



Raven's Bread

Food for Those in Solitude

Vol: 8 No: 4 November 2004

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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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

By: Brother Richard Simonelli
Order of Sarada in America

There are many ways of living a contemplative life and each faith tradition has a different understanding of how to go about this. One thing, however, is sure: in busy, turbulent, distressed times such as ours, we can more easily lose our contemplative awareness. Simplicity is at the heart of contemplation but even in a hermitage, it can be misplaced.

As a contemplative who interacts with ordinary worldly life, I've noticed what interferes with or blocks my contemplative spirit. I feel like I'm riding a very spirited horse, frisky enough to throw me over and over again. But she's not a mean-spirited horse. After I'm thrown out of contemplation, the horse is usually waiting quietly for me to mount once again. I gradually begin to notice what can throw me.

Distraction is the first challenge to contemplation that I notice. Distraction means that the focus of my faith gets pushed aside by the speed and intensity of the world, or even by my own thoughts and emotions. The strong, simple sense of presence gets diverted by other calls on my attention.

Occupation is yet another challenge to contemplation. Occupation means that my inner life is taken over or occupied by concerns other than contemplation. I may be occupied by work-related issues, or by media reports of suffering and war. The many forms of occupation have one thing in common: I am taken over and lose the simple focus that brings joy, love, peace and clarity.

Drama is a third impediment to the contemplative life. When I let drama enter my

psyche, I feel taken over by a kind of excitement that obscures the deep flow of contemplation. In drama, the mind and heart become possessed by a story line. It might be the drama of a personal relationship, or of personal issues. In any case, a dramatic mindset takes me away from the simple truth of contemplation.

Intrigue often does the same thing. An inner condition of intrigue is full of cunning schemes to accomplish one thing or another. When intrigue blocks the state of contemplation, life becomes devious and labyrinthine. The quality of simplicity is lost. In a mindset of intrigue, deception and trickery are present.

Indulging the **brilliant mind** is also a detour to contemplation. In this case we get lost in the thinking process even though it is sharp and brilliant. We get diverted by an endless stream of thoughts, even though they are good and perhaps even productive thoughts. The contemplative then finds the self always thinking. Where, then, is the quality of contemplation?

The **passionate heart** is also another challenge to a life of true contemplation. The passionate heart is occupied with intense emotions or feelings. One passion after another pulls us in contradictory directions, leaving the one-pointed quality of contemplation nowhere to be found.

Now, it's NOT that we should not have brilliant minds or passionate hearts, but they can be so seductive that they replace the single-mindedness of contemplation with an endless rush of thoughts and feelings. They must be used in service to our deepest faith and not become a faith in and of themselves.

These six diversions are not insurmountable problems for those committed to contemplation. In fact, awareness of any one of these six conditions can be a sign of the contemplative's diligence. Rather than seeing these lapses as problems or enemies, they can be seen as reminders and messages. When this happens, these diversions will be taken in stride, contributing to our living peace. Contemplation is a commitment to simplicity. It is a stabilizing influence needed more than ever in busy, turbulent times. We need to become better, more alert riders of our inner horse of spirit and awareness.

A Word from Still Wood

As we write this, leaves drift down, gilding the dying undergrowth in the forest with glimmers of gold. Across the valley, the slopes are radiant with red and russet, copper and crimson. Colors spill down the slopes and highlight the ridges. As it grows chillier outdoors and dark hours linger, the warmth and light within the house become more precious. No wonder Thanksgiving is celebrated at this time of the year!

This year we have cause to be more than ordinarily grateful since our home was spared serious damage from the unusual string of storms that surged up from the gulf even into these mountains. Flooding, downed trees, and mudslides affected thousands around us. Such havoc tells us Who is in charge and how interdependent our lives are. Gone are the days when each homestead was nearly self-sufficient. Now a single downed wire can plunge whole communities into virtual helplessness.

Hidden hermits, silent solitaries may appear to be the most disconnected people on the planet. Yet the opposite is true! As secluded pray-ers, we reach out with the compassion of God to offer spiritual sustenance to our lonely, suffering, fearful and dying brothers and sisters. We belong to a spiritual network that supports every movement for good around the globe. If we falter in our mission, thousands around us may suffer when the forces of greed and selfishness, as well as of nature, are unleashed.

Again this year **Raven's Bread** wishes to thank the Dominican Friars in Chicago who have hosted **RB** on their site for eight years, a site through which many new readers first find us. Your generous renewals and donations of the past year have been profoundly appreciated, for you have enabled us to send **RB** "First Class" again, as well as offer *Raven's Rest* to persons who otherwise could not have afforded a period of solitude, silence, and prayer.

We are delighted to announce that Karen's book, *Where God Begins to Be, A Woman's Journey into Solitude* is back in print! Some of you have already read this vivid account of Karen's years as a hermit in a holler in West Virginia complete with mud, copperheads, and her beloved cat, Merton the Tom. This edition, we are happy to say, is enriched by sketches from Paul's skilled hand. Ordering information is listed on this web page under **HERMIT RESOURCES**.

RB reaches you as the Islamic month of Ramadan ends and the Christian holiday season begins. For those who cherish solitude, Advent is a period of deepened quiet in

preparation for a renewal of the Christ-Light in our world. Long ago, St. Peter wrote : "Do not be perturbed; remain calm so that you will be able to pray. Above all, let your love for one another be constant, for love covers a multitude of sins. Be mutually hospitable without complaining. As generous distributors of God's manifold grace, put your gifts at the service of one another, each in the measure you have received" (1 Pt.4, 7-10). What better Christmas preparation can there be? May your joy be as complete as you have made ours!

**With Grateful love,
Karen & Paul**

**Solitude is the deepest well that I have ever run
across,
in terms of returning benefits.
I imagine it would be different if solitude was
forced on you.
But to choose it is to draw on a well that never
goes dry.**

**Robert Perkins
from *Heron Dance* February 1996**

zzz Stories of Solitude zzz

Embracing the solitary life is so liberating. I've been drawn to it over years. I've been aware of the Father setting me outside society, gently turning off the influences that distract me and becoming close to me for a number of years now - especially as my children moved into independent life.

However my constant complaint has been that I had no partner. Throughout the lonely years, all my prayers had been answered but that one. I have led a truly blessed life. Every time I argued with God about my aloneness, He would say that His love was sufficient for me. I seemed to get no peace though. Then somehow, through the reading of mystics, hermits and solitaries all became marvelously clear. This was my calling and I was resisting!

Since that realization, my foolish praying has stopped. I am happy to embrace this path. It's so freeing. Suddenly all that pent up love that I was holding in store for the partner that I sought for 20 years has been transferred to the Worthy Recipient. I guess I knew all along where He was leading me but I did not want it; my spirit wanting but my flesh not. Now I can follow the path with a free heart. I do not know where it will lead but it is an amazing new adventure - one that has been prepared for me over many years and one that I have been following without realizing for a while now. I know that God will bring what/whom I need into my life.

Hull, U.K.

Over time, I have noticed a growing contemplative dimension to my life. Someone has called me and I have felt His presence in various ways. I first became aware of this Presence during my university years. Amidst the busy schedule of classes, I would seek out spots in various university chapels and sit in the quiet. From that time on, I have looked for silent places where I could meet the One with whom I commune in the Prayer of Quiet.

Parallel to this, I spent my vacations hiking in the woods and mountains. The beauty of the woods, the silence of nature, the exhilaration of reaching the peaks were an epiphany of God. I understood why men and women have been drawn to the wilderness

to encounter God in solitude and silence.

Another step on my contemplative path occurred in my middle years. Many problems and trials suddenly burst into my life, forcing me to make changes in my work and life style. At times I felt that God had abandoned me and I did not know where to turn. But gradually I noticed a presence and silence deep within me, at my very core. I realized that this was from my faith to which, despite all my problems, I had always held fast. God thus became a source of hope helping me to hang on amidst all trials.

Then, I had three experiences that helped me to come to grips with my pain. First, for a period of six months, I enjoyed a continual sense of God, permeating my whole body-person. Gradually, I realized that I was experiencing God in a very explicit way. In all my activities, even while working, I could feel Him touching me and being within me. Contemplation and meditation were easy and full of consolation and I had no distractions; I just had to sit in God's presence and enjoy it. When this experience went away, it took me awhile to come down from the glow. I believe that God gave me this gift in order to build me up after so many difficulties in my life.

A second experience assisted me to put a conclusion to my years of suffering. In 2002 I made a pilgrimage of silence to Spain to the graves of John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila. At the chapel where Teresa is buried, I asked her if she remembered me from my visit 20 years earlier. I mentioned that since 1982 many things had happened to me including much suffering. Immediately she gave me her famous poem: "Only God matters". Since then, it has become a source of much confidence for me.

The third movement occurred in recent years. I have lost my former interest in various activities and want only to withdraw into silence and solitude where I can touch God's presence. This tendency has become very strong, almost like a culture shock. On the initiative of Someone else, I am leaving activities behind and seeking to sit in silence and solitude. I am now semi-retired so I can make space for this. All my life I have taken the initiative and now Someone else is taking the initiative and revealing Himself to me. While visiting friends in Mexico, I came across *el Convento de Santo Domingo*, reconstructed in the beautiful and austere Spanish colonial style. When I was at home alone again, I noticed that something had happened in me. I felt very different. God had touched me through the loveliness of that restored *Convento*. Now I often use a picture of the *Convento* in meditation, for looking at it ushers me directly into the presence of God. God touches us when and how He wishes - we have to be silent and listen; be attentive to these visits and how we are being lead.

New York, NY

Discussion Topic for February 2005 Issue:
(a continuation of the November 2004 topic)
Have you set apart a particular "sacred space"
for prayer in your hermitage? If so, please describe it?
Deadline: January 2, 2005

Only those who learn to live with solitude
can come to know themselves and life.
I go out there and walk
and look at the trees and the sky. I listen.
I sit on a rock or a stump and say to myself,
'Who are you Sandburg?
Where have you been,
and where are you going?'
Carl Sandburg

zzz**Discerning A Solitary Religious Vocation**zzz

Brother Randall Horton
Anglican Hermit in the Diocese of New York

(The following dialogue is the continuation of an article begun in the August 2004 issue of *Raven's Bread*).

These questions were posed to me in my ten plus years of profession as a hermit in the Anglican tradition. It is neither exhaustive nor necessarily accurate but does represent my own experience. Thomas Paine's words in *The Age of Reason* can apply: "You will do me the justice to remember, that I have always strenuously supported the Right of every Man to his own opinion, however different that opinion might be to mine. He who denies to another this right, makes a slave of himself to his present opinion, because he precludes himself the right of changing it."

Q. Why is it that some Religious I know seem to take their vows very literally, but others seem to take the vows more symbolically?

A. That's a good question. You see, most Religious, myself included, are not good, or holy, or necessarily very religious people. We need our vows not because we are holy, but because we are NOT holy. We all come to religious life with a bag of mixed motivations, some of them holy and wonderful, and others not nearly so! Not all who wish to take the habit can handle the disciplines, just as not all who promise fidelity in marriage are capable of keeping that vow either. But lapses in keeping the vows do not invalidate the vows themselves. Rather, they show their intrinsic validity.

Q. Why do some Religious seem to be centered on prayer exclusively and others seem to be centered on work of some sort?

A. Religious life comes in many different shapes and forms. The biblical story of Mary and Martha is often used to contrast the active and the contemplatives lives. But the Religious life goes back further than the distinction of contemplatives and actives. The earliest Christian monks were the desert hermits in the 4th century. They did not live in community at all, but alone. Then came the Rule of St. Benedict which organized this contemplative movement and developed communal monasticism. Later we have St. Francis of Assisi who popularized the active Religious life - the friars. All of these are radically different lifestyles and a person who is called to one would probably not be successful in adapting to another style. This is why when discerning a vocation, it is wise to explore many different communities and different styles of life before choosing a novitiate. While active Religious appear to be centered on work, they are actually centered on prayer. It is just that they understand prayer in a different way. Mary is not holier or better than Martha. She is just different.

Q. I have demonstrable psychic gifts, including psychic healing gifts. Why should I have to go through all this discernment process when it is already obvious that I have a vocation? Why doesn't the bishop just profess me?

A. Because the presence of charismatic or psychic gifts does not, in and of itself, indicate a vocation to anything. Historically, it never has. Such gifts are demonstrable in people who are not Christian or even religious at all. Neither do such gifts indicate spiritual maturity. And in no case do psychic gifts indicate that the recipient of said gifts is necessarily theologically educated or grounded enough so as not to accidentally fall into heresy or other such dangerous things.

Q. I have many ministries in my parish church. Are they an indication of a solitary vocation?

A. The solitary vocation is historically a contemplative vocation, and involvement with parish ministries has little if anything to do with it. In point of fact, should you become a canonical solitary, connection with parish ministries could be outright dangerous to your vocation.

Q. Why is it so difficult to find a bishop who will even talk to me about receiving my solitary vows?

A. First, most bishops know absolutely nothing about the hermit life except what one might learn from reading popular novels. And believe me, a knowledge of *The Name of the Rose* does not qualify anyone to be a superior. You do not want a bishop to hold your vows - particularly the vow of obedience - who does not understand religious life. The results could be disastrous for you.

Second, most bishops are afraid of the risks entailed in taking a solitary under vow. Any bishop who professes you is placing a tremendous amount of trust in you, for he or she seldom has the time to monitor you or your vocation. Many simply do not want to deal with solitaries. And more specifically, they do not want to be financially responsible for hermits under vows.

Third, many bishops have little appreciation of the contemplative calling. The solitary life is essentially a contemplative vocation. Part of the discernment process for a solitary is revealed in the lengths one will go in order to find a bishop who will genuinely assist a hermit. The process will take a long time and it will be difficult. If you are called to it, you will hang in there. If you are not, you won't. It is better to find out sooner rather than later.

(To be continued in the next issue)

Prayer is the inner bath of love into which the soul plunges.

**John Vianney
(with thanks to *Friends of Silence*)**

"A Suggestion"

Trying to get in touch with another hermit? Want contact from a hermit or solitary? Aware of opportunities that may be of interest to solitaries? Have you a service to offer? Are you looking to locate or re-locate a hermitage? Why not place your message on the **Bulletin Board** of *Raven's Bread* (printed version). Requests are posted **free of charge** for our regular subscribers.

Hermit Resources Available from *Raven's Bread* November 2004

(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**

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

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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 OHN

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 to schedule time beginning April 1, 2005 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

PARTY OF ONE - THE LONER'S MANIFESTO by Anneli Rufus.

Too often, loners buy into society's messages and strive to change, making themselves miserable in the process. Rufus delivers a long-overdue argument in praise of loners. Assembling evidence from diverse arenas of culture, she recognizes loners as a vital force in the world civilization... "party of one" rebuts the prevailing notion that aloneness is loneliness.

2003. Softcover, 286 pp. Marlowe & Company, NY, NY. Order through Amazon.com

LETTERS FROM A HERMIT by William Paulsell & Matthew Kelty.

Story of Trappist monk, Father Matthew Kelty's journey into solitude from his life as a missionary to a life of seclusion in a hermitage in New Guinea.

Paperback. \$7.95 Templegate Publishers. Order toll free: 800-367-4844;
www.templegate.com; email: orders@templegate.com

FLAME IN THE SNOW by Julia de Beausobre.

Fictionalized biography of St. Serafim of Sarov, the most popular saint in the Orthodox Church. Paints a vivid picture of Russian society in the late 18th and early 19th centuries.

Softcover, \$12.95 Templegate Publishers. Order toll free: 800-367-4844;
www.templegate.com; email: orders@templegate.com

DESERT DISCIPLESHIP - AN INTRODUCTION TO RATIONAL EREMITISM by Fr. Robert Gannon.

Father Robert lived as a hermit on St. Peter's Abbey grounds for nearly 30 years. This scholarly book has been called a Handbook for Hermits and includes a modified ancient rule useful for today.

2003. 151 pp. Paperback. Privately Published. \$35.00 plus \$5.00 P & H. Order from Gift Shop, St. Peter's Abbey, Muenster, Sask. Canada, S0K 2Y0

THE CALL OF SOLITUDE - ALONETIME IN A WORLD OF ATTACHMENT by Ester Schaler Buchholz, Ph.D.

Through these pages aloneness emerges as a richly textured tapestry, a dimension of human experience that is always in danger of being regulated to the realm of psychopathology. Buchholz sensitively captures the meaningful private moments of everyday experiences to make her case.

1997. Softcover, 365 pp. Simon & Schuster, NY, NY. Order through Amazon.com

CELEBRATING TIME ALONE - STORIES OF SPLENDID SOLITUDE by Lionel Fisher.

A book that combines insights from men and women across this country who shared their stories of chosen solitude; with Fisher's reflections on his own six years spent on a remote beach in a climactic period of willful isolation.

2001. 198 pp. Paperback. \$14.95 Beyond Words Publishing Inc. 20827 N.W. Cornell Road, Suite 500, Hillsboro, OR 97124-9808; Toll free: 800-284-9673

WEBSITES OF POSSIBLE INTEREST:

Between The Clouds - Divine Hours composed of selections from spiritual classics.

www.contemplativerudder.com

The Jesus Abbey - for spiritually seasoned married couples.

www.contemplativerudder.com/theabbey

Desert Fathers, Then and Now. www.stmacariusmonastery.org

Margot King on Desert Mothers. www.hermitary.com/articles/mothers.html

Resources and Reflections on hermits and Solitude. www.hermitary.com



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