



Raven's Bread

Food for Those in Solitude

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Raven's Bread is a quarterly newsletter 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
P.O. Box 562
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The annual subscription to the printed newsletter is \$8.00 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: 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).

Thoughts in Solitude

By: Richard Simonelli, Boulder, Colorado

And so it is *that* morning. A spring morning with the phoebes singing their plaintive two- tone chant and crows calling through the sunlit air, a morning of green fir and pine against the limitless blue sky. But it is also a morning of deep inner tiredness and weariness. It is a morning of feeling worn out despite a full night's sleep. A morning of feeling the unique signature of ill health pervading your body.

You *know*: chronic ill health has come to claim you. You feel a blight on your energy even as you perceive the exuberance of the day all about. It is a morning when you know that both life and death are with you. From the silence and certainty of this morning insight you do not turn away. You do not say, "Get thee behind me, death..." because you know that death is not the enemy. Life and death are partners in a dance; in a strange way, life and death are one. And though you feel the exuberance of the life force co-existing with your lasting illness, you do not feel a lust for life or the need to cling to life at any and all costs.

Life and death are one thing, one dance in which you are a willing and grateful participant. Although there may be no cure for your lasting illness, there can be healing. In healing you may become whole despite desperate physical symptoms that impinge on your thoughts and emotions, testing your spirituality. You become whole the moment you cease to fear the dance of life and death. The moment of healing is the moment when life no longer wrestles with death, when life stops seeking victory over death, when you let death dance with life without fearing one and lusting after the other.

You will do all that you can reasonably do to moderate your lasting illness -- there is no death wish here. But finally you will come to accept the hermitage of a difficult health condition, know that this hermitage is your teacher, this environment of seclusion a unique gift from the dance. You will come to realize that you have already claimed a life where nothing is missing, nothing left out; a life good, complete and quite enough. This understanding itself is one aspect of your healing.

Outside the orderly healing process that may take time and the acquisition of both health management skills and changes in attitude, something sudden might happen. You might experience the Immensity of Love. Suddenly, you might come awake. Such experience lies outside process. It can be neither created nor manufactured. You are already loved and enlightened. Healing is not a prerequisite to this. Opening to Love is not a sequential journey. In fact it is not even a journey at all. Realizing this, you are beyond healing; outside of it. And this may be the greatest healing of all.

The phoebe's call drifts through the window in an act of healing quite separate from cure. In the next minute there may be the difficult reality of getting on with the day, dealing with the physical depression brought on by illness, the struggle with making ends meet in the context of a wider "abled" world. But to heal is to be a participant in the swirling, energetic dance of creation. Healing is an attitude shift that may occur like an earthquake when the tectonic plates of our belief system subside into new positions of humble participant rather than conqueror. For the sacred mystery of birth and death is one holistic dance of healing grace that we may enter in illness as well as in health. And so it will be... *that* morning.

A Word from Still Wood

High summer in the Smokies is lush and green, celebrated by alternating thunder showers and brilliant sunshine. Today is the feast of Elijah the Prophet. Was it a mere coincidence that last

The body in chronic pain numbs focal attention. It limits the kind of attention that reflects, plans, envisions and wants. It also limits the kind of attention central to intentional prayer. Attention is more than an agency of intellect and will. Attention, said Simone Weil, is also prayer as prayer is attention. Pain defines how and when attention prays.

As pain spreads and deepens, it possesses attention, both the focal and prayerful kind. The gravity of pain translocates prayer. There is a paradox in unremitting pain. Pain that persists without relief and refractory to the mind's intention becomes a spontaneous prayer of the ensouled body-self. Oscillating between gravity and grace, pain works like a mantra. It functions like an incarnated Jesus Prayer or a centering prayer of the flesh. The grace of pain is in the embodied practice of praying without ceasing.

There is, however, in this mode of embodied prayerfulness progressive dark nights against which the mind, not cooperating with the body, rebels. On the level of the ego, pain secretly celebrated becomes self-serving suffering. At other times, the personality rages: Not me! And also: Why me? There are feelings of persecution and bouts of depression. There is loss upon loss, an endless stripping. There is angst and angry refusal, abandonment and destitution.

In the quietude of surrender, however, pain works its alchemy on a level other than that of the ego-self. Like a dark night of the spirit, chronic pain vitiates meaning. Yet, in embracing this void, one can find glimmers of a dark illumination. Chronic pain shapes the undefinable soul-scape of an experiential negative theology.

The gravity of pain gives the hermit and the one who is called to rest in the still small voice of the *Source*, a rare and efficacious grace. As acting becomes progressively limited and limiting, and as the body-self narrows into an incompetence that humbles all drives, (including the drive to idealize suffering,) the pulse of the sacred heart palpates.

In this heart-wrenching fragility all one can do is wait. In waiting, another level of attention is revealed as is another challenge to the ego-mind, for waiting is itself a kind of suffering. The attention required to wait in unknowing Simone Weil identified with *waiting for God*.

The grace given in gravity, however darkly, points one toward the kingdom, the yet-to-come that is already, strangely present. This grace of gravity is imbued with a great mystery - that God took on body in order for body to become filled with God (to modify St. Irenaeus.)

Through the lens of pain, one also sees the great gift that is authentic friendship. One who is afflicted and whose life is progressively restricted and circumscribed is in a state of real and defining poverty that only the gratitude of exchange can address. Vulnerable and radically dependent, one so afflicted knows, from the inside out, what it means to be the victim lying alongside the road, for whom hope comes in unexpected gestures of compassionate recognition.

The *flesh-taking*, says Rosemary Houghton, is an experience of passionate exchange. One of the limit conditions that exemplify this truth is the hermit who, in affliction, waits for God as he or she waits for the gift given without contingency. Such moments are replete with the strangely present yet-to-come of God.

The world, seen through the lens of passionate exchanges, is seen afresh in moments of awakened attention. The breakthrough of exchange softens the harsh limits of gravity. There is renewed perceptual acuity. One sees the wonder of the first cardinals in their powdery but powerful reds and one sees, despite the dulling lens of gravity, the Other who befriends and who never abandons. One feels the fire that never goes out.

Topic for November 2000 Issue:
What Importance do you attach to security in your life?
What about issues of safety, especially for women?
Deadline: October 2, 2000

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

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

Retreatants welcome to schedule time 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 \$20.00 per day includes meals. For further information, contact:

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BOOK NOTICES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Dogspell, A Dogmatic Theology on the Abounding Love of God by Mary Ellen Ashcroft. *A thoroughly delightful and reverent recognition that God (dog spelled backwards) loves us as eagerly as our hound; that God's tracks can be seen throughout every room of our homes and lives; who from the beginning longs to go for a w-a-l-k with us in the garden.* 2000. Paper, 88pp \$9.95 Forest of Peace Publishing, Inc., P.O. Box 269, Leavenworth, KS 66048-0269. TEL:1-800-659-3227

Simpler Living, Compassionate Life - A Christian Perspective Edited by Michael Schut. *Selections from some of the most noteworthy Christian writers encourage us in our search for an abundant life freed of the clutter and clamor of "too much; too fast"*2000. Paper, 296pp. \$14.95 From Living The Good News, a division of The Morehouse Group P.O. Box 1321, Harrisburg, PA 17105. Spencer, MA 01562-1233; TEL:1-800-877-0012

Silenced by Prayer, From Words to Contemplation by Peter Ward, CSsR. *A biographical account of the movement of prayer from recitation and reading to conversation and finally, wordless communion.* 1999. Paper, 153pp. \$12.95 Twenty-third Publications, P.O. Box 180, Mystic, CT 06355. TEL: 1-800-321-0411

Spiritual Literacy, Reading the Sacred in Everyday Life by Frederic & Mary Ann Brussat. *Using more than 650 brief examples the authors tutor us in the art of lingering with our experiences and seeing the world with fresh eyes.* 1998. Paper, 608pp. \$15.00 Touchstone Publications, Simon & Schuster; 1230 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10020. TEL: 212-698-7000



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