



# Raven's Bread

*Food for Those in Solitude*

*Online Edition*

*May 2010*

## Thoughts In Solitude

To live a Christian life means to live *in* the world without being *of* it. It is in solitude that this inner freedom can grow. Jesus went to a lonely place to pray, that is, to grow in the awareness that all the power he had was given to him; that all the words he spoke came from his "Father;" and that all the works he did were not really his, but the works of the One who had sent him. In the lonely place Jesus was made free to fail.

A life without a lonely place, that is, a life without a quiet center, easily becomes destructive. When we cling to the results of our actions as our only way of self-identification, then we become possessive and defensive and tend to look at our fellow human beings more as enemies to be kept at a distance than as friends with whom we share the gifts of life.

In solitude, we can slowly unmask the illusion of our possessiveness and discover in the center of our own self that we are not what we can conquer, but what is given to us. In solitude we can listen to the voice of him who spoke to us before we could speak a word; who healed us before we could make any gesture to help; who set us free long before we could free others; and who loved us long before we could give love to anyone. It is in this solitude that we discover that being is more important than having, and that we are worth more than the result of our efforts. In solitude we discover that our life is not a possession to be defended, but a gift to be shared. It is there we recognize that the healing words we speak are not just our own, but are given to us; that the love we can express is part of a greater love; and that the new life we bring forth is not a property to cling to, but a gift to be received.

In solitude we become aware that our worth is not the same as our usefulness. We can learn much in this respect from the old tree in the Tao story about a carpenter

and his apprentice: A carpenter and his apprentice were walking together through a large forest. And when they came across a tall, huge, gnarled, old, beautiful oak tree, the carpenter asked his apprentice: "Do you know why this tree is so tall, so huge, so gnarled, so old and beautiful?" The apprentice looked at his master and said: "No... why?" "Well," the carpenter said, "because it is useless. If it had been useful it would have been cut long ago and made into tables and chairs, but because it is useless it could grow so tall and so beautiful that you can sit in its shade and relax."

In solitude we can grow old freely without being preoccupied with our usefulness and we can offer a service which we had not planned on. To the degree that we have lost our dependencies on this world, whatever world means – father, mother, children, career, success or rewards—we can form a community of faith in which there is little to defend, but much to share. Because, as a community of faith, we take the world seriously, but never too seriously. In such a community, we can adopt a little of the mentality of Pope John XXIII, who could laugh about himself. When some highly decorated official asked him: "Holy Father, how many people work in the Vatican?" he paused a while and then said: "Well, I guess about half of them."

As a community of faith we work hard, but we are not destroyed by the lack of results. And as a community of faith we remind one another constantly that we form a fellowship of the weak, transparent to him who speaks to us in the lonely places of our existence and says: "Do not be afraid, you are accepted."

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Henri J. M. Nouwen  
An Excerpt from "*Out of Solitude*  
*Three Meditations on the Christian Life*"



## A Word From Still Wood

Spring seems to be a time of many firsts—the first bird warbling as morning light brightens the sky; the first wild flower—often a yellow Colts Foot or pale Spring Beauty; the first humming bird to buzz the feeder; the first blossoms to appear on the Carolina Silver Bell or the graceful Weeping Cherry. As each new actor appears on nature's stage, the mountain slope provides an ever-changing backdrop. We always look forward to that fleeting moment when all the trees display muted shades of autumn as their buds swell and they shed their dark winter sheaths. The forest across the valley resembles a water colorist's rendering of fall with soft amber, russet, beige, mustard, and rose dusting the stark branches of winter past. Within a few more days, the palette will be a dozen shades of green and spring's brief imitation of fall will be only a memory.

One of the gifts of solitude is having time to observe and savor nature's subtle changes. It takes special sight to mark the moment when trilliums carpet a meadow in the woods or spy the brilliant flash of the Indigo Bunting. I used to wonder, not why God had created such a beautiful world, but why He has left so much loveliness when we human beings seem to be doing our level best to destroy the exquisite ecosystem which supports our life.

One day as I was perched on a huge rock, marveling at the brilliant emerald moss which lay softly beneath my

palm, I seemed to hear an answer. "Child, I have left this loveliness so you will never forget how much I love you."

The ever-renewing wonder of the natural world certainly seems to be a sweet song that a lover might sing to his beloved. As solitaries, we are meant to be among the most aware so that we can join in a song of gratitude for the goodness and constant care which blesses us each day. In this issue, as we share thoughts about hermits and fun, we can include rejoicing with our God whose wonderful imagination has given us so many delightful and surprising creatures with which to share our planet earth. How it must rejoice the Creator's heart when we tell Him that He "done good" the day He came up with the mongoose, the roadrunner or the duck-billed platypus.

We can scarce keep from laughing when we see a white tail perfectly upright gliding along the shrubbery in stately dignity while the rest of the cat is out of sight. Or what about the black and white dusters that are the glory of our border collies? The white tip used to be called the shepherd's lantern as these intelligent creatures led both sheep and shepherd safely homeward through the fog and mists. Well, just consider any or all tails...what a neat idea! They come in every shape and size, each one with the label of the Original Designer. We are briefly saddened that somewhere along the paths of evolution, we humans lost our tails. What fun they would have been!

*With grateful love,  
Karen & Paul*

**Raven's Bread is a quarterly newsletter (FEB-MAY-AUG-NOV) for hermits and those interested in eremitical life published by Paul and Karen Fredette. This newsletter seeks to affirm and support people living in solitude. Raven's Bread is a collaborative effort and thus depends on the shared reflections, stories, news, notices, letters and information from hermits themselves.**

**Please send your written contributions, address changes, and subscription donations to: Raven's Bread Ministries, 18065 NC 209 Hwy, Hot Springs, NC 28743 or via e-mail: [pkfredette@earthlink.net](mailto:pkfredette@earthlink.net). Our phone number is: 828 622 3750, The annual donation is \$10.00 in the USA or \$12.00 US for readers outside the States. Please send payment in US funds or via PayPal at our website which can convert foreign currency to US dollars. Any extra donations will be used to subsidize subscriptions for hermits who cannot afford the full cost.**

**Raven's Bread derives it's name from the experience of the prophet Elijah in 1 Kings 17: 1-6. where a raven sent by God nourished him during his months of solitude at the Wadi Cherith (The Cutting Place).**

**Our website is :[Http://www.ravensbreadministries.com](http://www.ravensbreadministries.com)**

## SOME BOOKS OF INTEREST

**Guardians of Being, Words by Eckhart Tolle; Art by Patrick McDonnell** *A profound and delightful combination of words for every prayer combined with eye-tickling comic art. Hint: The words are "spoken" by dog and cat. 2009. New World Library. Hardcover. 120pp. \$18.00. ISBN 978-1-57731-671-8 New World Library, 14 Pamaron Way, Novato, CA 94949*

**Out of Solitude, Three Meditations on the Christian Life** by Henri J. M. Nouwen; Foreword by Thomas Moore. *Drawing on three moments in the life of Jesus, Nouwen invites us to reflect on the tension between our desire for solitude and the demands of contemporary life. This little book is as fresh today as it was thirty years ago. 1974, 2004. Ave Maria Press, Notre Dame, IN ,Softcover. 61pp. \$7.95. ISBN-100-87793-495-9. [www.avemariapress.com](http://www.avemariapress.com)*

In this solitude, I must remember:  
When I no longer know what I am doing  
...which is often,  
God knows what He is doing

### Website of Interest

*Raven's Bread* readers Betsy Caprio and husband, Thomas M. Hedberg, sponsor this site:

[www.centerforsacredpsychology.org](http://www.centerforsacredpsychology.org)

They focus on the interior world in the belief that *"those who tend their souls are not only better equipped to help others in need, but also send out a ripple effect that helps create consciousness in the world-soul."*

### **CBS Evening News**

#### **on *Raven's Bread Ministries***

A year ago this May, a team from CBS Evening News, spent a day at Still Wood, filming an interview about *Raven's Bread Ministries*. Check out the 2:14 clip by Googling: **Fredette, hermit, CBS.**

### **Discussion Topic for August 2010**

Responding to the charge that hermits do nothing all day, when so much needs doing.

**Submissions due July 1, 2010**



## A NEW APPROACH TO BOOK REVIEWS



I'm David Joseph Tetrault, an Episcopal priest living in a rural area outside Williamsburg, VA. Ann, a pediatrician, and I have two grown, married daughters and grand-daughter Abby who is nearly three now. I served at Bruton Parish in Colonial Williamsburg for many years before taking early retirement at the end of 1996. I'll save you details of that for perhaps another time. It was clear to me that something more than leaving a great job in the church was at stake here. I surrendered it to enter a whole new vocation that only a deep personal crisis could eventually reveal.

I don't know when I actually committed to a life of solitude. I guess it's always been there waiting for me to accept its invitation through a lifetime of desire, reflection, disenchantment and wondering. Jesus nailed it with the term "narrow door." It puts me outside the system and among the wayfarers. It calls me to Silence when others are busy elsewhere in their lives. It summons me to rise at outrageous hours to pray among what the psalmist calls the "sentinels who await the dawn." As I am able, I bless it with gratitude.

I teach a bit in the College of William & Mary's lifelong learning program, do some Sunday clergy supply and play music. Mostly I choose to live in the embrace of complete Silence. I read books and online Internet articles in addition to spending vast amounts of time writing my own material. There are always the tasks of a householder done with mindful simplicity (when possible) and what Pere de Caussade identified as surrender to the joy of the present moment.

To review resources for a group of hermits and solitaries is like trying to herd cats. I'm going to try anyway. There's so much available out there now both in print and electronic form that I rely on others' opinions when I search for resources. With the creation of [www.silentiumaltum.blogspot.com](http://www.silentiumaltum.blogspot.com) I hope to offer a space not only for "*Raven's Bread*" readers but for the large, hidden audience that doesn't understand what Tolkien really meant when he wrote "all who wander are not lost." Many more unknown to us await a mirror that reflects and supports the beauty of solitude.

I stay out of sight in the blog – like the monk behind the rood screen. Readers can contact me through an email address. Our privacy is important to me. Silentium altum, the deep silence, reminds me to share the most ancient practice of contemplative life. Be still, it says, and enter the Divine Knowing.