



# ***Raven's Bread***

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

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### ***Vol: 6 No: 2 May 2002***

***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 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***  
**18065 Hwy 209**  
**Hot Springs, NC 28743**

The annual subscription to the printed newsletter is \$8.00 in USA and \$10.00 US currency for foreign subscriptions. (Drafts drawn on US banks are the most convenient form of payment by foreign subscribers.) Any extra donations will be used to subsidize subscriptions for hermits who cannot afford the full cost.

To E-mail ***Raven's Bread*** directly click on this link: [fredette@nclink.net](mailto:fredette@nclink.net)

***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: Spencer Furbush, Stillness Hermitage, Piffard, NY**

In the stillness of the night, allow the mind to settle back and down into the heart of the soul. If you do not yet know this place, keep searching but know that it is not perceived as being in the head. Once found, maintain a certain stability there, resisting impulses of the mind to be scattered abroad in various thoughts. One day, after many years of diligent effort, the seed of light in the heart of the soul will be revealed. This seed of light is a pearl beyond price, a gift of God to every person born.

Finding this seed is but a beginning. We must now nourish this seed of light within the heart of the soul. Nourish it with the attention of the mind, which acts as gentle rain upon a seed planted in the ground. The seed will sprout and grow. When it blossoms forth, then the stillness of the night, which may seem narrow and enclosed at first, expands outward as a vast openness. The seed of light blossoms into a sparkling iridescence that fills one's whole being and radiates out into the world. At first the light blossoms for but a moment. The attention is still weak. But with continued cultivation, the light blossom will grow in strength, vigor and stability.

A light that remains alone in itself fails to reach maturity. A light that returns to participate in the Light from which it came, becomes far greater than itself. To be light within the Light of Christ is to reach the fullness of maturity that God desires for each person. This radiant light goes out to all the world in company with Christ. A radical shift occurs. We shift from being focused within to being outpoured for all. The true interior life is an outward flowing. It is now time to forget yourself and be outpoured through and with Christ for the sake of the world.

All this work is supported by the grace of the Holy Spirit, a gift we cannot control. I speak of what we can learn to control, the attention of the mind. Attention within nourishes the soul. Attention to God nourishes the soul's ultimate fulfillment. Both are

necessary.

There will always be a dynamic tension between grace and free will. Western spirituality has emphasized a passive acceptance of grace, whereas Patristic and Orthodox spirituality gives a greater responsibility to the will. In the Philokalia, purity of heart and stillness are often synonymous. This understanding underlies the prayer of the mind in the heart, which hopefully leads to the vision of the Taboric Light.

Cassian says that purity of heart is something the monk can achieve; it is the aim of ascetic practice. We can know when we have attained it and when we have missed the mark. The self-discipline, the ascetic practice, is the work of our own free will but the fruit of this practice comes to us only as a gift of grace. It is a mature and fully realized soul that can hope for the fullness of life in Christ, which is self-giving love. We shall see him then for we shall be like him, light from Light, radiant love without end.

## **A Word from Still Wood**

Early spring brought a few sharp disappointments to our mountain – just as we anticipated seeing our “old rugged cross” embraced by encircling arms of golden forsythia, temps dropped to 18 degrees and all the buds shriveled brown. At the same time, the daffodils toppled their bright faces into the mud, and our hopes for spring color plummeted with the mercury. But gradually brilliant tulips raised their heads ... and our hearts. And in the woods surrounding us, the annual parade of wildflowers kicked off proving, once again, that spring is inexorable. It **WILL** triumph.

And so will the love of Christ poured forth in our hearts. Amidst the grief over recent scandals among church ministers, sorrow over the seemingly endless cycle of retaliatory violence in the Middle East, the horrors generated by terrorism, famine, drought, and other natural disasters triggered by human exploitation of the land, **hope** and **love** are nourished in the hearts of hidden pray-ers around the world. Spiritual forces are enlisted to heal, to forgive, to establish justice ... in a word, to allow spring miracles of renewal to happen beyond all human reckoning.

**Raven's Bread** itself is sustained and even flourishes against all odds. That “extra” that so many of you add to your subscription allows us to continue our ministry to the many in solitude who depend on **RB** for encouragement, information and a sense of community in their oft lonely choices. We are humbled by your generosity (no donation is small that comes from loving hearts) and profoundly grateful. We pray that all who cast their bread upon the waters will have it returned to them a hundredfold.

We thank – as do our readers – all of you who share your thoughts in writing to fill our issues with the unique insights that are born in an environment of silence and solitude where the hidden whispers of the Divine can be heard and savored. Such contributions are essential to **RB's** character as a forum by and for hermits and others interested in eremitic life.

A practical note! Take a look at the date on the right-hand corner of your address label, i.e. 5/02. This date indicates when your renewal comes due. However, if you are unable to afford the cost just let us know that you want to continue receiving it and we will be happy to keep you on the mailing list. **Raven** gladly offers its “bread” to all who desire it!

*Still Wood* has donned a new spring bonnet of sorts this year - an expanded deck now surrounds the house, replacing the former one which, unfortunately, had begun to rot underneath. And Raven's Rest, our hermitage for solitary retreatants, is opening with refurbished facilities. Anyone who enjoys the peaceful beauty of the Smokies is welcome to come for a period of solitary retreat. We ask only a modest donation to cover expenses. And Starlight, our border collie, freely offers her services as escort on all hikes, with exuberant delight!

Let us continue our prayers for one another, especially during this joyous Paschal Season!

**With Grateful love,  
Karen & Paul**

## The 2001 Survey of Raven's Bread Readers

A year ago this month, approximately 590 copies of "The Survey" were mailed to our readership, and we received over 150 responses. It was a truly gratifying experience. The volume of returns was a fantastic 25%!!! It said something wonderful about everyone who cooperated in this project, making it truly reflective of what is happening in our own time re solitary lifestyles. We continue to receive requests each week for **Survey Results** and back issues containing the summaries we have printed thus far.

The current print issue of **RB** (May 2002) features the results to the Third of Ten Reflection Questions: "*Reactions of others to my choice of eremitic life...*"

...ranged from laughter and disbelief to hostility and ridicule to support and encouragement. A full gamut of responses was reported when readers answered the third reflection question on the May 2001 survey: "With whom did you discuss your initial attraction to solitude? Describe their reactions." As many hermit-wannabe's have discovered, it is one thing to experience an attraction to solitude; another thing to explain it!

Most people were prudently selective of the persons with whom they shared their initial sense of call to a solitary lifestyle. Some chose church representatives or religious superiors; others discussed it with a spouse or intimate friend. Many first raised the issue with a spiritual guide or a hermit acquaintance. One had the privilege of discussing her attraction with one of the most famous hermits of the 20th century, Thomas Merton! Others spoke to no one other than God as they set about following the attraction they trusted was from the Holy Spirit.

The following summary will be arranged by grouping individuals according to where they were when they first perceived their drawing toward more solitude.

*(from editor's introduction, pg. 4 of May 2002 Print Issue)*

We are still offering the "big picture" from the eleven categories covered in the Survey's check-off section (Personal Information, Location, Religious Affiliation and Status, Lifestyle, Prayer Forms and Religious Practices, Financial Situation, Spiritual Direction, and Difficulties) which was published in the August 2001 Issue. In the months ahead, we will continue to review with our readers the material received in answer to the **10 Reflection Questions** and offer updates about any significant new data we receive. Eventually, a complete Report will be available from **RB RESOURCES**.

If you are interested in obtaining the **2001 Raven's Bread Survey Results**, these initial reports are available upon request to our online readers for \$5.00 each (U.S. currency):

### **By Mail:**

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**By Telephone:** 1-828-622-3750

**By E-Mail:** [fredette@nclink.net](mailto:fredette@nclink.net)

**The Soul would have no rainbow  
had the eyes no tears.**

Minquass Tribe Proverb

# zzzzzzMust Hermits Work?zzzzzz

By: Kenneth C. Russell

*Reprinted by permission from Review for Religious, March-April, 2000)*

## Some Conclusions

In tracing the role of work in the eremitical life, we have seen that the spiritual emphasis on manual labor as a means of fighting idleness has remained a constant in the literature. Work has also been valued as a refreshing change which lightens the burden of the spiritual routines of life in the cell. As this spiritual appreciation has come to the fore, however, work in the hard sense of that which is done to sustain life has faded into the background. It seems clear that for a long stretch of time it was taken for granted that hermits need not earn their living.

It seems to me that, in the main, the penitential dimension of work in the context of the solitary life has been lost in the literature we have examined. Uninterrupted quiet has won out over gainful employment in the tug-of-war between work and solitude. In the medieval texts, work is no longer the serious business it was in the Egyptian desert. It no longer binds the hermit to the real world and the hard facts of the human condition.

Behind the texts examined, we have caught glimpses of different religious and economic situations which profoundly affected how solitaries lived the eremitical life. The Egyptian desert, for all its harshness, offered solitaries ready access to markets where there was a constant demand for the wares they could produce in the quiet of their cells. In Europe, hermits never quite found their niche in the economic system. There was nothing they could make that was in continual demand and thus brought in cash fairly quickly.

Land was the basis of security, and, as nobles and monasteries gained land and lived off the income from it, they passed some of this largess on to solitaries who were thought to be making a valuable contribution to society through their life of prayer. In this economic climate the nature of work underwent a change. Book copying, in itself a profitable undertaking in which communities invested time, did not have to be done at a

rapid pace because other sources of income provided sufficient ready cash. The tendency, as we have seen was for hermits to be more and more dependent on alms. They may have worked, but, at least for the more institutionalized and educated among them, work lost its connection with earning a living.

We live in a less charitable economic climate. Most hermits today have to endure the tension between the desire for solitude which pulls them out of society and the need to work which draws them back into it. I would argue that, while tradition does not unanimously affirm that hermits must earn their living, it is, as Aelred of Reivaulx put it, better that they do. I say this for several reasons. First, working for a living introduces a sobering penitential dimension into their lives. Second, working enables them to share in the lot of the rest of humanity, particularly of the working poor at the bottom of the economic ladder. Third, it gives them the wherewithal to aid the needy. I would add a fourth reason: working for a living forces hermits to shape their solitary life to conform to the realities of our time.

**Topic for August 2002 Issue:**

"Spiritual Direction! Where do you find it? How has it helped you? What do you do when none is available?"

**Deadline: July 1, 2002**

"Acquire the Spirit of Peace,  
and thousands round you  
will be saved."

*St. Seraphim of Sarov*

**"A Suggestion"**

Trying to get in touch with another hermit? Want contact from a hermit or solitary? Aware of opportunities that may be of interest to solitaries? Have you a service to offer? Are you looking to locate or re-locate a hermitage? Why not place your message on the **Bulletin Board** of *Raven's Bread* (printed version). Requests are posted **free of charge** for our regular subscribers.

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

(all prices include postage)

*Readings in Spirituality - Annotated Bibliography* by Sharon Jeanne Smith **31pp. \$15.00**

*Solitude & Union: A Select Bibliography on the Hermit Way of Life* by Cecilia W. Wilms **26pp. \$13.00**

*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. \$12.00**

*Notes to Guide the Beginning Hermit* by A Hermit of Mercy **15pp. \$7.50**

*Statutes for Hermits* by The Bishops of France (1989) **12 pp. \$6.00**

### **Fellowship of Solitaries**

Comprised of and open to religious solitaires 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.

Correspondent: Eve Baker, Coed Glas, Talgarth Road, Bronllys, Brecon, Powys, LD3 0HN

To email Fellowship of Solitaires directly click on this link: [fos@btinternet.com](mailto:fos@btinternet.com)

To access the website of Fellowship of Solitaires click on this link: <http://www.btinternet.com/~benedict.baker>

**Inner Light Productions**, Michael McClellan, Editor

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

**Being a Hermit: Where and How** 12 pp, \$6.00

**Acedia - The Dark Side of Commitment** 4 pp. \$2.00

**The dangers of Solitude** 5 pp. \$2.50

**Must hermits Work?** 10 pp. \$5.00

### **2001 Reader Survey: Initial Findings**

Compilation of data from 11 categories (personal information, location, religious affiliation and status, lifestyle, prayer forms and religious practices, financial situation, spiritual direction, difficulties).

Reprinted from *Raven's Bread* Vol.5 No.3. **2 pp. \$5.00**

### **2001 Reader Survey: Initial Findings**

Compilation of data from First Reflection Question: "For me the grace and essence of solitary living is..."

Reprinted from *Raven's Bread* Vol.5 No.4. **2 pp. \$5.00**

### **2001 Reader Survey: Initial Findings**

Compilation of data from Second Reflection Question: "How did you come to recognize your call to religious / solitary / hermit life?"

Reprinted from *Raven's Bread* Vol.6 No.1. **2 pp. \$5.00**

### **2001 Reader Survey: Initial Findings**

Compilation of data from Third Reflection Question: "Reactions of others to my choice of eremitic life..."

Reprinted from *Raven's Bread* Vol.6 No.2. **2 pp. \$5.00**

# Raven's Rest

The Silence...The Solitude...The Solace of God...

Retreatants welcome to schedule time from March 25 through November 1, 2002 at **Raven's Rest** Hermitage (a fully furnished apartment with kitchenette & private entrance) here at **Still Wood**. Offers opportunity to experience solitude and silence on a forested mountainside of the Newfound Range in the rural Smokies, approximately 35 miles N.E. of the Great Smokies National Park and 35 miles N.W. of Asheville. Spiritual Direction available upon request. Suggested offering \$25.00 per day includes meals. For further information, contact:

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**Tel: 828-622-3750**  
**[email: fredette@nclink.net](mailto:fredette@nclink.net)**

## BOOK NOTICES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

**Thomas Merton's Paradise Journey** by William H. Shannon. *An excellent summary of and commentary on Merton's contemplative writings.* 2000. Paperback, 305 pp. \$12.95. St. Anthony Messenger Press, 1615 Republic St., Cincinnati, OH 45210-1298 Tel: 800-488-0488.

**The Mountain of Silence: A Search for Orthodox Spirituality** by Kyriacos C. Markides. *Fascinating conversations with an Athonite monk, Maximos, who has re-established monasticism on Cyprus.* 2001. Hardback, 256 pp. \$16.07. Doubleday, 1540 Broadway, New York, NY 10036. Tel:212-354-6500

**Counsels from the Holy Mountain** by Elder Ephraim. *A selection of letters and homilies of Elder Ephraim of Mount Athos, a true Desert Father of the 20th century* 1999. Deluxe Hardback, 466 pp. \$35.00. Order from St. Anthony's Greek Orthodox Monastery, 4784 N. St. Joseph's Way, Florence, AZ 85232. Paperback, \$15.00. Access Pub. Network. Order:  
<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0966700023/innerlightproducA>.

**The Way of the Dreamcatcher, Spirit Lessons with Robert Lax: Poet, Peacemaker, Sage** by S.T.Georgiou. *Conversations from the unique friendship between S.T. Georgiou and Lax, a wise old hermit and lifetime friend of Thomas Merton.* 2002. Hardback, 200 pp. \$14.95. Novalis, P.O.Box 216, Rouses Point, NY 12979-9931. Tel: 800-387-7164.

**Moments of Truth, A Spirituality of Time, Grace, and Sacred Space** by Joseph Nassal. *An invitation to embrace the events of our lives as moments of truth that reflect God's graced presence in both our wounds and our blessings.* 2002. Paperback, 183 pp. \$13.95. Forest of Peace Publishing, 251 Muncie Road, Leavenworth, KS 66048-4946. Tel: 800-659-3227.



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