



Raven's Bread

Food for Those in Solitude

Vol: 8 No: 2 May 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:

Raven's Bread
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: Thomas Merton
Selections from "Creative Silence"
First Published in 1969 in "The Baptist Student"

Our service of God and of the church does not consist only in talking and doing. It also requires periods of silence, listening, waiting. It is very important in our era of violence and unrest to rediscover meditation, quiet inner prayer and creative prayerful silence.

Silence has many dimensions. It can be a regression and an escape, a loss of self, or it can be presence, awareness, unification, self-discovery. Negative silence blurs and confuses our identity and we lapse into daydreams or diffuse anxieties. Positive silence pulls us together and makes us realize who we are, who we might be, and the distance between these two. Hence, positive silence implies a disciplined choice and what Paul Tillich called the "courage to be." In the long run, the discipline of creative silence demands strong faith. For when we come face to face with ourselves in the lonely ground of our own being, we confront questions about our values, our commitments, the authenticity of our everyday lives.

When we are quiet, not just for a few minutes but for an hour or several hours, we may become uneasily aware of the presence within us, of a disturbing stranger, the self that is both "I" and someone else. The self that is not entirely welcome in his own house because he is so different from the every day character that we have constructed. There is a silent self within us whose presence is disturbing precisely because it is so silent.

To meet this inner self, we have to come to terms with silence. In silence we face and admit the gap between the depths of our being which we consistently ignore and the surface which is so often untrue to our own reality. We recognize the need to be at

home with ourselves in order that we may go out to meet others, not just with the mask of affability but with real commitment and authentic love.

True faith has to be tested by silence in which we listen for the unexpected, in which we are open to what we do not yet know, and in which we slowly and gradually prepare for the day when we will reach out to a new level of being with God. True hope is tested by silence in which we have to wait on the Lord in the obedience of unquestioning faith. Isaiah recorded the word of Yahweh to his rebellious people who were always abandoning him in order to enter worthless political and military alliances. "In silence and hope shall your strength be"(Is 30:15). The idea is that faith demands the silencing of questionable deals and strategies. Faith demands the integrity of inner trust which produces wholeness, unity, peace, and genuine security. Here we see the creative power and fruitfulness of silence. It helps us to concentrate on a purpose that really corresponds not only to the deepest needs of our own being but also to God's intentions for us.

The real purpose of silence is a deepening of prayer, a return to the roots of our being, in order that out of silence, prayer and hope we may receive from God new words and a new way of stating not our message, but His.

A Word from Still Wood

The warm spring sunshine and cheerful birdsongs encourage us as we collect rocks and stir cement to build yet a third stairway on our mostly vertical acre. Standing at the bottom of the thirty-foot bank and eyeing the curving line of steps we are "rasslin" into place, Paul suggests we name it "the stairway to heaven." Perhaps "Jacob's Ladder" might be equally fitting since we are building on a site we are certain is "nothing else but an abode of God and the gateway to heaven!" (Gn 28.17).

This particular project is one we have wanted to tackle since we moved into Still Wood eight years ago, but like most everything in life, it had its own time. Eventually we hope to get the open area at the bottom that we have dubbed "the lower 40" landscaped. It was providentially terraced last year when our new leach field was put in so we expect the grass will be VERY green and the flowers QUITE fragrant! The Lord has provided yet once again.

The account of Abraham's sacrifice in the Book of Genesis has become very vivid for us over the years here in the Smokies. After offering the ram in place of his son, it is written "Abraham named the site Yahweh-yireh: hence people now say, 'On the mountain, the Lord will see to it' (Gn 22,14)." Over and over the Lord has dramatically seen to our needs, especially in regard to ***Raven's Bread***. When we took on this ministry in 1997, we made a little covenant with the Lord. We would gladly put in our time and energy but we had no money. That would have to come from the Lord. And lo, it always has! Often in the nick of time, when bills for the printer or the postage came due, the needed amount arrived from one of our generous readers. You know who you are and we thank you! Despite rising costs, we have been able to keep subscriptions stable.

As we expanded our ministry to include ***Raven's Rest***, we deliberately kept suggested donations low. Recently though, a hermit-reader gave us (and you) a marvelous gift by offering to subsidize retreats for those wanting to come but unable to afford even a modest donation. (Details are on the Bulletin Board.) We are immensely grateful for such generosity and trust that those who take advantage of this gift will be too.

A recent story about hermit life in the *National Catholic Reporter* featured ***Raven's Bread*** and has resulted in numerous new subscribers. Welcome to all of you! You, together with all who have generously renewed their subscriptions, have become Yahweh's providers and we trust you will be especially rewarded.

Still our most precious assets are the many personal stories readers have offered to share in this and upcoming issues of ***RB***. So many of you write to say how encouraged you are to know that there are others "out there" who share the solitary vocation. Eremitical life is an uncommon call, but a profoundly necessary one. When the social, political and economic fabric of our planet threatens to fly apart, it is the silent pray-ers united at the hub of the whirling world who keep spokes and rim intact and turning in the right direction, that is, towards the beautiful destiny for which we were all created. Let us continue to pray for one another!

**With Grateful love,
Karen & Paul**

**Forests and fields,
sun and wind and sky,
earth and water,
all speak the same language:
peace, solitude, silence.
Thomas Merton
(with thanks to *Heron Dance*)**

The 2001 Survey of Raven's Bread Readers

Since "The Survey" was initiated more than 620 copies were mailed to our readership. Over 175 became participants. It has been a truly gratifying experience that continues to generate a wide range of responses. It says something wonderful about everyone who cooperated in this project, making it truly reflective of what is happening in our own time re solitary lifestyles. We continue to receive requests for **Survey Results** and back issues containing the summaries we have printed thus far.

The February 2004 print issue of **RB** featured the results of the last of Ten Reflection Questions.

The complete summary of compiled responses in a single resource (23 pages) since the first published results appeared in the August 2001 Issue is now available.

If you are interested in obtaining this compilation of the **2001 Raven's Bread Survey Results** it is available upon request to our online readers for \$5.00 (U.S. currency):

By Mail:

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

By Telephone: 1-828-622-3750

By E-Mail: fredette@nlink.net

**The small truth has words that are clear;
the great truth has great silence.
TAGORE
(with thanks to *Heron Dance*)**

zzz Stories of Solitude zzz

I was converted from hedonism and disorder by Padre Pio who threw me out of confession telling me to change my life and that I had sold my self to the devil - the most most wonderful day of my life that split open my calcified heart and redirected / set me on the road to truth, reality and Jesus...

I then spent some 15 months as a hermit postulant with the Hermits of Mary Immaculate in the French Pyrenees: not only the grace of a change of life/heart, but also the beginnings of an understanding of, a catching sight of a vocation that our heavenly Father gives to some of his children.

Some can bear the silence and solitude, which is only silence and solitude from nature's point of view but which is communication and companionship from the soul's point of view. Some cannot. In the Order (already mentioned), we even had a Trappist and another monk from a cenobitic order who simply couldn't take being in that aloneness with God. One monk was so ashamed to admit that he couldn't live in that quiet Hsucia that he ran away in the early hours of the day so that no one would see him.

The break comes at about two months. If one can stay longer, one has within oneself the ability or the natural foundation necessary for constructing a hermit vocation, with God's grace and the soul's cooperation. Although I later left the Order, married, and became the father of 8 children, God has always kept me in the state of "hermitude" to coin a word. After the collapse of my marriage and having to live through the experience of human rejection, I am now more than ever a hermit of God. What form this will take in the future I do not know...

By: Giordano Elia Marian, Victoria, Australia

Like many natural Solitaries, my life has been a series of solitary spaces since childhood, often wedged between domestic duties, motherhood, and teaching. There has always been an inner space calling, waiting to be fed, and from which to learn. I often wandered off alone as a child, taking long walks, watching the sunset, riding my bike. Life was safer for children then and I was blessed with the freedom to roam. Later, it was sometimes possible amid the frenzy of rearing three children, to set aside regular prayer and meditation times, for focus, observation, and inner reflection. At other times the Silence called but I could not answer.

I was always drawn to sit outside the church of a summer evening watching the stars, or in a sheltered corner in winter. In one town, this developed into a daily habit. I drove to the local church to sit outside during Evensong. Because I could not leave work early enough to join the prayers inside, I would not intrude on the rhythm of their worship, but appreciated being caught up in their prayer. On weekends I sat alone for hours in the quiet church. Finally I was drawn to serve in the Sanctuary team on Sundays and have always felt that to be a form of visible prayer. One needs to be very disciplined to keep focus on the duties required as well as being caught up in prayer. In my last posting I enjoyed regular serving as well as tending candles and little odd jobs, all unseen duties but they became a rich part of the fabric of my silent worship.

I am now newly arrived in Central Australia in a very remote Aboriginal settlement serving the needs of the local people teaching Literacy/Numeracy and associated support subjects. I felt that the last year or so of my "official" teaching life should be spent in giving back something of the skills I had learned to adults who may otherwise not have that chance. So I came here alone and God in typical whimsical style has me living in what was a Mission House. The children of the area are pretty lively and undisciplined, but refer to me as "that Christian lady." There is no formal Christian presence in the little village at this time.

I wake with the sunrise at 5 am each morning, say Morning Prayer at 6:30 before walking to work at 7. I'm home at 5 pm. Evening Prayer is at 6:30 pm and most nights are spent in extra prayer and thought. Sundays I say Mass at 6am, celebrating at a small altar set up in the lounge, with the host from a reserve previously blessed by a Bishop. While my days are spent variously attending to other people's needs, my nights and three days a week are spent in prayer and silence. I don't know what is ahead of me here, but I am hoping that the time will lead me to a deeper Silence and sense of Presence that may be shared in the daily duties serving the people.

By: Beverly Driver, Central Australia

I am 54, an ex-nun and now a divorcee, living alone this past year and a half with a contemplative dog! I love being alone and celibate and single. I own my 1925 house and on top of the garage I converted a storage shed, about 10' x 10', into a chapel, meditation room.

I am self-employed as a professional artist, so my income is through what I sell and teaching two days a week. Being an artist, I work at home in my garage studio, in a part of Los Angeles County. I have solitude as an artist and my neighborhood is quiet.

By: Paula, Wilmington, CA

I'm 63 yrs old, married, Catholic, and belong to a local fraternity of the Secular Franciscans, in which I have served as the Vice-Minister, and recently as Formation Director. My wife Judy and I have four adult children, one of whom is married. I joined the Methodist Church at fourteen and converted to the Catholic Church when I was eighteen after my two older brothers converted to Catholicism. Then as I searched for God's will, I was led to the Brothers of St. John of God, a nursing order, where I

remained through the postulancy until I was asked to leave after the voting process. I wondered how God could change his mind. I was sure I was to be a monk. I returned home and wandered in and out of jobs, until I discovered that I had a vocation to nursing. I have been active in nursing now for over 35 years.

In the 1970s my wife and I found ourselves attending a Catholic charismatic prayer group, having attended a Marriage Encounter weekend and a Cursillo Group weekend. We knew that God was calling us to stay with the prayer group for follow-up. We started hearing a call to live in Christian community and after about 6 years of praying and searching and 7 more years of waiting, we moved to Steubenville, Ohio, where we joined a Catholic charismatic covenant community of laypersons, priests, and sisters. We have been here for 15 years now.

Through consistent prayer and listening we are both moving to quiet times in our life while still living in community. I am reading more about Franciscan solitude, hermitages and the eremitical life and trying to understand about life in the desert in our urban setting. We draw much support from and want to thank you for your writing and the articles in each newsletter.

By: Frangelo, Steubenville, OH

Discussion Topic for August 2004 Issue:
Have you set apart a particular "sacred space"
for prayer in your hermitage? If so, please describe it?
Deadline: June 30, 2004

TAOIST MEDITATION

Close your eyes and you will see clearly
Cease to listen and you will hear truth
Be silent and your heart will sing
Seek no contact and you will find union
Be still and you will move forward in the tide of the spirit
Be gentle and you will not need strength
Be patient and you will achieve all things
Be humble and you remain entire."
from Heron Dance

"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* May 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

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 0HN

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 4, (Palm Sunday) 2004 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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Tel: 828-622-3750
[email: fredette@nclink.net](mailto:fredette@nclink.net)

BOOK NOTICES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

INTERIOR PRAYER, Carthusian Novice Conferences by A Carthusian, Translated by Sister Maureen Scrine

For members of the Carthusian Order, prayer is not just something that is done at certain times of the day: it is in fact the vital respiration of their faith. This third volume of novice conferences gives us access once again to the Carthusian's profound wisdom, as we share the initiation of a group of young monks into the practice of prayer.

1996. Softcover, 181 pp. Cistercian Publications, Institute of Cistercian Studies, Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo, MI 49008. www.spencerabbey.org/cistpub/

MAKING MORE OF LIFE WITH LESS, Seeking Humility, Simplicity, and Silence by Rick Mathis, Ph.D.

The author, who holds a doctorate in Political Science from Johns Hopkins University and currently manages medical policy for Blue Cross Blue Shield of Tennessee, maintains that we make life harder than it has to be by looking at the world from the perspective of maintaining our own importance and our own secure place in it. Recovering the virtues of humility, simplicity, and silence that are all too often eclipsed by an all-too-busy modern lifestyle can offer more of the complete joy that is part of knowing and loving God.

2004. 142 pp. Paperback. \$14.95. Liguori/Triumph, Liguori, MO
www.iliguori.org / www.catholicbooksonline.com

THE LANGUAGE OF SILENCE, The Changing Face of Monastic Solitude by Peter-Damian Belisle, OSB Cam.

Part of the **Traditions of Christian Spirituality Series**, this author's survey highlights the more salient factors involved in the formation of monastic solitude in its various hues.

2003. 187 pp. Paperback. \$16.00. Orbis Books, P.O. Box 308, Maryknoll, NY 10545-0308 TEL: 800-258-5838

CHRIST IN THE MARGINS by Robert Lentz and Edwina Gateley.

This remarkably beautiful collaboration in coffee table format features forty Robert Lentz icons and biographies of Christ-figures who confounded the status quo. Together with Edwina Gateley's stories of men and women who have led her to experience the Christ who lives in all of us, it is both profoundly spiritual and spiritually profound.

2003. 144 pp. Hardcover. \$25.00. Orbis Books, P.O. Box 308, Maryknoll, NY 10545-0308 TEL: 800-258-5838



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