



# ***Raven's Bread***

## ***Food for Those in Solitude***

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### ***Vol: 11 No: 4 November 2007***

***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 \$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***.

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***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

excerpted from

***Consider the Ravens: On Contemporary Hermit Life***  
***A forthcoming publication by Paul & Karen Fredette***

It has been said (and quite accurately,) that mystics swim in the same waters in which psychotics drown. Solitary life frequently proves to be the "waters" where sagacity or psychoses can surface quite dramatically. Many of us are haunted by this possibility and so view the desire to live alone, apart from maximum human interaction, with profound suspicion, even when this attraction rises in our own heart. "It ain't natural!" proclaims the Censor within and we quickly flee from the temptation to become (May God save me!) a hermit.

Yet, some of us harbor a concern that we might just be running from the life-giving stream that once sustained that old Biblical hermit, Elijah. We can well understand the occasional desire to chuck it all and head for the hills where, at least for awhile, we can just be. But what happens when such a dream threatens to become a way of life? Are we sinking into a psychosis? Displaying the symptoms of a major depression? Or struggling with the mid-life nemesis of change for changes' sake? At the very least, aren't we being profoundly selfish?

The one thing we are most certain about is that there is an aching void at our center. Traditional religious practices and conservative morals have (we believe) given earlier generations "blessed assurance." We may strive to

recover such certainties by returning to our earlier practices or we may seek out more esoteric spiritualities which seem to offer the secrets of meaningful living, However, even as we go about this search (and grow in the process), we are likely to discover that the fulfillment we want involves increasing chunks of solitude. Uh, oh, here comes that "h" word again. Hermit! Maybe it is time to stop running blindly and look more seriously at this phenomenon known as eremitical life. So just what is a hermit?

An anonymous Camaldolese hermit wrote of his life in terms of hiddenness and concealment. Among the lessons he describes "the first is this: our departure for the hermitage is an eloquent rejection of the mentality of our environment. Our solitary life is not only a renunciation of the artificiality of a mundane existence based on appearance and efficiency, but it hides us from the eyes and the acquaintance of others ...in such a way that we live truly concealed in complete anonymity."

To safely set off for the desert, we need an abundance of inner strength, balance, fidelity and resourcefulness - qualities developed through years of struggle and experience, and seldom found in the very young. I recall when, as a young nun, I would observe my Irish abbess shaking her head over some of my bright ideas and murmuring with a sigh: "You cannot put a grey head on young shoulders."

We spontaneously expect "grey heads" on hermits and solitaries. Our conventional image includes the gifts which either suffering or age bestow, usually both in tandem. So our hermit is "mature" and will have acquired a special gift of wisdom and insight into soul-matters. We expect him/her to have compassion and depth of understanding; to be someone who will accept us as we are without condemnation, without judgment. How few people ever do! And those who do are not the very young. The elders we seek out look upon us with serenity and kindness, and quite likely, also with a twinkle in their eye.

So we may ask of the solitary - are you a sage or a psychotic? The more genuine may respond that it doesn't really matter. Both are beloved of God. For all of us, this is the ground of our being, the one solid place on which we can stand. Where the genuine hermit dwells, there is peace, the peace which surpasses understanding. Here, then, is the vocation of the true hermit, the genuine solitary: to be a mediator of peace to others while absorbing their pain. S/he may speak some words of wisdom and comfort, or be humbly silent before the mystery of another's pain, admitting that s/he has no answers. In the words of T.S.Eliot:

"Suffer us not to mock ourselves with falsehood  
Teach us to care and not to care  
Teach us to sit still  
Even among these rocks,  
Our peace in His will"  
(Ash Wednesday VI)

## A Word from Still Wood

The golden glow of autumn is bathing our mountains, shafting light through amber trees and glinting off the dancing leaves. Tree trunks are wrapped in the scarlet of Virginia Five-Leaf (or is it poison oak?) and walnuts plummet to the ground. Goldenrod and deep purple ironweed add royal beauty to the roadsides. Yet fall is an ambiguous season when we gratefully honor another year's harvest, but also vaguely mourn chances we will never have again. There is a gentle peace as the land settles down, welcoming everything back into its dark bosom, but there is also a twinge of fear as we face the long, cold months soon to come. Harvest Moon is followed by Hunters' Moon and then, on some calendars, November brings the Hermit Moon!

As we grow into our er..., "mature" years, time takes on some dismaying aspects. Once it never moved fast enough; now it hurtles by at a frightening rate, leaving us standing with a handful of unfinished tasks. We surmise that just as yellow buses carry the neighborhood children off to school, this golden season is taking us to classes as well. What is it we have yet to learn?

All around us, forest creatures scurry to store food for the winter, often at the risk of their lives. We, too, are rushing about, trying to amass all those things we can't live without. Will we ever admit we have enough? Learn to accept what is? Count our blessings instead of lamenting our lacks? Autumn is the

season to be schooled in Contentment. When dusk falls early, the lighted windows of home are the most welcome sight on earth. When we come to our final hour, we hope to look up to see eternal lights shining for us – those Welcome Home lights which our heavenly Father has put on for us. If we have practiced being satisfied with our present lot here and now, we can trust the door of our eternal home will swing wide open. There we shall want for nothing; there Contentment will be the essence of our bliss.

As the lucky editors of *Raven's Bread*, we have much to be thankful for, including all the new readers who have recently subscribed. Many of them learned about the newsletter through an article in (of all places!) the New York Times real estate magazine. Welcome, neighbors! Other new readers learned about us through a program from the Canadian Broadcasting Company. We appreciate this growing interest in hermit life and are glad to "educate" people on what it really is and debunk a few myths.

We are working diligently on Consider the Ravens, our book on contemporary hermit life. We feel it is not so much our book as yours – for what you have shared with us over the years has influenced and shaped the material between its future covers. We project that it will become available sometime next spring. We thank those of you who have written reflections for us or have contributed financially. Despite your generosity, we have reluctantly concluded that we will have to raise *RB's* subscription rate to \$10.00 a year in the U.S. and \$12.00 (US currency) for outside the States. We had hoped to put this off but printing costs, as well as postage, are rising. If you remember, the last increase was in January 2000 when the rate went up from \$7.50 to \$8.00. Please take note! We will still offer *RB* free of charge to any of you who cannot afford it.

May our world be bathed in God's golden light. May our hearts also bask in Love's light, making the holidays holy and bright. We wish you the gift of Contentment – the grace of knowing that God's abundant love is enough.

With Grateful love,  
Karen & Paul

**The Quiet mind  
Brings calmness,  
Infinite, eternal grace.  
Born inside silence  
Is the will to be.  
Chaos becoming order,  
The holiness of life,  
The unfolding of Great Mystery.**

from *EARTH MEDICINE* By *Jamie Sans*  
taken from the October 2007 issue of *Friends of Silence*

zzzzzz **Ora et Labora** zzzzzz

By: Rev. Eugene Stockton, Lawson, NSW

"Pray and Work" summed up for St. Benedict the Rule he gave for his monks; it did not specify two distinct occupations, two different compartments, but two faces of the one contemplative life. The Benedictine Rule underlined "listening to God" in a deep awareness pervading the daily routine. In my book *Wonder* I noted the sort of natural mysticism at play in such pastimes as bushwalking, biking, gardening, surfing, fishing. In a previous paper, "Layers of Perception", I drew attention to those, especially in primal societies, who live almost

habitually in a mystical state, even while engaged in ordinary routines.

One will often observe a person deeply absorbed in what they are doing, as if activity and contemplation were one. A good gardener tingles with a sense of feeling for his plants and results show signs of plants responding to this deep personal care. There are cooks who, without the aid of measuring or recipe books, have an uncanny sense of the right ingredients, how much needed and how long to cook, as if they entered the feel of the brewing mix: "It is just right." Japanese Buddhism has highlighted the role of tea making, archery and calligraphy in a contemplative mode. Thich Nhat Hanh in *The Miracle of Mindfulness* is speaking not just of habitual attentiveness to detail but of a state where mind penetrates matter and action in a single awareness.

Two personal experiences stand out in my memory. As a child I loved to go into the bush and explore its delights. I was full of wonder and curiosity. From the moment of entry I found every sense heightened and alert to its full extent. There was a sense of being with, of communicating with (in both directions), of becoming one with the landscape. On return I knew I had been in another world. In recent years, on taking up the life of a hermit, I have found an unexpected model in some retired couples I know and admire. Their working life is over, the children have grown up and left home. "Now there is just the two of us." So much of the daily routine is taken up with attention to one's spouse. Little things are done in constant watchfulness of the other, for the sake of the other. So in my hermitage I am not alone. "Now there is just the two of us." The round of domestic and gardening chores are carried out with Him in mind, not for myself. Cooking is not a casual, slumming necessity. "Let us prepare a banquet fit for a king." This home is the kingdom of God in little, not a lonely outpost.

Such contemplative mindfulness can be found not only in manual activity, but also in the exercise of the intellect. There are those who are especially proficient in languages or mathematics, even to the point of genius. They appear to be no longer processing words and numbers, symbols of reality, according to established rules of reasoning (and the primacy of the left hemisphere of the brain at work) but to be mulling over deeply felt realities of an inner three-dimensional world, interweaving patterns in intuitive recognition. In archaeology I found such intuition played a big role in recognizing and identifying artifacts, in judging plans and in reading sections of a trench. How often it had to be said "A suggests B." Later such intuitions had to be translated into objective descriptions and classifications, so others could verify the results on a respectable basis. In scale, I wonder whether there is here a question of thinking at different levels of awareness. It is perhaps no surprise that some scientists, especially in the field of quantum mechanics, with its baffling paradoxes, have tended to mysticism (cf. Paul Davies, *The Mind of God*).

**Twist and get whole.  
Bend and get straight.  
Be empty and get filled.  
Be worn and get renewed.  
Have little: get much.  
Have much: get baffled.  
*The Way of Ways - Tao*  
taken from Autumn 2007 Holy Ground**

zzzzzz **"The Ether of Love"** zzzzzz

**By: Barbara Erakko-Taylor, Hannibal, MO**

When I wrote the book, *Silence: Making the Journey to Inner Quiet*, and subsequently, *Silent Dwellers: Embracing the Solitary Life*, I told myself (and the readers) that the call to the eremitic life is one that must be held with open hands...and a willingness to leave the life of silence and solitude if called out of

it by God. I felt that I could not know the source of the desire. True, the source is God...but also the one constant of life is change. So I wanted to acknowledge, right up front, that I wanted to *follow* God - not create an eremitic shrine to God.

Of course, I did create the shrine. I put into place practices, structures, restrictions, ideals, intentions, and basically cemented my "ideal" of a hermit into place. Thankfully that did not last too long and I entered the gentle flowing silence. Today, ten years later, I am a much different type of hermit. One would, and could say, not one at all. Only the silent dwelling has remained. I bubble with mirth, relish numerous friendships, am out more than in. What I found is that, for me, the hermitage - the silent dwelling of love - is the heartbeat for my arms and legs, my mind and my actions. I live alone in order to be among others. My prayer life, with its set times and devotions, eventually slipped away. What has been left is the ether of love, the frequent ejaculation of joy that "I love You." That seems to constitute my entire prayer.

We often talk about how to become a hermit – and how to live as a hermit – and the value to society of the eremitic vocation. And all of that is absolutely true! It may be the only way we can finally and truly see all of the masks that separate us from Love. But here I am, poking around on the other side. I suspect I may flow back into the eremitic life. I can begin to feel the slight tug of its edges. I'll try not to party too long if that truly is God's call for me. And whether "in" or "out", there is one constant. Love.

## **Hermit Resources Available from *Raven's Bread* November 2007**

### **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](http://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.

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To access the website of Fellowship of Solitaries click on this link:

<http://www.solitaries.org.uk/>

## **BOOK NOTICES AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Sounding the Silence**

by John Skinner

*Here is an invitation to step outside time, and join ourselves to the Silence that lies at the heart of the world - through silence to enter into prayer. Inspired by the Carthusian tradition, John Skinner has developed ways to offer this intense experience to any who are seeking to engage with their own inner reality and with a deeper experience of God. Based on material used each month by a wide network of people, this book provides weekly readings threaded together to provide a year-long exploration of silence.*

2004. Softcover. 120 pp.

ISBN 1-56854-565-7

Liturgical Training Publications, 1800 N. Hermitage Ave., Chicago, IL 60622-1101

Tel: 1-800-933-1800 email: [orders@ltp.org](mailto:orders@ltp.org)

**On Living Simply, The Golden Voice of John Chrysostom**

compiled by Robert Van de Wyer

*This meditational book contains more than 90 excerpts from the sermons of St. John Chrysostom, a major but little-known spiritual thinker of the early Church. The compiler has selected thematic passages from the written record of these sermons in order to inspire, challenge, remind, and reassure a new generation of readers.*

1997. Softcover. 100 pp.

ISBN 0-7648-0056-6

Ligouri/Triumph, Ligouri, MO

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

**Einsam und allein? Eremiten in Deutschland**

by Maria Anna Leenen

*For those fortunate enough to read German, this little book is a treasure trove of information about the contemporary eremitical movement in Germany, written by a hermit in touch with the estimated 70 - 80 hermits in that country.*

2006 Softcover. 144 pp.

ISBN 3-402-00235-3

Aschendorff Medien GmbH & Co. KG, Druckhaus, Munster

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