



Raven's Bread

Food for Those in Solitude

Vol: 12 No: 3 August 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

"Forest Dwellers"
An Alternative Life-style for Seniors
by Eugene Stockton, Lawson, NSW, Australia

While still an active parish priest, I became interested in contemplative prayer and concluded that the life-style most appropriate to sustaining contemplation was that of a hermit. In 1999 I went to the U.K. to do a study on persons who had embraced the solitary life. My published report was entitled Lay Hermits. (Summary available through RB). After retirement in 2001, I engaged in a more serious trial of the hermit life. Taking vows as a consecrated hermit appealed to me, for I saw it as a deeper commitment to my diocese and an extension of my vocation as a diocesan priest.

Hermit life, officially sealed by the Church, has added a new dimension to my retirement. It has given me something positive to live for, something to work for, freed me from the retiree's subtle slavery to merely pleasing oneself. I am able to fulfil the spiritual aspirations of my young days, "*seeking to live with God alone and for God alone.*" I can face death in a robust, healthy way. The consecration, vows, and plan of life add something definite, concrete, and committed to this new period in my life.

I suspect that many people in my age group might welcome such an alternative life-style, with its renewed commitment and dedication, appropriate to the reduced capacities of their age. Some people I know opt to become affiliates of religious orders, but that clashes with a sense of a positive vocation to the lay state. In my own case I am definitely not called to a

religious community. My place in the Church is clearly as a secular, an "ordained layman." Couples could find added value to their married state, committed to God through each other. Singles could view their aloneness, not as a necessity to put up with, but a state to be embraced before God. Former priests and religious, instead of regretting a "failure in commitment," could see in this way of life a second chance to pursue the ideals of their youth. Anyone can live as a hermit or "forest dweller" privately but Catholics can opt for consecration under Canon 603 which gives them a definite place in the Church defined by a rule and vows.

The hermit way of life has a long tradition in the Christian Church. But it could well borrow from the wisdom of Eastern religions, which offers something lacking in the West, namely how to value retirement/old age. Are people to be just left on the shelf, awaiting death? Hindu asceticism envisions four stages of life: 1. Student (undergraduate), 2. Householder (graduate), 3. Forest dweller (recluse or semi-retired), and 4. Suddhu or saint. The third stage on retirement is not an end but a new path on the journey of life, one looking forward to the final graduation. A "forest dweller" corresponds to the hermit or recluse, living a virtually solitary life. The separation from the world, lived more or less conspicuously, is more crucially a mental or spiritual separation. Paul Gurr wisely observed that what really matters is how one sees oneself. One lives in the world with a certain objective detachment, beholding the concerns of the world with wisdom and compassion, without becoming embroiled in the passion of its causes. What is important for a person so called is not whether they conform to a certain definition of hermit but how they answer the call to be alone with God in the given conditions of his/her life.

One embraces "aloneness" as a positive value, seeing the proximity of death as the next step. One views one's home as a cell or hermitage: a place for encounter with God. The daily routine is not a chore but the opportunity to exercise what Buddhists call mindfulness. The solitary vocation can fit a whole range of spiritual self-perceptions, not necessarily religious.

Through the ages hermits, without betrayal of their calling, have often been engaged in socially useful endeavors; maintenance of a bridge or road, lighthouse keeper, counsellor; the Russian *poustinik* or *staretz*, ready to help at harvest time. Thomas Merton is a famous modern example of a hermit busy in correspondence, conferences and writing. Priests may have a busy round of parish duties. I find academic research and writing very compatible with my new way of life. As mentioned already, it comes down to how one perceives oneself in the world; in the world but not of it.

I believe some dedication or commitment is the key to a full life. Everyone's initial calling entails various stages until it achieves completion. But little account has been made of life beyond that achievement, the period of retirement and old age leading to death. What does it mean for me to be a priest in this Third Stage? What does my priestly vocation call me to now, when I am no longer "useful?" Becoming a "forest dweller" can ideally provide meaning to this new stage of life.

A Word from Still Wood

It begins with a dream, a vision of the impossible that gradually doesn't seem impossible after all. One day there is that still small voice, the compulsion to look more closely at a secret attraction which has lived deep within one's heart... for years perhaps. But unlocking the door of that hidden room can open a veritable *Pandora's Box*. Without warning, all one's priorities tumble into new patterns and life as one knew it is no more. One cannot equivocate, delay, deny. As Scripture warns: *Today I set before you life and prosperity, death and doom. If you obey...loving God and walking in his ways ... the Lord will bless you in the land you are entering. If, however, you turn away and will not listen... (cf. Dt.30.15-17)*. The message is stark. Isn't that how a hermit vocation begins? When hope is revealed?

If you are reading these words, you may well be one of those brave souls who took a deep breath and cried out, "I want to live!" Suddenly you were touched by the Breath of Life itself and your weary soul was heartened. The road ahead forked and you had a choice: to continue along the flat, well-defined route you could see all too well or take that unmarked way which curved mysteriously around a bend and out of sight. You risked finding yourself a child again, waking to a summer day, full of promise and mystery.

Summer at Still Wood is like living at the edge of Eden. Everything is lush; dew sparkles where the sun strikes it. Birds warble deliriously amid a woodland rich with heady aromas. Wild flowers spangle the innumerable shades of green covering the forested slopes. Our little waterfall now chuckles and sings over the rocks we were struggling so hard to put in place last year at this time. Soft breezes caress the windchimes evoking a song so delicate, our thoughts are turned to angel song.

Not only are summer days full of loveliness. Summer nights have their own velvety mystery. On solstice eve, we watched our fire leap while stars emerged and lightning bugs flickered deeper in the forest. Bird songs were replaced by the trilling of tree frogs and the hooting of owls. Contentment enfolded us for a long cherished project had come to completion and we were savoring the sweetness of it. (Warning! Once you start to follow dreams, new ones continually arise!)

So we are delighted to announce that *"Consider the Ravens"* is now in production and by October we will have the completed book in hand. We have looked forward to sharing this news with you because every single one of you has had your part in making this dream come true. First and foremost, were your prayers and words of encouragement offered over nearly two years as we worked on this project. We gathered the wealth of experience and information with which you filled the pages of *Raven's Bread* (since 1997!). We were blessed by the generosity of those who helped financially so that the finished book will be both beautiful and well-made. Sketches drawn from the pictures of your hermitages adorn its pages. You supplied many personal reflections and insights that enrich the text, giving statistics their living resonance. Dear ones, we are happy to proclaim that "our" book is done! It is as much YOURS as it is ours, and to you *"the sentinels who await the dawn"* this work is dedicated. Without you, it could never have happened. We sincerely hope that *"Consider the Ravens"* will meet your expectations and will serve the eremitic community for years to come. *"If you want your dream to be, build it slow and surely; day by day, stone by stone, heartfelt work grows purely."* (Brother Sun, Sister Moon).

With Grateful love,
Karen & Paul

**The most perfect prayer
breathes in a heart that remains
silent before God and knows
how to listen to God.**

Augustine Ichiro Okumura

zzzzSolitude and Connectionzzzz

by Dusty Reed

Solitude is important to one's quality of life, its completeness, and one's ability to love others. One does not have to be a monk to find solitude necessary, notes Merton. Many people do not care to invest their whole lives in solitude but they do desire a more simple, reflective style of living. Solitude and simple life-styles often go hand-in-hand.

Most everyone needs some kind of human connection; some degree of intimacy. There are not many who can exist as a recluse. There is usually someone, family or friend, with whom one can share that affords the satisfaction of not being completely alone in the world. The ideal for most is to balance solitude and connection. Whether in solitude or in companionship, there is an assurance in making do, in carrying on, in holding things together.

If one desires a space of solitude in an otherwise very busy and social life, a significant block of time, daily or weekly, must be claimed when one can totally close oneself away from the world. This might be a walk in the country or in an unpopulated wooded area or it may be in one's home. The time span is best when it is expansive enough to offer time to realize privacy and make use of it in the way most desired. This is sacred time. It is possible to seek for and take this special time. A ritual of nurturing one's self as often as necessary can develop. It is good to be able to snuggle in and enjoy a quiet hideaway space.

Each person is responsible for one's personal solitude. Anyone has the freedom to choose the depth, quality and quantity of solitude preferred. In the right circumstances, the alone time can be embraced and considered useful. It might help tap into creativity. Solitude can allow a return to creative, imaginative pursuits that have been cast aside for many years. Maybe it has been a dream to learn a musical instrument, or make pottery, or keep a journal or a diary, or study languages. These activities can be accomplished as pleasurable solitary pursuits. Becoming aware of one's deepest feelings, opinions, and attitudes are tasks of living that can offer the most serenity and pleasure.

Solitude can be found in the act of contemplation and silent reflection in everyday life.

**Silence is the beautiful fruit of prayer.
We must learn not only the silence of the mouth,
but also the silence of the heart
of the eyes, of the ears, and of the mind,
which I call the five silences.
Say it and memorize it on your five fingers.**

Mother Teresa

via SACRED JOURNEY August / September 2008

Hermit Resources Available August 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: pkfredette@earthlink.net](mailto:pkfredette@earthlink.net)

"AVAILABLE IN OCTOBER 2008"

CONSIDER THE RAVENS *On Contemporary Hermit Life* by Paul A. and Karen Karper Fredette

Web address to order online from iUniverse will be published in the November issue. Advance orders for autographed copies (\$19.95 plus \$3.00 postage & handling) available from:

Raven's Bread

18065 Hwy. 209

Hot Springs, NC 28743

Tel: 828-622-3750

[email: pkfredette@earthlink.net](mailto:pkfredette@earthlink.net)

Fellowship of Solitairies

Comprised of and open to religious solitairies 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

SOLITUDE, A PHILOSOPHICAL ENCOUNTER

by Philip Koch

"What is the proper place of solitude in human existence? Some claim that it is our truest, most ultimate, metaphysically deepest state of being. Others maintain the contrary view that it is in Encounter that we most truly find ourselves. Koch proposes that both solitude and encounter emerge as primary modes of human experience, equally essential for human completion."

1994. Softcover. 375 pp. ISBN# 0-8126-9243-8 \$17.95

Open Court Publishing Company 315 Fifth Street, POB 599, Peru, IL 61354

HERMITS AND THE NEW MONASTICISM,

A Study of Religious Communities in Western Europe 1000-1150

by Henrietta Leyser

"Talking about hermits provokes mirth. Try it! The perspective of the Middle Ages was different. Hermits were to be found on the very highest rungs of the ladder of perfection. Hermits were everywhere, on every rostrum. And the consequences? Read and discover."

1984. Hardcover. 135 pp. ISBN# 0-312-36999-9

St. Martin's Press 175 Fifth Ave. New York, NY 10010

CROSSING THE DESERT,

Learning to Let Go, See Clearly, and Live Simply

by Robert J. Wicks

"Wicks offers a psychological perspective on the early Christian monastic movement of the Desert Fathers and Mothers. He presents readers with the four desert questions that will lead them to take three steps to inner freedom."

2007. Softcover. 192 pp. ISBN# 0-9718-9334-9508-8 \$18.95.

Sorin Books, Division of Ave Maria Press.

P O Box 428, Notre Dame, IN 46556-0428 www.sorinbooks.com



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