



Raven's Bread

Food for Those in Solitude

Vol: 3 No: 3 August 1999

Raven's Bread is a quarterly newsletter for hermits and those interested in the eremitical life published Paul and Karen Fredette. This 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

P.O. Box 562

Hot Springs, NC 28743.

The annual subscription to the printed newsletter is \$7.50 in U.S. currency. (International money orders 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: 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 on Solitude

By: Barbara Erakko-Taylor, Catonsville MD

The "Fourth Magi" seems a good metaphor for the solitary in the institutional church. The story is of a fourth Magi who is trying to reach the Christ Child. But things keep happening. People need help and he feels he has to stop his journey to provide that assistance. Ultimately he spends his whole life trying to reach the manger and never quite making it.

The solitary is like this fourth magi making his or her way to a solitary lifestyle, feeling drawn to live this inner mystery of Christ. The urge, the longing, is so strong that the solitary wants to rush, to run with total abandon, past humanity. But and this is Christ's grace and gift obstacles appear in the shape of family, friends, lifestyle, church teachings, even the Gospel message itself. And the solitary is forced to deal with each one. Why? Because the journey and the goal are really just about love.

The solitary has a unique problem and dilemma to resolve before authentic solitude finally emerges. Only in being *with* each of these so-called obstacles can one achieve the deeper mystery of solitude. I have come to the conclusion that my solitude is growing even as I travel in ways I cannot understand. I feel very much like the fourth magi who has not yet entered into the mystical solitariness of the manger. It seems ever distant. What gives me comfort is that the obstacle itself somehow couples with my solitary heart to allow my inner solitude to unfold more deeply. It is a mystery but an essential one. So when things happen - such as the total disruption of my so-called solitary life, I learn to enjoy the wonder these moments offer.

If the solitary call is authentic, others will eventually support you. They will begin to learn more about themselves, prayer and solitude. They will see it through you not because you preach or try to convince but because you are content to be what you are. Even as the institutional church can be an obstacle to you, so you too can be an obstacle to the institution. It is a needed conflict one that allows *grace* to show the way.

Regarding the urge to go elsewhere, I believe this is merely surface turbulence on the water of desire. It takes time and courage to understand the turbulence in our life. I often think such urges are really signs of something unresolved within ourselves. They symbolize a story unfinished.

A novice recently said to me, "I finally realized the path is the path, not home." She was always seeking a home, a finality, a sense of conclusion, a matching of inward desire with outward lived reality. But one day in retreat, she realized that home is not a place but a trusting in the path.

It is a very difficult thing to live into such a radical understanding, one that is so close to the Gospel. Yet for all of us, solitary or not, the beginning is the end, and the journey itself, the goal.

A Word

From

Still Wood

Despite our best efforts, the jungle tends to prevail on our mountain acre, watered daily by the rains and dripping mists that give the Smokies their name. Since spring we have been trying to turn a steep slope into a rock garden that produces something more than rocks. Is it progress that it is now covered with volunteer ferns and moss that threaten to strangle the Astilbes and Coral Bells we planted with so much hope? Perhaps it is better to go with nature than combat it! Like God, it will prevail in the end, yes?

The continuing conversation about Plans of Life that we are facilitating in this issue of *Raven's Bread*, presents a similar theme. Many of our contributors say, in one way or another, that any Plan of Life they may have developed has had to submit God's own "master plan." We are fascinated by the variety of experiences and points of view represented in our pages this month and thank everyone who took time to respond.

The last issue of *RB* to appear this century (doesn't that sound ominous!) will be published in November. We would like to offer reflections by solitaries about how they view their vocation vis-à-vis the New Millennium. Does the Church, the world, need what persons in solitude have to offer? Any insights into the resurgence of eremitical life during the past century? It has been a long time since hermit life has exhibited such vigor and vitality. What has triggered this revival? Will it continue into the new century now knocking at our door? Is some prophetic note being sounded?

Our hermit-retreat, *Raven's Rest*, has already seen a number of guests this summer and there are persons booked into the year 2000 already! Apparently there are many courageous folks who are willing to travel past Trust and beyond Luck (two of the "communities" near us on NC Highway 209!) to reach Still Wood. We are happy to share with them the quiet loveliness of this mountainside where God's ravens soar on the updrafts and his showers soften the stony ground.

Let us continue to pray for one another as we each cultivate the "garden" God has given us, rocks and all! Perhaps, as in the parable, weeds and wheat must grow together for a season. May we all rejoice in the riches and wisdom of God's all-prevailing care!

With Grateful
love,

Karen
&
Paul

zzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzz *Sounding Solitude* zzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzz

By: Bill Kolacek (and Heidi dog)

(Reprinted from "The Solitary Voice" Vol.VI,#1, Pentecost 1999)

I, living here in the hills and woods of my hermitage, am trying to find my true self and establish a true relationship with God in a more "mystical and contemplative" manner than I can experience in the active setting of the business/social world. This is, of course, only one of many ways to approach this truth and this relationship. For me, the practice of silence, solitude, contemplation, and following the rhythms of the day, is the best way for me to "see."

However, I, like many others, have found that the road, whether active or passive, can be strewn with many potholes. The deeper and nastier of these obstructions seem to have always come from my own reasoning and understanding. They have come when I have forgotten the simple truths God has placed within our very beings, the truths and realities of our union with God. This union is forged in the deep furnace of spiritual intuition, revealing what is already all around us.

I believe that what enters this place of spiritual intuition comes from a divine source and is infused freely into each of us by grace. In my opinion the problems begin when we attempt to use our understanding to inform our reason at this intuitive spiritual level rather than allowing our intuitive spiritual knowing to inform us.

In our reasoning capacity, there is a place that is sensitive to detecting and "seeing" and being filled with divine truths; a place that each of us needs to behold and listen to from a silent and simple center within ourselves, free of the noise of "under-standing." Merton describes such a place where "some men, with some of the simplicity of Noah, will always be capable of seeing nature and created things for what they are, signs and pledges of our union with God."

Here is one example of how this plays out practically for me in my hermitage, Hill House. As Heidi dog and I walk the hills, valleys, and woods, I have come to hear many messages from what surrounds me on these walks, walks prepared for by time spent in centering and contemplative prayer. One such message, apparent to all, is that there is no lust of the eyes, lust of the flesh or pride of life operative in the animal, plant, or inanimate life that I walk past and through. Yes, nature is "red in tooth and claw"; however, that is not the point here. I realize that unless I bring these dimensions of lust with me on these walks, they are not present.

In my humble opinion, God shows me, through nature, that there is a place where my reason can be free of the lust of the eyes, lust of the flesh and pride of life, where I can just "be" in God's presence ö a place where a simple intuition of the truth (simplex intuitas veritatis) can happen through divine in-filling, free of interference, where I can hear it and apply it to life.

zzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzz *Words from the Desert* zzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzz

By: A Montreal Hermit

Arriving back at my door after one of those unavoidable weekly excursions outside the hermitage, I noticed that my love of solitude, if not my entire vocation, was immediately placed in doubt for a couple of days. The experience seemed to be a pattern of psychic and physical stages that had to be endured before the fruits of prayer and solitude could once again be accessed. Given that my hermitage is in a busy urban area, and my once-a-week excursions involve teaching, the contrast between the world and the cell is probably more pronounced in my case than in a rural hermitage situation.

By tracking the movement from exteriority to interiority with some precision, I have put together a small chart that has helped me immeasurably during those hours or days when I'm trying to settle back into my spiritual rhythm. What follows, then, is offered to those who struggle at the threshold, that they may perhaps benefit from the heightened contrast that comes with my living situation.

First six hours: Excitement, pacing, and nervous energy; increased appetite; desire to go back out or call someone to follow up a thought; prayer or work is bitter to the taste.

Next eighteen hours: Lonely, unhappy; distracted, can't find God or peace in prayer; replaying conversations, noting things I should have said; nervous energy transforms into a generalized anxiety, guilt, and worry; energy depleted, drained.

Next twenty-four hours: Busy dreams, sexual arousal; still tempted to go out; still drained, off-center; stray memories/thoughts rising in the residue of previous conversations; some desire for prayer, meditation and spiritual reading but concentration still not there.

Afterwards: Loneliness and sexual temptation are drastically lowered or completely dissipated; concentration and attention to prayer returns; happy, peaceful and joyful feelings are possible; energy increasingly rises and peaks typically on Day Four of solitude; no desire to leave hermitage.

Seeking to shorten these times or to lessen their negative effects has required, over time, adopting a number of practices or rules of thumb. First, quite a bit depends on what disposition I bring to the excursion in the first place. If I can bring the fruits of my previous solitude to my colleagues through patience, joy, love, simplicity of gesture and word, and of course, constant prayer in and between conversations and tasks, then I stand to gain, and perhaps they will also.

Upon returning to the hermitage, when prayer is the last thing I want to do, I gain much by asking God or the saints for help and doing my prayers anyway ò with all my muscle if necessary. Nervous energy can sometimes be successfully channeled into simpler, more physical prayers, work or penitential practices.

Finally, consulting the list above has helped me to remember that it will soon pass on its own and I need not be angry at myself or the world for all this disruption.

Topic for "Hermits Ask and Respond" Forum in November 1999 Issue:

The millenium is at hand!

What words of wisdom and hope can hermits offer on the threshold of a new century?

Deadline: October 1, 1999

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**

Statutes for Hermits by The Bishops of France (1989) **12 pp. \$4.00**

Discernment Survey 1996 **6pp. \$2.00**

Raven's Rest

Retreatants welcome to schedule time at **Raven's Rest** (a fully furnished apartment with private entrance) here at **Still Wood**. Offers opportunity to experience solitude and silence on a forested mountainside in the Smokies. Spiritual Direction available upon request. Suggested offering \$20.00 per day includes meals. For further information, contact:

Paul and Karen Fredette

P.O. Box 562 Hot Springs, NC 28743

BOOK NOTICES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

How the Wild Things Pray by William Cleary. *A collection of prayer-poems written from the perspective of forty different Wild Things - birds, insects, fish, fowl, and four-footed creatures. Following each prayer is an insightful and humorous "Praxis for Today" that extends the wisdom of Wild Things into daily life.* Forest of Peace Publishing, 251 Muncie Road, Leavenworth, KS 66048-4946; 1999, Paper, 111 pp. \$12.95. To order: 1-800-659-3227.

Carnival Tales for Blind Ben See by Roger Robbenolt. *A master storyteller relates the healing from abuse of a teen-age boy who finds temporary refuge among the scarred and beautiful folk of Blind Ben See's carnival family.* Forest of Peace Publishing, 251 Muncie Road, Leavenworth, KS 66048-4946; 1999, Paper, 167 pp. \$11.95. To order: 1-800-659-3227.

The Hermit, A Personal Discovery of Prayer by David Torkington. *Through conversations with a hermit on a remote Scottish isle, the author instructs the beginner in the first stages of a prayer life.* Alba House, Staten Island. 1999, Paper, 112 pp. \$7.95

The Prophet, The Inner Meaning of Prayer by David Torkington. *In this second volume of the trilogy, the author narrates two parallel stories about hermits to take the reader beyond the first stages of prayer to an understanding of role of sacrifice and self-denial.* Alba House, Staten Island, 1999. Paper, 173 pp. \$9.95

The Mystic: From Charismatic to Mystical Prayer by David Torkington. *A rich and compelling tale that likens the various stages in our search for God to those of a successful marriage.* Alba House, Staten Island, NY, 1999, Paper, 128 pp. \$7.95

(**The Hermit, The Prophet** and **The Mystic** may be ordered as a set for \$21.95. Alba House: 1-800-343-2522)



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