



Raven's Bread

Food for Those in Solitude

Vol: 5 No: 3 August 2001

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
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

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

Translated by: Dr. John Pestian, Loveland, OH

"The lamp of the body is the eye. It follows that if the eye is sound, your whole body will be filled with light. But if the eye is diseased, your whole body will be darkness." In the last conference we introduced a discussion about Silence. For the next several issues we will discuss silence of the senses, starting with silence of the eyes.

The eyes are a gift from God. They provide sight. Sight for living, sight for admiring God's works and sight into danger. We are living in a time of permissiveness when all seems to be licit and justified. Often, the desire to see and read everything, to satisfy all curiosity has deep roots in our soul, in our unmortified ego. This desire may be an indication of immaturity or even of a psychological disorder.

We should avoid reading that distracts us or makes prayer more difficult. We should not be earthly-minded even under the pretext of study or science. Experiences like David's with Bethsheba are not confined to the past. They still happen today. None should be so sure of themselves that they give full license to their eyes.

Does this mean that we must always close our eyes or cast them up to heaven? No, this would be neither possible nor prudent. To become truly contemplative, we must not give total freedom to our eyes and our curiosity. Rather we must put our eyes to good use. Our Lady, at the wedding feast in Cana, had seen that there was no wine. We, too, should see the needs of others and be ready to help where help is needed.

"If you guard your eyes, you will be assured of guarding your heart." says Tanquerey in his classic book, *The Spiritual Life*. He continues: "There are looks that are grievously sinful, that offend not only modesty, but chastity itself; from such we must abstain. There are other dangers: for instance, to fix our eyes on persons or things that would bring on temptations."

The eyes also provide opportunity for growth in holiness. Tanqueray counsels: "The earnest Christian who wants to save his soul at all costs, mortifies the sense of sight by repressing idle, curious glances and by duly controlling his eyes in all simplicity without any show of affectation." The mortification of our eyes, then, is very important to our spiritual life. Such mortified silence of the eyes is not eccentric; rather it expresses simplicity and naturalness.

Not mortifying our eyes - the restless eyes, the curious eyes, the selfish eyes - is a great obstacle to our union with God, to a genuine prayer life, and to becoming a contemplative. Let us remember the words of Our Lord. The eyes are not only the door from the outside into our soul; they are also express the depth of the soul to those outside. The eyes tell much about us. The German Cardinal Bertram notes: "There are two things which we cannot hide - our voice and our eyes." What does this mean? The voice and eyes reveal our truthfulness and virtue. Through them others see if we are peaceful or fearful, proud or humble, joyful or sad, pure or lustful.

"The eyes, they will tell!" May Our Lord help us to make good use of the precious gift of sight. Amen.

A Word from Still Wood

Her black nose glistening like the blackberries drooping above me, Starlight, our border collie, peered down at me as I crawled around the steep bank falling off the side of our drive. An overarching briar branch plucked at the scented dryer sheet pinned to my kerchief, guaranteed to ward off gnats. I was suited up in long sleeves and overalls with cuffs tucked into thick socks above my hiking boots. This in 85 degree weather with 95% humidity that had mosquitoes hovering in hungry hordes!

A plastic bucket was wedged in the weeds at my knees and I was plucking thumb-large berries with both hands. A warm shower pattered down on the leaves about me, the fragrance of crushed jewelweed floated around me, and there wasn't a snake in sight. "Does life get any better than this?" I mused. In that moment, I seriously doubted it.

Frequent summer rains have filled out foliage, flower and berry in exuberant abundance this year and the gifts of nature and grace are literally falling into our hands here at Still Wood. We could never pick all the berries weighing down the briars surrounding us ... nor will we try. Dozens of other species are dining on them as well. Similarly, the fruitful abundance dripping from all the Surveys returned (132 thus far!) will nourish readers, eremitics and those of us who cherish solitude for years to come.

We can't find words to adequately express our heartfelt thanks to all of you who have taken time to fill out (with care and honesty) the survey questionnaire published in the May issue of **RB**. The data we are collecting is invaluable, in part, because there is (to our knowledge) no other such documented evidence of the existence of and the trends in this world-wide resurgence of eremitic life. Very, very special thanks from all **RB** readers should go to Sheila Richardson who, employing her professional skills, keyed all the raw data collected into a computer program that collated, organized and analyzed it into meaningful components. (**Folks – all surveys were keyed in by number only; anonymity is preserved.**)

As Paul and I held the thirty-five pages of the initial print-out of the "*Summary of 2001 Eremitics Database*" in our hands, we were awed by the potential this represents to assist hermits and solitaries now and in years to come. It is a sacred trust to use this information wisely and well. Pray for us! And we now ask, if you have hesitated for whatever reason to send in a survey response, please reconsider. For this Survey to be a fair and comprehensive presentation of emerging lifestyles of solitude, we need as broad a base as possible. We will continue to incorporate new data as long as it comes in. The "fruit" of your experience is urgently needed to encourage, educate, support and direct all of us – those who oversee vocational development in an official capacity and those of us who simply live it.

Who knows? This "dish" **RB** is cooking up may be as savoury (and helpful) to eremitics – and to the household of faith – as the mouthwatering blackberry cobbler Paul and I enjoyed the other night. With the Lord's help and your continued assistance, "food" for solitaries may be getting even better!

**With Grateful love,
Karen & Paul**

The 2001 Survey of Raven's Bread Readers

Of the approximately 590 copies of the Survey mailed in May, we have received (thus far) 132 responses. Those who know about such things tell us this volume of returns is fantastic! 3% - 6% response to surveys is the expected norm. We have over 22%!!! This says something wonderful about you who are cooperating in this project and making it reflective of what is truly happening re solitary lifestyles.

The figures in the initial report are based on the 122 surveys we (meaning our hard-working **Sheila Richardson** see "**A Word from Still Wood**" above) had time to key into the database for the August issue of **RB**. We can now offer you 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. In the months ahead, we will review 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**, this initial report is available upon request to our online readers for \$5.00 (U.S. currency):

By Mail:

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

By Telephone: 1-828-622-3750

By E-Mail: fredette@nclink.net

**"Is there enough Silence
for the Word to be heard?"**

zzMust Hermits Work? (A Continuation)zz

by Kenneth C. Russell

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

Jerome's Letter to Rusticus

Some of the jobs that Jerome recommends are the familiar crafts of the Egyptian desert: weaving baskets and tending a small garden plot. To these Jerome adds the cultivation and grafting of fruit trees, bee-keeping, the weaving of fishing nets and, significantly, bookcopying. The copying of manuscripts was both physical labor (preparing parchment, mixing inks, cutting pens) and an intellectual activity that feeds the mind.

We have here, I think, the seeds of a new conception of work. From this time on

we see a certain tension between the idea of work as a physical, money-earning activity and work as an intellectual activity for the betterment of the individual. Should someone who can do the higher work lay it aside to do a less spiritual task for the sake of earning money? Must a hermit work?

Grimlaic's Rule for Solitaries

The 9th-10th-century Regula Solitariorum by Grimlaic represents a dividing line between the traditional insistence that hermits must work to earn their living and the belief that solitaries have the right to turn to others for support. He states that a hermit's food, drink, and clothing are paid for either by his personal labor or by the offerings of the faithful. He considers it legitimate for solitaries to live off alms.

But what of the traditional obligation of hermits to help the poor? Grimlaic compares hermits to the apostles in the Jerusalem church. They owned nothing but acted as channels through which each of the faithful received what he or she needed. The Regula Solitariorum is not saying that hermits need not work, but rather that they need not earn their living by the work they do. The profitability of work is not the sine qua non of the eremitical life.

A Camaldolese Rule for Hermits

The shift in what is meant by "work" is evident in a 12th-13th-century rule for hermits found among the Camaldolese. The "works" suggested are actually spiritual and penitential practices. When the rule does refer to manualia exercitia, the emphasis is on when manual labor may not be done. What the Rule indicates when it talks of work (the noise of which must not disturb the quiet of the hermitage) is the maintenance necessary to keep the hermit colony functioning. Indeed, liturgical prayer has become the monk's real work.

Bernard of Portes's Letter to Rainaldus

Work regains some economic importance in the letter that the Carthusian Bernard of Portes wrote about 1130 to a recluse named Rainaldus. Bernard advises the recluse to use the profits from the sale of things he has made to buy new materials and the clothes he needs (his food and dwelling is provided by a nearby monastery). If anything is left over from this or from offerings he has received, he is to give it to the poor. This concern for the poor goes hand in hand with the warning not to let money pile up in the cell.

Bernard of Portes takes work seriously. The recluse is told to "work up a sweat" during work time. He is cautioned, however, not to become so preoccupied with work that it starts to intrude on prayer time. On feast days spiritual exercises hold first place, but Bernard notes that it is better for the recluse to turn to some quiet manual task periodically than to keep reading when he is dozing off!

(To be Continued)

**Topic for November 2001 Issue:
"Responses to the 2001 Reader Survey Results"
Deadline: October 1, 2001**

Resources Available from *Raven's Bread*

(all prices include postage)

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**

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

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

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**

Raven's Rest

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

Retreatants welcome to schedule time (until November 16, 2001) 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

Desert Wisdom, Sayings from the Desert Fathers Translation and art by Yushi Nomura, Introduced by Henru J.M.Nouwen. *A fresh translation from the original Latin and Greek texts, illustrated by playful brush and ink drawings that restores a dimension of vitality and wry humor to these simple teachings that must have sparkled through their earliest oral form.* 2001. Paper, 122 pp. Orbis Books,

Maryknoll, NY. 10545. \$15.00

The Forgotten Desert Mothers, Sayings, Lives and Stories of Early Christian Women by Laura Swan. *A fascinating recovery of the lives and teachings of early Church women whose wisdom would still be lost to all but scholars were it not for Prioress Laura Swan's painstaking research.* 2001. Paper, 218 pp. Paulist Press, 997 Macarthur Blvd, Mahwah, NJ 07430. Tel: 201-825-7300. \$19.95.

Soul Wilderness, A Desert Spirituality by Kerry Walters. *An insightful and challenging guide to our own inner desert. Terrifying yet alluring, fraught with both danger and promise, this psychic wilderness is where our inner demons are fought, our false selves unmasked and our souls reborn.* 2000. Paper. 153 pp. Paulist Press, 997 Macarthur Blvd, Mahwah, NJ 07430. Tel: 201-825-7300. \$12.95.

That Mysterious Man, Essays on Augustine Baker, OSB introduced by Rowan Williams. *A collection of seventeen essays, including Eve Baker's "Augustine Baker, Welshman and Solitary, and Una Kroll's "Life-giving Encounters with Holy Wisdom."* 1993. Paper, 272 pp. Three Peaks Press, 9 Croesonen Road, Abergavenny, Monmouthshire, NP7 6AE Wales, UK. \$60.00



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