



Raven's Bread

Food for Those in Solitude

Vol: 11 No: 2 May 2007

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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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. If you enjoy this free online service, we encourage you to make a donation to ***Raven's Bread Ministries***.

To E-mail ***Raven's Bread*** directly click on this link: pkfredette@earthlink.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

Still Night, Twin Moons **by Elizabeth Ayres, California, MD**

I was here earlier today, watching the water slide shoreward through the wooden slats of this pier. Light splashed off the river's wavering surface and back onto the dock in a brightsome, undulating mosaic. Stirred by the soft salt breeze, tree limbs cast quivering shadows on cliff and creek, while above me, white clouds roiled with gray as they drifted across their own blue sea. Sea gulls, ospreys, crows. Dragonflies, butterflies, wasps. The air was aslant with wings and tangled with sound: warbles, trills, whistles; the slap of fish falling back from their sunward leaps; the liquid tattoo of waves on sand.

All that is gone now. Sun and wind have both disappeared. It is night. It is still. I recognize nothing and yet I know everything, especially this moon. This silver disk that leaves me almost aghast at such perfect roundness, almost appalled at such perfect brilliance, almost confused because tonight there are two moons. One above, one below. One in the cloudless sky, one in the motionless water. In fact, as I look around I see that everything is doubled this night. The uneven silhouette of the tree line, a little white shed on the opposite shore, a boat moored at my neighbor's dock, all are twinned in the river's glassy surface.

A palindrome is a sequence of units that reads the same forward or back. Words like "radar" and "noon". Phrases such as "damn mad!" Numbers. For example, "16461" or "12/02/2021." Even DNA - those spiraled threads that teach all life how to grow - even the nucleotides of our genetic coding can mirror each other. A recent genome sequencing project discovered that a palindromic structure allows the Y chromosome to repair itself by bending over at the middle so that a healthy twin can replace its

damaged counterpart.

Which brings me to the dark, still night of contemplative prayer. "For you alone, my soul in silence waits." For a long time I used this line when I prayed, sometimes repeating it like a mantra, sometimes settling into the silence and just letting the phrase arise when it would. The sentence paraphrases Psalm 130, and I can't remember where I picked it up - a set of taped chants, perhaps? I've been praying it off and on for 20 years now, always as an expression of my silent waiting, always directed to a "you" who is God. But just the other day it came to me, in a quiet eureka moment: the "you" is "me" and the one waiting in silence for me is God. We are all palindromes. Our divine twin forever bends over us repairing the damage to our true nature. But in the mesmerizing sights and sounds of daytime, how can we arrive at such a deep knowing? Contemplative prayer is the windless, moonlit evening that allows me to say, as Catherine of Genoa said 500 years ago, "My me is God, nor do I recognize any other me except my God."

Which brings me back to this moment, sitting here on this pier. The curling shore is silver-gilt, a lavish frame, and the river is fastened to earth, mirror to wall. Making a mirror is a painstaking process, involving so many grains of Silver Nitrate and Rochelle Salts, so many pints of distilled water and ammonia, much stirring and dissolving, straining and filtering. The glass must be warm, and absolutely clean, for the least speck of dust or grease will show in the backing and mar the reflection on the finished surface. Isn't that what life is? A painstaking process involving so many grains of struggle, so many pints of hurt, a stirring of joy, filtering of mistakes, the warmth of love and we become God-mirrors. "Now we see as in a reflection," says Paul of Tarsus. "Then we shall know clearly, even as we are known." But do we have to wait until some distant future? Can't we be who we really are today?

Like many another in this newest and most fragile of centuries, I am plagued by anxiety. There's a line in scripture, in Peter's first letter: "Your opponent the devil is prowling like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour." My anxiety seemed just such a ravenous beast. I struggled with it constantly, until I borrowed a peacemaker's tip from the Buddhist teacher Thich Nhat Hahn: treat the offending feeling like a suffering child, not an enemy. Envelop it with compassion, not hate. Then memory turned up a very different passage, from Isaiah: "The wolf will lie down with the lamb, the calf with the lion will feed. There shall be no harm or hurt on all my holy mountain, for the earth is filled with the knowledge of God as water swells the sea." Yet we cling to our conflicts, inner and outer, afraid to recognize ourselves. Aghast at such brilliance. Appalled by the truth.

A stone's throw from this dock, a solitary piling stands erect in the tranquil, moon-bright water. It's impossible to tell where post ends and reflection begins. Be still. Be still and know. Be still and know that I am God, says the psalm, says the wooden post, the white shed, the motionless trees. If ever I wanted a book that would tell me what peace really means, that book is here: peace means not knowing where God ends and we begin.

A Word from Still Wood

We were preparing evening service on Good Friday when white flakes began drifting lazily onto our deck. By dark, the dreamy drifting had become driving flurries. Holy Saturday dawned with one of the deepest snowfalls of the year. Flowers and trees, which had been glorious with early blooms, were victimized by temperatures in the teens and what had promised to be an idyllic Easter turned into Christmas revisited. Should we leave the snow shovel out until May 15th?

Though white flakes dismayed us this Easter, we've been pleasantly surprised by dozens of white envelopes appearing in our mail box, assuring us that ***Raven's Bread*** (sorry the February issue was late, folks) was being read around the world. We often wonder what our local postal workers think of letters arriving from New Zealand and Malaysia and Qatar for that strange "bakery" down in Spring Creek. More than one person has asked how much our bread sells for!

We appreciate feedback about ***RB*** and often discover that an article which irritated one reader to the point of cancelling a subscription, has inspired another to share it with three friends. The February issue provoked more than the usual number of comments so this seems a good time to restate what ***RB*** is and is not. Please attend to the box below where we set forth our purpose: to be a forum of exchange among hermits and lovers of solitude.

We are merely editors; that is, people who assemble writings for publication (Merriam-Webster). We don't write ***Raven's Bread***...YOU do! And we encourage you to take seriously this responsibility to ***RB*** and to your fellow readers. Many of you do - for instance, notice the lead article for this issue. It is a beautifully poetic reflection of a

reader's discovery of God one silent evening. Peruse the goodly number of responses to this issue's Discussion Question. Review the *Reader's Write* page and ponder what other readers are telling us.

We wonder if any other publication for hermits conveys the authenticity that *Raven* does? What gives it that aura? YOU! *RB*'s articles are not fantasies; they are the fruit of personal experience; expressions of what really happens when someone risks seeking the Numinous on the pathless ways of solitude. There each of us learns that our God has a particular name known only to us and even more astonishingly, discovers this God has bestowed a special name on us as well!

This is why *Raven's Bread* transcends denominational limits. It focuses on the universality of spiritual experience that one inevitably discovers when immersed in solitude. We welcome personal reflections engendered when hermits and solitaries experience the fruits and flowers; the storms and struggles; the discoveries and delights with which the Divine surprises us. Even a four inch snowfall on Holy Saturday can remind us that the Lord "sleeps in the earth" on this day and perhaps needs a downy blanket?

As your editors, we renew our commitment to focus each issue on topics of particular interest to those who love and need solitude and silence in their lives. We are asking YOU to let us know what interests you. It is YOUR newsletter, intended to serve YOU and fill a niche that other publications do not. What do you look for when *RB* turns up in your mailbox? Do you find it? What are you willing to contribute to make *Raven's Bread* more nourishing? Generously sharing your genuine questions and discoveries will benefit your companions far more than theoretical studies on eremitism. (Companion is derived from a Latin word meaning to share bread!)

We are not asking for money even though U.S. postage will be raised in May. Many of you already send that little extra which has kept *RB* operating "in the black" all these years. So far funds have proven sufficient to cover all expenses and even provide the editors with an occasional bonus. Once again we thank you and trust that all of you will share whatever gifts you have to keep *RB* both solvent and savory for at least another ten years!

**With Grateful love,
Karen & Paul**

**There is no need to *create* silence
for it is already there.
It is simply a matter of letting it rise up
from within us.
Once we have heard this silence
we thirst to find it again.
A Carthusian *The Wound of Love***

zzzzzz Into Great Silence zzzzzz

A Film Review By: Robert Trabold, Jamaica, NY

Peter Groening, a German filmmaker, lived for six months in the Carthusian monastery, "La Grande Chartreuse" high in the French Alps and produced a cinematic poem – a silent film almost three hours in length. His camera followed the hermit-monks in their daily life – praying individually in their room or in the chapel, eating, doing manual labor, singing the psalms in the daily office, etc. The silence of the film enters into the silence of the hermits' lives – a silence that permeates all. The stark stone walls and the stunning surrounding Alpine scenery reinforce the stillness. The viewer enters the eremitical silence through the film, a silence which covers the whole audience. The camera leads one always deeper to feel the divine presence.

Ultimately, the viewer realizes that this film is a love story where the hermits have

stripped themselves of many aspects of human living so as to be naked and seduced by God. They live out this seduction in silence – the voice of God. This contemplative film reminds us of the experience of Elijah the prophet in the cave. He did not experience God in thunder or lightening, nor in the earthquake, but in the gentle breeze that touched his face.

Discussion Topic for May 2007 Issue:

Anyone moved by the Spirit:
What topics relevant to contemporary hermit life are important to you?

(Please limit responses to 300 words or less)

Deadline: July 1, 2007

**Unless we zealously guard the few remaining fragments of
silence
within our civilized life from verbal pollution and dissolution,
we forfeit the redemptive intention of the word within the
world.**

Max Picard (1888-1965) *The World of Silence*

Hermit Resources Available from *Raven's Bread* May 2007

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**

JURIDICAL COMMENTARIES

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)
12 pp. \$3.00

HERMIT RULES

Rules for Hermits (Spanish & English) by Padre Justo, O.P. **9pp. \$3.00**

Eremitic Rule of Life **30pp. \$5.50**

Franciscan Plan of Life in Hermitage **4pp. \$2.50**

Topical Outline for Plan of Eremitical Life **3pp. \$2.50**

HERMIT SURVEYS

Raven's Bread Survey 2001 - Compiled Responses **23pp. \$5.50**

Marabou Questionnaire 1996 - **9pp. \$3.00**

ARTICLES & COMMENTARIES

Notes to Guide the Beginning Hermit by A Hermit of Mercy **15pp. \$3.50**

Lay Hermits by Rev. Eugene Stockton **8pp. \$3.00**

Eremitism: Call to the Chronically Ill and Disabled (1989) by Laurel M. O'Neal **5pp. \$2.50**

NCR 2004 "Sacristans of Emptiness" by Rich Heffern **6pp. \$3.00**

Discernment Criteria - "Marabou" 1996 - **6pp. \$2.50**

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

Being a Hermit: Where and How 12 pp, \$6.50

Acedia - The Dark Side of Commitment 4 pp. \$2.50

The Dangers of Solitude 5 pp. \$3.00

Must Hermits Work? 10 pp. \$5.50

Where God Begins To Be A Woman's Journey into Solitude by Karen Karper

An Authors Guild Back inprint.com edition

To order online, click on this link: www.book.orders@iuniverse.com

Autographed copies (\$12.95 plus \$3.00 postage & handling) are available from:

Raven's Bread

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Fellowship of Solitaries

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.

Correspondent: John Mullins, 415 Akeld Cottages, Akeld Wooler, Northumberland, NE716TA U.K.

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

To access the website of Fellowship of Solitaries click on this link:

<http://www.solitaries.org.uk/>

BOOK NOTICES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Wild & Robust, The Adventure of Christian Humanism

by William McNamara.

This volume paints a vivid picture of the contemplative life as lived at the ground of one's being, intimately in touch with the source of being, in mindful harmony with the universe, in love with the Ineffable One who hounds and hallows us until our existence is a unique and dynamic embodiment of the cosmotheandric Presence.

2006. Softcover. \$12.95 (US).

ISBN-13: 978-156101-248-8

Cowley Publications, Cambridge MA,

Now purchased by: Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, 4501 Forbes Blvd. Lanham, MD 20706

Tel: 301-459-3366 Website: rowmanlittlefield.com

Silence, Solitude, Simplicity: A Hermit's Love Affair with A Noisy, Crowded and Complicated World

by Jeremy Hall, OSB.

"We all need God," Sr. Jeremy says in her first sentence and readers find here a warm and practical address to that need. Her book is the fruit of decades of practice and the spiritual journey she recounts is nobody's but hers - which makes it, paradoxically, something we can all learn from.

2007. Softcover. 192 pp. \$14.95 (US)

ISBN 978-0-8146-3185-0

The Liturgical Press, Collegeville, MN

Raven's Bread Library

*Are you aware that **Raven's Bread** offers the services of a library to our readers? We have a select collection of books and reading material about solitude and eremitical life which may be difficult to find elsewhere. If you are interested, please send a self-addressed stamped envelope for a Book List. When you make a choice, please send us the Title, together \$2.00 per book for postage. Ordinarily we ask that books be returned in a month. N.B. Sorry - library books can be sent only in the USA.*



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