



# Raven's Bread

*Food for Those in Solitude*

---

*Online Edition*

*November 2010*

---

## Thoughts In Solitude

A remarkable little monk who lived centuries ago, known as Brother Lawrence, left us a way of keeping "mindful", a method which many today believe arises from Buddhist praxis. He referred to it as the *practice of living in the presence of God*. The letters he wrote in which he talked about this spiritual method are still widely read. His practice was a way of being focused on the work at hand and not drifting about in yesterday or what you are going to do later in the day or sometime in the future; not dwelling on worries and anxieties or just being uneasy in yourself. It was a way of stilling the heart to the benefit of the mind and body and still getting on with the job at hand.

Mindfulness does not have to be focused on some religious concern or centered on a deity, as was the case for Brother Lawrence. It can be *the practice of living in the presence of Goodness* for that which is good is compassionate. Since goodness and compassion are essentials of love, Br. Lawrence's practice helped him to be focused on love. Famously, he wrote that he was able to be mindful of the presence of this universal goodness even as he scrambled eggs at the monastery stove. What mattered was that he did not fall away from this union with goodness, which is union with God, whose essence is love, no matter what he was doing.

So the practice of living in the presence of God is the practice of finding in the Now, the continual presence of Goodness. Doing so will help you in everything you undertake – including scrambling eggs, (or writing a reflection for **Raven's Bread**), because you will be focused and united with the moment in which you are living. For a hermit, it is always good to be in touch with love from moment to moment for remaining so provides all the nourishment we need.

The goal of the spiritual life is not ultimately to observe a set of commandments or rules, however necessary to religion. Such things are merely the habits of a soul which has not yet reached its highest point where it is transfigured and crowned with spiritual joy. The most

indispensable dimension of religion is not breadth but depth. This insight into sanctity has the power to produce saints. When we reach this stage, we put away the habits, rules and rituals which were such a help on our pilgrimage. We have become part of the mystery where love is the sole observance. We no longer need to seek for we have been found and are holy and joyous in just *being*. This is the purpose of all religion, the meaning of all lives, and the glory of the universe. We have received our true inheritance for Christ is risen in us and we are in the kingdom.

We can rest now in stillness of heart for we fully attend only upon God, here and now. Indeed, this sublime joy does all things without concern for we live in an emptiness, stillness, tranquility, silence and non-action which is the root of holy being. The one sacred ground of everything has been reached – but we find we are again at a beginning for all things are new, ever-changing in nature and in form. Yet, even as all in the universe is continuously reborn, all remains in constant union for nothing is outside the presence of God. We are at once unified, set free of all illusions and actions, and still evolving.

What then is the right beginning for us? It is neither commandments nor rules nor spiritual practices. It is to know when to stop, to know when you can get no further by your own action. This is the right beginning. When we do this, we have submitted to the Father of the spiritual world and draw life from Him. We acknowledge He is the author of all our peace. Let us praise God then and be quick to begin.

\*\*\*\*\*

**Stafford Whiteaker  
Maubourguet, France**

## A Word From Still Wood



Recently, we have had reason to reflect on the place of love in a hermit's life. Anyone who has read Karen's book, "Where God Begins to Be" will probably remember the chapter on the "Mighty White Hunter" in which she writes about her relationship with her white cat, Merton the Tom. She reflects how "*Merton padded into my heart and created a hole that no one but he could fill; that letting myself love means becoming vulnerable (but) being entrusted with someone to love and being loved in return is literally re-creating.*"

We were blessed with Merton's magical presence until cancer took him at age fourteen. A few years later Paul saw a picture of a white cat so closely resembling Merton, it gave us chills. We went to the shelter and found he was indeed a white angora who differed from Merton only in the greenish cast to his golden eyes...and profound deafness. We didn't mind his handicap and it didn't seem to bother him much either. We named him Merlin and were delighted by how well he interacted with Neill and Cynda. For his protection, we posted a sign on our drive warning delivery trucks and the meter man to be alert for a deaf cat who had no fear of vehicles.

We tried to prevent Merlin from wandering down our long drive but occasionally he gave us the slip and we had to tote him back to home territory. Often when we couldn't locate Merlin, (and of course, couldn't call him,) we would send Neill to search for "kitty". He would tag Merlin with his nose and let us know where he was. (He was smart enough *not* to try herding a cat!) Merlin always slept indoors at night, usually curled on the corner of our bed and with uncanny accuracy, would awaken us shortly before our alarm was due to go off. How did he know? Only God can answer that. Here was another white cat who had found his way past our defenses to take up residence in our hearts, as well as our home.

Now our hearts are heavy. On September 24<sup>th</sup>, Karen missed Merlin and went searching for him. To our great grief, she found his body on the side of the highway. It was obvious he never knew what

hit him. She gently carried his soft, warm body up the drive and laid him in our small gazebo chapel. Paul dug another grave in our "pet cemetery" and we laid him to rest amid flowers, sweet grass and tears. We trust Merton has touched noses with his spiritual "twin", and that now two white angora Toms are romping through eternal meadows, both of them delighting to hear celestial birdsong.

In November, as we recall our beloved dead, let us not overlook the four-legged or winged companions who have brought so much joy into our lives. We believe that they, as loving expressions of God's creativity, continue to exist in the God Who is Love. "*Where charity and love prevail, there God is ever found.*"

Changing the subject, we know many of you were confused by the new address form on the last issue of *RB*. In an effort to keep costs down, we initiated a new mailing system which reduces postage so we don't have to raise *RB's* rate at a time when we are all struggling financially. As always with something new, a few glitches cropped up! The subscription renewal date was dropped (why then?) and a postal code put in its place. We apologize for this and salute all of you who renewed despite the confusion. With this issue, you will find the renewal date above the postal code, as Nov '11. And yes, we agree the "**Or Current Resident**" line is tacky (but still necessary). Please continue to keep us updated on any change of address.

Finally, thank you for all who have prayed for Karen this past year. She is fully recovered from her accident and two subsequent surgeries. Her energy is high and she is working steadily on a book many of you have requested. Shsh! Updates will follow! For now, let us continue to pray for one another and all our beloved dead who await us in our eternal home place.

*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 Paypal at our website.\* Phone: 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 dollars (PayPal 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)**



## Raven's Forum



The following is a great suggestion from an *RB* reader in Riverdale Park, MD.

"You asked for suggestions on ways to serve the hermit community. I propose a lending library focused on books of interest to hermits - spiritual or practical (e.g. cookbooks geared to cooking for one; books about ways to support oneself from home, gardening; etc.). We can easily weigh ourselves down with possessions just by building up a library. I'm down-sizing to a smaller home, but would keep books to share with fellow solitaries.

I envision a decentralized lending library, with a website in which each of us could input the books s/he is willing to lend, and could place requests that would be routed by the same website to whoever has the book to lend. If more than one person has a given title, these could be placed in a queue. If a given subscriber places a request for a book not yet in the database, it would be listed. If someone acquires it and then, is willing to lend it, there will already be a queue for it. It costs about \$5. to ship a paperback book by media-mail. Borrowing from the library could equal costs incurred as a lender/sender. I am hoping that there is someone with the requisite web-

programming skills who'd be willing to donate their services???. I am not computer-savvy enough to create a framework for this. We don't need to reinvent the wheel. Here is one website with a similar idea: <http://www.makeuseof.com/tag/the-best-bookcrossing-websites/>. Any others you know of? Subscribers who do not use the internet could be notified by mail and place requests by mail. Swapping books is better than accumulating them. I would be happy to coordinate the library. Let's start the conversation."

**K&P respond: We think this is a great idea! This library would be more broadly based than RB's eremitical collection – if it works we may be able to merge the list of our books with the other books available. Interested readers, please get in touch with us and we'll pass along your responses to the author.**

### Discussion Topic for February 2011

How do you maintain "inner balance" in your solitary life? What personal yardsticks have you for measuring spiritual equilibrium?

**Submissions due January 1, 2011**



## BOOK AND WEBSITE REVIEWS



Please continue to visit David Tetrault's Blog: [www.silentiumaltum.blogspot.com](http://www.silentiumaltum.blogspot.com) where he offers his reflections about matters of interest to *Raven's Bread* readers. Also, check in from time to time at RB's website: [www.ravensbreadministries.com](http://www.ravensbreadministries.com) where we change a short reflection on the Library page bi-weekly and add new links which readers may wish to check out. Have you checked out an *RB* reader's [www.mertonocso.wordpress.com](http://www.mertonocso.wordpress.com)?

### A few books *RB* readers may find interesting:

**Alone with God** by Dom Jean Leclercq with memorable Preface by Thomas Merton. The author is widely regarded as the foremost 20th century scholar of Western monasticism. This critically acclaimed volume is also a guide to the hermit way of life, based on the teaching of Blessed Paul Giustiniani. It is said that "If you are only going to read one work on monastic spirituality in your lifetime, this could be your best choice." Recently reprinted by Ercam Editions, Bloomington, OH and available at [www.camaldolese.com](http://www.camaldolese.com) and distributed by Catholic Bookmark, P.O. Box 365, Downingtown, PA 19335.

**Office of the Passion of Saint Francis of Assisi** A special edition to celebrate the Centenary of the Franciscan Province of the Immaculate Conception, New York, NY. Arranged for individual and group praying by a *Raven's Bread* reader, Andre Cirino, OFM and Laurent Gallant, OFM. This unique expression of the prayer life of St. Francis opens the devout pray-er to what inspired the heart of one of the world's most beloved saints. This volume is adorned with the various figures found on the San Damiano cross, miniatures intended to offer a visual representation of the theology of the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In addition, simple psalm tones are provided so that the psalms chosen by Francis for his daily meditation can be rendered by a group. In this unique volume, we find how to turn exhaustive research into lived praxis by utilizing musical and artistic venues, thus employing all the senses in a prayer-form rich with the Hebrew psalms and the power of modern Gregorian-style hymnody.