that we have been slowly working up to that moment for a lifetime. But the certainty, "*God is in me and I am in God*" happens in the unexpected twinkling of an eye.

A gift of hermitage is abidance in non-separation. In non-separation my worldly identity and my identity with God coemerge and coexist. It's called "non-separation" (and not oneness) because these two possibly contradictory identities are neither the same (one), nor are they separate (two). This kind of paradoxical truth becomes clear only through the mystery of divine grace. It is then that the rational, separating mind as well as the sentimental, emotional heart both step out of the way.

A contemplative life offers an ever-deepening absorption into God. At some point the boundaries vanish with an ineffable *knowing* in which the *knower* is no longer present as a separate entity. It is then that the two "in"s from the statement of non-separation begin to fade. Finally, they are gone. What this means is unutterably sacred, beyond words and inseparable from oneself. It is nameless direct experience, not theology, a teaching or an idea. It is nothing to bandy about with mere intellectual knowledge.

The greatest gift of a hermits's life is to abide in non-separation from God. It is finally becoming acceptable to voice this understanding, with the promise that we may come to realize what it signifies within our lifetime. When this happens for even one individual, the benefit to all living beings and their communities is enormous.

## A Word from Still Wood

Our Carolina mountains are suffering one of the longest droughts in recent years, but on this cold and wintery January day, the ground is covered with the first notable snow of the season. A relief on several counts. Mother nature's limited palette, mostly browns and grays dusted with dry leaves, gave the past holiday season the look of an Andrew Wyeth landscape. The trees stripped of color and the threadbare hills reveal what is so well hidden the rest of the year. Homes. Here and there perched along ridgetops and nestled in the hollers are farmhouses and cabins, summer homes and cottages, big and small, of sticks and stones, and block and glass, some shingles here and a tin roof there, wood fires and chimney smoke signalling the inhabitants' survival.

Still few and far enough apart to be taken for "hermitages" of sorts, the folks in this end of our county are mostly mountaineers, more solitary than most, and living more simply than many, but outlanders have moved in too...from Florida, and Georgia, and a few folks like us from "up north" looking for quiet...silence even. Looking for space...solitude even. Looking for who knows what...maybe even the presence of the One.

Over the past twelve years, some of these neighbors have even come and gone again, finding this remote area just too isolated...nearly 20 miles in any direction to the nearest town. Here at Still Wood, it often seems that nothing much has changed since we moved in, but a pile of snapshots tell a far different story. A casual leafing through photo albums chronicles a gradual transformation wrought by painting, and planting, repairing and renewing, and landscaping this wondrous habitation we call Still Wood.

The homes of our neighbors tell their stories too: small rustic cabins with few amenities, rambling farm houses, old family homesteads, some abandoned in disrepair, others being restored by the next generation, and surprisingly, a growing number of large and luxurious second-homes of those who are...rarely

home.

As we approach the final stages of our current project, Consider the Ravens, On Centemporary Hermit Life, we decided that some pertinent visuals would help our anticipated audience acquire a better understanding of the current resurgence in eremitic living. They would get a better picture so to speak, if we included photographs of some actual hermitages from various settings: urban, rural, wilderness, town, and country, from around the globe. You, the readers, are the perfect resource to draw from. What a blessing! You responded so generously when we conducted the survey in 2001, and we're certain that many of you have pictures as telling as your thoughts. Would you be willing to share some interesting quality photographs of your hermitage that we might include in this publication? We would happily accept prints either in color or B&W or a CD containing a .jpg file. Photos selected would have to be identified clearly and the actual photographer would be credited. Since we are still planning a June publication date, we need to select such photos as soon as possible.

While in this begging mode, we hasten to add how much *RB* depends on your submissions for each edition. What we most need are reflective essays of 600-700 words for *Thoughts in Solitude*, the lead article of each issue. Some of you have already shared your thoughts more than once in this regard and we are profoundly grateful. Now we invite those of you who have not to contribute your thoughts in solitude. We are eager to hear from you.

Lent will have already begun when *RB* reaches you. May the grace of this season sow seeds of abundant life in you.

With Grateful love,  
Karen & Paul

The truest solitude is not something outside you,  
not an absence of men or sound around you;  
it is an abyss opening up  
in the center of your own soul.  
And this abyss of interior solitude  
is created by a hunger  
that will never be satisfied  
with any created thing.

from SEEDS OF CONTEMPLATION *By Thomas Merton*  
(1915-1968)

zzzzzz **From Fr. Joseph's Hermitage** zzzzzz

The Lenten Prayer of St. Ephrem the Syrian:

O Lord and Master of my Life,  
Do not abandon me to a spirit of idleness  
discouragement, ambition, and idle talking!

But rather bestow your grace upon me your servant,  
the spirit of chastity, humility, patience and love.

Yes O lord and King,  
Grant me to see my failings

And not to condemn my brother,  
O you who are blessed from ages to ages. Amen.

This prayer is attributed to one of the great masters of the Oriental spiritual tradition: Saint Ephrem the Syrian. It could be presented as the prayer 'par excellence' for the Lenten Season. It is prayed with a prostration at the end of each of its three parts. In its simplicity, it underlines very well the aspects of repentance that make up the essential points of our conversion during the Lenten Season.

It starts by presenting four negative points that are obstacles to eliminate: the spirit of idleness, the spirit of discouragement, the spirit of ambition, and the spirit of idle talking.

The spirit of idleness is the most dangerous for spiritual life. The evil spirit impedes our desire for good to develop and bloom. It persuades us, seeing the repetition of our faults, that change is impossible. This idleness is at the root of all sin since it poisons spiritual energy at its source.

The result of idleness is discouragement expressed in acedia...It is a very devious evil that invades the heart of a monk to the point of his losing interest in the things of God. The psychoanalysts who explore the illnesses of the soul would call it depression. But acedia is a kind of distaste, a boredom with the "things of God." The monk, the religious, (the hermit) is no longer attracted to prayer, to a relationship with God in prayer. Saint Ignatius Loyola called this "distress."

When one's life is not centered on God, it invariably become egotistical and centered on oneself. Then, the road is wide open for the spirit of ambition that brings us to look at reality only according to our own ideas, desires and needs. By excluding God from the center of our life, we achieve a truly spiritual murder that ends up in spiritual suicide.

Spiritual suicide consists in this: blocking the word of God that makes us live. We are left with only our words, empty and useless, which become sterile talking. These four negative aspects are the obstacles to eliminate; but it is only by the grace of God that we can accomplish this. "...bestow on me your servant the grace..." After realizing my human helplessness, this prayer points out the positive goals of the road to conversion, also four in number: chastity, humility, patience, and love.

Chastity is opposed to the desire for possession in my heart. It helps me understand my life in its totality. Chastity lets me recognize that all alone I cannot realize the real desires of my heart and that all in my life comes from the gratuitous goodness of God.

The total vision of life, the fruit of the spirit of chastity, brings about the virtue of humility that lets me see and welcome truth, that is to say, to remain with open hands before God with the realization that we have nothing and that all is given to us.

Chastity and humility are followed by patience. The spirit of ownership pushes us to want everything right away without

ever being satisfied. We constantly live with the anxiety of wanting to realize our desires without ever finding them fully satisfied. Patience is the fruit of experiencing that God never deceives us and that true happiness is found only when we take the time to live our life with a deep and integral vision.

The road to conversion is fulfilled by the virtue of love that is a gift of God and the goal of every spiritual effort. The Lenten road finds its summary in St. Ephrem's final request. Pride is the source of evil and all evil stems from pride. The Lenten road leads to the foot of the cross of Christ, where we recognize our limits, our need to be healed through His mercy and become in our turn merciful to one another.

O beauty ever ancient, ever new.  
Too late have I loved you.  
I was outside and you were within me.  
And I never found you until I found  
You within myself.  
*St. Augustine (354-430)*  
taken from The Fire of Silence and Stillness

**Hermit Resources Available  
from *Raven's Bread*  
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**BIBLIOGRAPHIES**

*Annotated Readings in Spirituality* - by Sharon Jeanne Smith 21pp. \$5.50

*Solitude & Union: A Select Bibliography on the Hermit Way of Life* by Cecilia W. Wilms 26pp. \$5.50

*Annotated Books on Solitude* - 4pp. \$2.50

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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. \$3.00

*Hermits: The Juridical Implications of Canon 603* by Helen L. Macdonald, Researcher Novalis: St. Paul University, Ottawa, ONT 24pp. \$5.50

*Statutes for Hermits* by The Bishops of France (1989)  
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Four Articles by Kenneth C. Russell. Reprinted by permission from *"Review for Religious"* (excellent footnotes & references)

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Comprised of and open to religious solitaries of all stripes. The Fellowship is ecumenical and has no official connections with any church. People may join the Fellowship either as Members or as Associates. All receive a regular Newsletter and a List of Members, so that they may be prayerfully aware of each other in their different paths and to make contact with each other if they so wish.

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2007 319 pp. \$24.95. ISBN 978-2-89507-902-6

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