



Raven's Bread

Food for Those in Solitude

Vol: 12 No: 2 May 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
18065 Hwy 209
Hot Springs, NC 28743

The annual subscription to the printed newsletter is \$10.00 in USA and \$12.00 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

"Watchman in the Night"

by Robert Trabold, Jamaica, NY

**"My soul yearns more for the Lord,
than the watchman waiting for the dawn."
(Ps. 129: 6)**

I have always been fascinated by the symbol of the watchman in the night, seeing it as a possible analogy to the eremitic vocation. In ancient and medieval times, the cities hired watchmen who walked through the dark streets and stood sentinel on the city walls, watching for dangers such as fires breaking out or a sneak attack from the enemy. After a long night, they welcomed the dawn and the light.

In a sense, hermits enter into a similar darkness when they make a radical break with human society. They attempt to live in silence and solitude, away from the social commitments and engagements that most humans are involved with. They may live in out-of-the-way places which facilitate such isolation. They generally lead a simple and poor life and are not completely absorbed in the usual work activities that humans use to support themselves and acquire riches. In this radical break, the hermit is stripped of many things and stands alone in order to encounter God. He/she is not encumbered with the many commitments of a life in the world. As a result, the solitary hopes to encounter God more directly and intensely and build a life around this meeting and union. In this inner journey, the hermit encounters the divine as his/her center and still point. The presence of the divine is immanent and in the deepest part of

the person. This presence is also mysterious because God is transcendent and completely other. This gives this inner experience of the Absolute a sense of the ineffable. In this inward journey, the hermit realizes that the Divine is present with us, loves us and is wooing us to reciprocate this love.

In taking this radical stance and staying apart from many human activities, the solitary is inviting other people to enter this inward journey - to encounter God at their center and still point. Most people may not be called to take such a radical stance as hermits do but all are called in one way or another to encounter the divine at their center and open their ears to hear God wooing them into a mutual relationship of love.

In their radical lifestyle, solitaries are also asking the world a question. They are raising the issue of the ultimate meaning of life on earth with its contingency and temporality. Many people are so involved with their activities in the world that they may not take the time to ask this essential question. They may lose sight of this or never discover it. The solitary raises the issue of God in our life - God who is the ground of our being and the goal of our life on earth. We are called to have a relationship with the divine on earth - a union which will follow us into eternal life. The radical stance of the hermit challenges us to make changes in our life so that we can orient ourselves toward God and live our true vocation. The radical detachment that the solitary has toward many things in human life is a sign that shocks us and makes us wonder. Hopefully it will orient us toward a loving relationship with the divine and service to our neighbor.

In making such a radical break with ordinary human endeavors, the hermit challenges us to sit in the eternal silence of God where the divine will call our name and we will know who we are. Like watchmen in the night who await the morn, the hermit invites us to prepare for this dawn. It will change our whole earthly life; we will walk into the light and leave the darkness behind.

"I will seduce my love, lead her into the desert
and speak to her heart." (Hos. 2,16)

A Word from Still Wood

"Spring was breaking out all over" just beyond the glass doors that give us a wonderful view of the long slope of our mountain, slowly greening in the sunshine. Goldfinches were flitting around the feeder when Paul bumped my elbow. "See that?" he asked, and I nodded, watching the scarlet cardinal hopping around in the holly bush. It was our early Sunday morning quiet time together and Paul began to muse about what living here had taught us.

"Balance is so essential," he began. "For instance, you can't work inside at the computer all the time," looking at me pointedly. "You need to get outside, get your hands into the dirt..." I interrupted, "And you need to just sit and listen to the birds and play with Neill and Cynda (our two border collies)." I admitted that working full time at home (as I do), it is tempting to just keep on working and working...and never take time to exercise or relax with the cat in my lap.

Meditating aloud, Paul added that perspective was also critical, and expanded on how much that helps when Neill and Cynda have chewed another mat to pieces or devastated a flower bed in their manic play. "It's not quite like having a bomb land in the Green Zone! We aren't living in harm's way, we have a home and enjoy a security which many do not," he observed. "Comparing our situation to most of the world, we know we're among the most fortunate people on earth."

Pondering what makes for contentment, I added mindfulness which helps me stay focused in the present moment, however quick or slow the pace, not fretting when things don't get done as fast as I had hoped. We would have preferred to have written Consider the Ravens in six months instead of eighteen months but it wasn't the only thing on our plate. We had a life to live and other projects and commitments which could not be neglected until "The Book" was done.

But now, tra-la, we can say the text is done and most of the graphics too. Thanks to all of you who sent us photos of your hermitages, as well as everyone who sent us an encouraging word. Paul has turned several of the photos into pen-and-ink sketches since our book "package" requires only black-and-white graphics. He's also hatched an "unkindness" of ravens to adorn chapter headings and the cover. A final editing is underway to format all

the material for on-line submission to our publisher. If all goes as planned (does it ever?), Consider the Ravens may be submitted sometime in May - an 80,000 word text which will become a 250 page soft-cover book by July. We are proud to report that Father Richard Rohr, ofm, is writing the Forward!

How fortunate can editors be? We asked if you would send us reflections and articles to "fatten" Raven's Bread and your response has amazed us! Thanks to all who shared thoughts, personal stories, letters, replies to the Hermits Ask column, and poetry. You will find many of these in this issue with more to come as the year rolls on. We welcome your exchange of ideas and responses to items already published, as well as tips about good books, etc. Please keep things coming. Everything is welcome and will, in time, find a place in a future issue. By sharing with RB, you are helping to nourish your hermit brothers and sisters around the world.

As we sign off for this spring issue, we wish you a life imbued with balance, perspective and mindfulness. In a word, we pray that you will experience that deep contentment which is the nearest thing to heaven on this earth.

With Grateful love,
Karen & Paul

**When we enter the stillness and listen,
we feel the aliveness that is all around us.
We give ourselves the opportunity to be a part
of the vibrant, living, natural world.
The stillness brings a deep serenity
into our hearts
and a vital force into our bodies.
When we practice Entering the Silence in nature,
there is no frantic separation between the
creatures of the forest.
and the gentleness of our hearts.**

*from EARTH MEDICINE By Jamie Sams
via Friends of Silence April 2008*

zzzzzz Solitude & Silence zzzzzz

STORIES SHARED:

While prayer in solitude is the heart and core of my vocation, it seems that my call to solitude is not to be a call to go apart from the world, live in a remote hermitage or drastically limit contacts with people.

After much inner upheaval, prayerful reflection, and discussion with my spiritual director, solitude for me seems to be based on what I read in "Breakthrough, Meister Eckhart's Creation" in new translation with commentaries by Matthew Fox. In Matthew Fox's words: "He (Meister Eckhart) wants to explore solitude, which is what is left in the person who has learned to let go and let be." (pg. 245) Applying these words many times to daily situations, I find a space inside myself which for me is

solitude. This space grows larger and more silent as I strive to let go and let be. It is a space where I meet God (though I do not always sense God's presence there), where I can truly obey the command to "be still and know that I am God."

The maintenance and nurturing of this space, my hermitage, requires considerable monitoring of my life-style; how much external solitude and silence I need; how much contact I have with other people and the nature of that contact; how uncluttered my home and mind are; how much space I have in my daily routine; my prayer; how often I withdraw into my hermitage to just be in that space and silence with God. The fruit of prayer, the time spent in my hermitage and the disciplined choices I make to maintain my solitude/space/hermitage, hopefully show up in my relationships with every person who comes into my life.

I have a rule which was first developed when I believed the call to solitude would eventually lead to physical solitude, even if, at that time I couldn't see how. When it became apparent in recent months that perhaps my call to solitude was somewhat different than I first imagined, I prayerfully reflected on my rule. I found that my rule applies to solitude that is essentially interior based on letting go and letting be, as well as physical solitude. This was an affirmation that my rule had indeed been inspired by the Holy Spirit. It also confirmed what one of my first spiritual directors told me: the rule is written in stone, but the constitutions are written in pencil so that they can be adapted to apply the rule to specific times and situations.

Being a subscriber/reader of *Raven's Bread* for several years, I have come to realize that the call to solitude can be lived out in many different ways. Each journey is unique and to look at only one person's journey as The Way can block one's growth as a solitary. The diversity of situations presented by the writers to *Raven's Bread* has been a great gift to me and I am grateful to be part of the *Raven's Bread* community.

P.M. in ST. PETERSBURG, FL

It is eleven years now, since I entered my hermit life. Specifically four years of that time were in extreme isolation, and my meditation was very deep. I used that time to seek the Lord like never before. I had a shattered heart to heal, and only God could do it. I hoped to come to understand, accept, and then heal from my emotional wounds. It proved to be a very long odyssey, this spiritual quest. I could no longer cope with the city and the pain it held for me. I felt it necessary to withdraw from the old life, move to a new state, and tuck into the safe nest of the mountain forest. There, I could rest, and seek the closeness of my heavenly Father, find His guidance and healing from my wounds, and learn new ways of doing something to please Him, even in my isolation. I truly felt like Elijah, and God did not leave me desolate.

Here in the Bitterroot Mountains, where I came to search for an increased closeness with God, there is snow on the ground at

least four months of each year. I have found that an excellent time to pray is when shoveling snow, or simply watching it come down, gently, gently, hour after hour, sometimes day after day. The solitude of winter brings a peace for me. God used the silence to smooth away the rough edges of my mind; the wind to rekindle my interest in life, the great skies to draw my face upward; and the purest darkness of the country nights, to focus me inwardly.

I was raised a born-again Christian, though many Catholic ways move me deeply. I believe that no matter what we do in this world, and no matter where we go, God is just as close, and continually yearning for us to seek him. I read the Bible, think what it means to me, and then raise my heart to my God, to tell Him how very much I love Him, and need his help.

The inner agony of my darkness those first four years was deep. Very deep. But even as I realized how deep the wounds were, the Holy Spirit let me know that Christ could reach and heal wounds much deeper. He had suffered too. He was there. He cared. He understood. He loved me. There was a reason, even if I could not see it. I knew that God saw it and would never leave me. I felt complete trust, even in my anguish.

It's been eleven years now. God has healed me so much that I again find myself able to reach out to others and help them. He has given me strength. I stand straight now. I shovel snow slowly, due to my age, and talk to the Lord. I feed the wild animals in winter and thank Him for letting me share this part of helping other living creatures that He has made.

God sustains me in an unusual way. When I was young, I adopted three profoundly retarded children as a single mother. I chose them, one at a time, because I had love to give, and they needed a mother. They are quiet, middle-aged adults now, and I still love nurturing them and seeing their smiles. They do not move around but they look out the windows, and I entertain them every way I can. They do not demand, and cannot speak but they are attentive to me and my talk. All three will always be infants in their understanding. Praise be to God, they are on S.S.I. and so I do not hunger. I never dreamed in my youth that I would ever need my children as much as they needed me. However God knew all about it. I find an inner reward in changing them, loving them, caring for them. They are infinitely dear to me.

There is a pure love which exists when nothing is expected in return. I have come to realize that this is how God's love for me is - very, very pure. He loved me even when I gave nothing in return. He has taught me much through loving these three of His precious children. Now, with my inner spirit so much healed, when a life-trial comes along, it doesn't overwhelm me. With God's help, I meet it openly with knowledge that God must have something for me to do for His glory in this new trouble. Perhaps I can lead someone to Christ. Perhaps I can do as little as give a bag of food to snowed-in people on this mountain who can't get out, and are out of food. Perhaps a gift to God is as small as smiling at others.

R.G. in CARYWOOD, ID

After reading in the past couple issues of *Raven's Bread* comments about "hippie-Buddhists," I knew it was time for me to come out of the Buddhist closet! So, hello, ...I am a Tibetan Buddhist Hermit, and have been for forty years."

Although I am not a hippie and never have been, I must admit they look like they have a whole lot of fun, no matter what they do! I would humbly like to share my spiritual Path with you. I choose to live my life as a Hermit, in the midst of a large Northeast American City and I work daily in the marketplace. I have a job at a university in order to pay rent on my small Hermitage Apartment, as well as purchase food and books. As many of you know, a number of early Christian Egyptian Hermits also found it beneficial to live in the city as it's easier to remain anonymous in such an environment; one can remain hidden in plain view!

I was born in the wilderness of Northern Ontario, Canada. Those early years surrounded by the wildness of nature, grounded and prepared me for the culture shock I experienced when my family moved to an American Midwestern City in 1951. Although my lovely parents were highly cultured, warm and spiritual people, I felt totally out of place and lonely.

When I turned ten years old, my older brother appeared in his high school play, "Lost Horizon" by James Hilton. The story line goes like this: A plane crashes in the mountains of Tibet. The survivors barely make it to a Tibetan Monastery in the region called Shangri-la, where it's soon discovered no one grows old. To this day, I remember my overwhelming emotions when watching that drama. I sat next to my father on the second row of the balcony. As one of the main characters, a Tibetan High Lama, walked across the stage, I no longer felt alone for the first time in my life. I knew I had arrived home!

From that moment on, as though I was being guided by an unseen hand, I have spent my life seeking and engaging in the Buddhist teachings on Compassion and hopefully putting them into practice, day by day. Over the years, I've had the good fortune to have met and been taught by many of the older generation of Tibetan Lamas. The high point of my spiritual life came in 1991 when I received the Kalachakra Empowerment from His Holiness, the Dalai Lama.

I arise at 4 am each day. For one hour I recite my daily Commitment: the Valrayogini Sadhana (Prayer Ceremony). After breakfast, I do some Spiritual Painting and then I get ready for work. During the workday, on my breaks, I sit down and silently recite the Kalachakra six-session recitation (which is another Commitment).

At night after work, depending upon the situation, I say prayers for the sick. Occasionally, I am also asked to do a recitation of the Tibetan Book of the Dead for a deceased individual. Sometimes I do silent Dzogchen meditation at night or I might teach a meditation student. In closing, I'd like to share with you a Buddhist prayer by Shantideva. I'm sure you

will all resonate with the heartfelt words:

"May no one who encounters me ever have an insignificant contact. May the mere fact of our meeting contribute to the fulfillment of their wishes. May I be a protector of the Helpless, a guide to those traveling the path, a boat to whose wishing to cross over, or a bridge or a raft. May I be a lamp for those in darkness, a home for the homeless and a servant to the world."

Bless you! And may all beings, human and nonhuman, find happiness!

A.A.C (PCD) THOGYAL HERMITAGE

**It is not speaking that breaks our silence
but our unceasing anxiety to be heard.**

Thomas Merton

via SACRED JOURNEY June /July 2008

zzzzzz **Illusion or Reality** *zzzzzz*

by Elizabeth Ayres

It rained, briefly, then stopped, then started again. I thought, No need to dash for cover, this isn't going to last long. And stayed put. On the beach. Listening to raindrops behind me: tat, tat, tat on the stiff marsh grass, like tine claws. Feeling raindrops on my face: tat, tat, tat on soft, warm flesh, insistent, a drum roll. Watching raindrops on river's surface, her face pocked and cratered. Tat: one drop plunges to its death. Tat: melts into concentric circles. Tat: lives again as flowing water. Tat, tat, tat.

By the time I got back to where my car waited - up the hill I clambered, into the woods I plunged, along the leaf-caked path I ambled - by this time I am softened. Tat, tat, tat. Ready to vanish. Tat, tat, tat. Melt into something else.

Now the rain stops. Silence. 'Hush," the trees whisper, "Mum's the word.' I touch my lips, checking, yes, they're all buttoned up. Thoughts are another matter. I do my best to let them melt, tat, tat, tat, into the thought-river slowing in my pocked and cratered brain.

I glance down. There's a ditch along the side of the road, clotted with leaves, filled with water. Dead leaves in a ditch, I think, but no, my brain registers a mighty fretwork of trees towering loftily, no, plunging down into sky to where gray clouds drift by, billowing underfoot, no, drifting high above, no, heaped in roiling masses and submerged beneath the swaying treetops that are reflected in the fathomless depths of a shallow roadside ditch.

I can't tell you how many times I traced and retraced my steps,

lost in the confounding shift between illusion and reality. If I stared at the leaves, the reflection vanished. How mundane. Clouds above if I craned my neck, yes, a bit of fringed treetop, okay, myriads of gray trunks bristling in the forest, if I glanced off to the side, ho-hum.

But when I gazed at the reflection, a dizzying panorama revealed itself, whole and complete. A majesty of trees soaring vast, infinite, contained by, containing all. Something about seeing the one reflected in the other, and something from my college psych class. About figure-ground relationships. Is it a vase or two faces? Is it a rabbit or a duck? Is it me, or God, or God in me and me in God? The whole is different than the sum of its parts.

I guess I have a choice, what I want to attend to, moment by moment, day by day, the figure or the ground. Because one way, it's just tat, tat, tat, drops of rain, dying. Another way, it's deep calling to deep, tat, tat, tat, in a mighty river, melting.

Author's Note: This essay was inspired by Richard Simonelli's "A Great Gift" which I read in last issue of Raven's Bread just before taking the walk described herein.

<

Hermit Resources Available from *Raven's Bread* MAY 2008

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

18065 Hwy. 209

Hot Springs, NC 28743

Tel: 828-622-3750

[email: fredette@nclink.net](mailto:fredette@nclink.net)

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

SELF-ABANDONMENT TO DIVINE PROVIDENCE

by Jean-Pierre deCaussade, S.J.

"An incredibly rich store of wisdom is contained in this perhaps the greatest classic on the benefits to be derived from surrendering our human wills to divine Providence. The author shows that this self-abandonment is the key to attaining peace and great holiness." A must-read for serious hermits!

1959. Softcover. 448 pp. ISBN# 0-89555-312-0 \$22.50

Tan Books and Publishers, Inc. P.O. Box 424, Rockford, IL 61105

THE SACRAMENT OF THE PRESENT MOMENT

by Jean-Pierre deCaussade, S.J.

"The central message of the book, Self-Abandonment, by the same author. In this superb new translation of the celebrated spiritual classic of wisdom, hope and inspiration, de Caussade offers guidance for daily living in communion with God ... points the way for experiencing each moment as a sacrament."

1989. Softcover. 101 pp. ISBN# 0-06-061811-6 pbk. \$12.00

HarperSanFrancisco. for more information contact:

Harper Coliins Publishers, 10 East 53rd St. New York, NY 10022

THE ART OF PRAYING, The Principles and Methods of Christian Prayer

by Romano Guardini

"Guardini is a master of the spiritual life. It is a blessing to have his book on prayer available. Simple, direct, profound, this classic work guides everyone from the beginner to those long-experienced in prayer."

1985. 184 pp. ISBN# 0-918477-34-4 pbk \$15.95.

Sophia Institute Press, Box 5284, Manchester, NH 03108

Tel: 800-888-9344. www.sophiainstitute.com



Raven's Bread
18065 Hwy. 209
Hot Springs, NC
28743