



Raven's Bread

Food for Those in Solitude

Vol: 10 No: 3 August 2006

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 On Solitude** zzzzzz

By: Loretta Ross-Gotta
excerpted from *Letters from the Holy Ground*

The definition of recollection is quiet tranquillity of mind and self-possession. Recollection is the gentle art of prayerful gathering-in in preparation for deeper prayer. One calls back the scattered, fragmented self, strewn about one's world like trash on a windy day. I pick up the pieces, sweep out the psychic debris, reorder the clutter, and create at the center - wholeness. All within me that is frantic and frayed, dispersed helter-skelter, leaving me anxious, confused, and overwhelmed is drawn back. I am no longer like a cracked and broken bowl that leaks and spills its contents, but I am mended and suitable once again for holding my life, for containing safely and serviceably who I am.

In his sublime prayer for the church at Ephesus, Paul prays "that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love." He prays further that "you may have the power to comprehend with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God." (3: 16-19)

What interests me about this prayer is the apparent passivity of those prayed for. Paul asks for a number of wondrous things to be done to and for the followers of Christ. God, the Holy Spirit, and Christ are the actors here. We are the receivers of this action. In recollection, one creates the space in which God may act upon the world and us, and a place where Christ may dwell. Recollection allows our roots, vainly seeking to be nourished by material goods and success, to be grounded in the fertile soil of love.

Recollection, in my experience, is not something you do once and then are finished with. It must be replenished continually. You have to keep taking back holy ground. There is an endless supply of critters eager to move into the space you have created. Erect fences. Drag your foot in a circle around your hearth. Mark your territory. Keep watch, as Jesus admonishes.

Each time I return to the hermitage I marvel anew at the reclaiming I am required to do. Years ago, when I began praying at the hermitage, I did not want to harm any creature. The word soon got out that I was an easy touch and generations of field mice moved in from the whole county. I sealed their entrances. I bought ultrasonic pest resisters. I bought humane traps. I caught the little boogers in my hands and hauled them out to the pasture. They came back. They chewed up the bedspread. They nested in the old trunk. They littered the floor. They got into the bird feed. Now I kill them.

I say to them, "You have four hundred acres out here. These two hundred square feet are mine." Snakes, spiders, toads, beetles, even a duck - when your back is turned, something will come crawling over the sill. Webs in the privy. Raccoons in the woodpile. Coyotes passing through. Stuff wants to get in, take over if it can. All God's creatures are on the look out for a little shelter, a place out of the rain and cold. To be filled with all the fullness of God instead of being full of the world's clutter and pain, we have to create and maintain space. We empty ourselves, but the world keeps sneaking back, slipping a hand under the door, oozing in through the cracks. There are mind weasels, mind wasps, mind lizards, and assorted other varmints that will settle in and build a nest at the first opportunity. Pesky attitudes, irritating notions, false assumptions, flit in and out, peck at the windows, skitter across the floor, chew at the baseboard.

When it comes to holy ground and the recollection that is part of creating it, the rule seems to be squatter's rights. Whoever gets there first, lays claim, and stays the longest, gets the space.

A Word from Still Wood

We write this "Word" as summer attains its lush fullness here in the Smokies. In the woods surrounding us, the shade is deep and cool, even on the warmest days. The view across the valley is a smudgy blue-green or else obscured by a thunder storm sweeping through. At night, the stars above vie with fireflies flickering below as we sit on the deck listening to the first of the "singing nights" that round out the celebration of high summer.

This issue of *Raven's Bread* is loaded with "fruits" offered by our readers and we once again say "Thank you!" for your generous and insightful sharings. The topic proposed has elicited much wise counsel learned in the school of hard experience. One response mentions that hermits should be "invisible" to society as far as it is possible. It reminds us of the six years Karen spent living as a hermit in West Virginia.

People were interested in my lifestyle and asked questions, some of them startling. One, "What is your habit like?" assumed I wore something which identified me as A Hermit. In truth, the only "habit" suitable for the rough life I was engaged in was blue jeans! I pondered the matter and concluded that wearing a habit would actually defeat my desire to be hidden and unseen. One of the best ways to provoke notice and comment would have been to walk the short "downtown" streets of this rural and largely Baptist community in a "funny" dress and a veil. I could imagine the whispers of people across the street as I ducked into the hardware store or bank. "There goes that hermit!" I wondered what the clerks in the supermarket would think as they checked out the modest supplies of The Hermit and discovered I did not subsist on soup beans and greens but occasionally bought a cake mix and cold cuts.

Another assumption people made was that I planted a vegetable garden. My first summer as a hermit, neighbors kindly shared produce from their gardens. I quietly observed what an investment of time and money a garden required, not only to grow the food but then to "put it up." The astonishing truth was that I could not afford to raise my own vegetables and fruits. Scratch another classic image of The Hermit.

My daily activities comprised prayer, household tasks and earning my daily bread through remunerative work - basket weaving was out! With regard to a habit, I loved to use a prayer shawl and (in winter) a lap blanket during my hours of meditation and Lectio. Canned goods from the grocery filled my shelves since I had no freezer. I couldn't afford a chain saw so I bartered for firewood. Necessity and common sense undergirded my Rule of Life. My only advice beyond the above is this one **RULE** I held to: "**Thou shalt keep holy the Lord's Time – every day.**" In other words, prayer and reading that praised my Lord and nourished my soul came first; the other "stuff" of life happened in between. It still does!

This now includes a book about contemporary hermit life which we have decided to compile even though the publisher who suggested it has faded away. We are using material garnered from ten years of responding to hermits' needs and questions as well as insights from the *Survey of 2001*. We are soliciting written contributions from our many gifted readers and appreciate the willing cooperation we have received. When it comes time to go to press, we trust the Lord will supply either an interested publisher or the needed funds to self-publish.

To all of you who respond in your own way to the "Raven's Call" (our working title), we offer encouragement and gratitude. Keep faith with your God, lovers of solitude. You are not shirking your "duty" but doing the one thing that can hold the fragments of our distressed world together.

**With Grateful love,
Karen & Paul**

**The best remedy for those who are afraid,
lonely, or unhappy is to go outside,
somewhere where they can be quite alone
with the heavens, nature, and God.**

Anne Frank (German Diarist)

zzzzzz **Salute To Starlight** *zzzzzz*

By: Karen Karper Fredette

The Irish call certain sites *thin places*, meaning that there, the barrier which separates the spirit world from our earthly sphere becomes diaphanous and is easily passed through. In addition to *thin places*, there can also be *thin times*, such as All Hallow's Eve when the spirits of the dead are said to be allowed to visit family or friends for a brief period. This "passing through" can be in either direction which creates a certain ambivalence towards these *thin* places or times.

Is what passes through from the Other Side friendly or inimical? Will we be blessed or cursed when in the radius of such a charmed circle? What would happen should we be the one who passes through from this side to the Other? Or someone we love?

Wonderful legends and stories have been spun around this theme. The ruins of monasteries and churches, the sites of cells where the ancient Celtic hermits dwelt seem to be imbued with this aura. Abandoned houses sometimes possess this rather eerie quality as well. When we find ourselves speaking more softly in a cemetery, it is an instinctive response to our awareness that we are surrounded by many silent listeners. Actually, the sites where communion between the spirits in the other world and those of us on this side seems to be more easily facilitated are normally very peaceful places, despite the latent power also present.

The period during which someone is dying is normally one of the *thin times* when those present are aware that there are "spirits" hovering close at hand, unseen but undeniably there. Having had the privilege of being at the bedsides of both my parents during their final moments, I can speak with a fair amount of certitude about this. I felt as if I could accompany my mother to the door where she then left my care and was met by kindly spirits on the other side. Ever so briefly the curtains fluttered apart to admit the living essence of my Mom that we call Soul. I did not sense any reluctance on her part to go - her work was done and she was ready. The same felt true of my father who died seven years later.

Most recently Paul and I were kneeling on our deck with Starlight, our beloved Border Collie, between us. Only a week before, she had been diagnosed with acute leukemia, a disease of rapid onset and progression. By the time we realized she was ill, she was beyond anything medicine could offer. Moreover, she was thirteen years old, which put her in her nineties in human terms. Our vet suggested only some medications to relieve her distress. Almost miraculously, Starlight perked up during her final week and seemed

her usual loving and interested self. However, there were moments when her honey brown eyes seemed to be seeing something not visible to us.

When her time came, her crossing was swift. A few hours earlier, she had happily trotted out, barking to greet Paul's arrival home from work. I was away teaching a quilt class. When a friend dropped me off about 9:15 pm, Paul had carried Star outside where he felt the cooler evening air might ease her struggle to breathe. She responded to my arrival as if she had been waiting for me. Now she appeared to let go and within fifteen minutes her breathing had become so slight we knew her death was near.

During the hours Paul had kept vigil with Starlight, he had not been alone. Our cat, MaBelle, had hovered just inside the screened door, alert and watchful. I joined a loving throng when I reached Star's side. We were experiencing one of those *thin times* when the Cross-Over lines are gently obscured. One moment, there was a gleam in Starlight's eyes, the next, the light flickered out. Through our tears, we looked up at the star-studded sky arching over us, wondering which of those brilliant diamonds might be the spirit of our own Starlight. At the same time, we were comforted by myriad presences, touching and soothing us. Normal barriers were "thinned" to admit our Star. Back in the mountains, the coyotes howled their wild song to honor one of their own.

Discussion Topic for November 2006 Issue:

How have you dealt with the need for healthy relaxation/recreation and friendships while maintaining your solitude?

(Please limit responses to 300 words or less)

Deadline: October 1, 2006

**It all adds up to one thing: peace, silence, solitude.
The world and its noise are out of sight and far away.
Forest and field, sun and wind and sky, earth and water
all speak the same silent language.**

Thomas Merton (Trappist monk)

Hermit Resources Available from *Raven's Bread* August 2006

(all prices include postage)

BIBLIOGRAPHIES

Annotated Readings in Spirituality - by Sharon Jeanne Smith **21pp. \$5.00**

Solitude & Union: A Select Bibliography on the Hermit Way of Life by Cecilia W. Wilms **26pp. \$5.00**

Annotated Books on Solitude - **4pp. \$2.00**

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. \$2.50**

Hermits: The Juridical Implications of Canon 603 by Helen L. Macdonald, Researcher Novalis: St. Paul University, Ottawa, ONT **24pp. \$5.00**

Statutes for Hermits by The Bishops of France (1989)
12 pp. \$2.50

HERMIT RULES

Rules for Hermits (Spanish & English) by Padre Justo, O.P. **9pp. \$2.50**

Eremitic Rule of Life **30pp. \$5.00**

Franciscan Plan of Life in Hermitage **4pp. \$2.00**

Topical Outline for Plan of Eremitical Life **3pp. \$2.00**

HERMIT SURVEYS

Raven's Bread Survey 2001 - Compiled Responses **23pp. \$5.00**

Marabou Questionnaire 1996 - **9pp. \$2.50**

ARTICLES & COMMENTARIES

Notes to Guide the Beginning Hermit by A Hermit of Mercy **15pp. \$3.00**

Lay Hermits by Rev. Eugene Stockton **8pp. \$2.50**

Eremitism: Call to the Chronically Ill and Disabled (1989) by Laurel M. O'Neal **5pp. \$2.00**

NCR 2004 "Sacristans of Emptiness" by Rich Heffern **6pp. \$2.50**

Discernment Criteria - "Marabou" 1996 - **6pp. \$2.00**

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

Being a Hermit: Where and How 12 pp, \$6.00

Acedia - The Dark Side of Commitment 4 pp. \$2.00

The Dangers of Solitude 5 pp. \$2.50

Must Hermits Work? 10 pp. \$5.00

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 \$2.50 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: Eve Baker, Coed Glas, Talgarth Road, Bronllys, Brecon, Powys, LD3 0HN

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/>

Raven's Rest

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

Retreatants Welcome. Now scheduling for September thru October 2006 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 \$25.00 per day includes meals. For further information, contact:

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BOOK NOTICES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Peace Planet Light for Our World

by Nan Merrill with Barbara Taylor.

*A ring-bound book of brief but profound prayers begging peace on every one of our global neighbors, all 198 (at last count) of them! All are recognized, named and prayed for equally from Venezuela to Burkina Faso; from Seychelles to the United States. It is a powerful experience to hold this blocky (5" x 5 1/2") book in your hand and realize every nation on earth lies in your palm. **Peace Planet Prayer Necklaces** are available to enhance your prayer experience and bonding with all the citizens of planet earth.*

2006. Softcover. \$15.00 (US).

FOS Peace and Prayer Gift Shop, 200 Rock Street, Hannibal MO 63401

For Large Volume Orders, email "Friends of Silence" for Quote

FriendsOfSilence@sbcglobal.net

All profits from the sale of this book will go towards supporting organizations working for peace in the world.

Soul Making: The Desert Way of Spirituality

by Alan W. Jones.

The apophatic approach affects not only the way we believe but also the way we pray...formlessness is for freedom." One RB subscriber has called this the best book she read in 2005.

1985. 217 pp. Softcover. \$16.00 (US)

Harper Collins Publishers, 10 East 53rd Street, New York, NY 10022

Letters from the Holy Ground - Seeing God Where You Are

by Loretta Ross-Gotta.

The author lives in Kansas where she directs The Sanctuary, an ecumenical center for prayer. Writing from her rural hermitage, her lively essays of spiritual growth and guidance reveal her to be a modern mystic and teaches us how to see God in all things, right where we are.

2000. Softcover. 216 pp. \$16.95 (US)

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