



# ***Raven's Bread***

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

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### ***Vol: 8 No: 3 August 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](mailto: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: Father Richard Baker**  
**"The Hermit's Vocation"**

**Exerpted from Letter from the Hermitage, Winter 2003 # 11**

When visitors arrive at a hermitage, their first question is "Why? Why do you live this way?" Answers are as diverse as the work of the Spirit. Some came by chance. Some intended to spend a few days in retreat but were moved to spend a lifetime. Some came seeking a pathway to make up for past sins. Some came in search of a peace the world can never give. One said he did not know what it was to be loved by God until he lived within the walls of a hermitage. There are many paths to a hermitage. God calls each soul in a unique way. For those of us who decide to stay however, there is no pathway of return. For the rest of our years we must remain watching, waiting in prayer for the world, until the Father calls us home.

When it rains as it does so often here we are touched. In the hermitage we see rain as God's tears of compassion on a broken world. God longs to soak this world in his Love. If only it knew the gift that was being offered! God from the dawn of creation desired that humans should live in intimate union with Himself so the Word could be born in our souls and we could live in that Presence. We believe to know Him is to love Him, to serve Him, to honor Him. Pride and disobedience originally expelled humans from paradise. The hermitage is a place where paradise is regained; where God and his creatures live together as one again.

Here in the hermitage we try to rise above divisions and live in the wholeness of God. It is He alone who can reconcile opposites and contradictions. Where there is error He alone can bring truth to a situation. The God we worship is the God of all people; the

God of both sides of each argument. When people come to spend a few hours with us, in imitation of this, we welcome both sides of each issue. Each hermitage becomes a little place of reconciliation. We have become separated from all to unite all.

When God's Love takes control of a soul, it is like a wound that only God can heal by our living alone with Him. Our seclusion began from our earliest moments, from before creation when God alone held the thought of us. "Deep called to deep" as the psalmist sang and some of us had to answer with our lives. More than one had to break the hearts of those they most loved to enter hermit life. It was made more difficult because loved ones did not understand what we were doing and why. But we had to follow the Call to be true to ourselves and our God.

All through our lives we have been seeking the answer to a profound question: "Who is it who can tell me who I am?" Within the walls of a hermitage the answer awaits us - the God in whom we live, move and have our being. In God we once again find those we have left behind and meet them again on a different level. The thought of them fills the long months of silence. We are together once again. As painful as it sometimes is, we believe it better to be apart in this life so we can prepare for heaven where we will meet again all those whom we knew and loved in this life.

We conclude with the mystery we began with: that in God there is no conclusion. He is without beginning or end; the vast Silence of the Word. As one hermit wrote: "While everything sleeps, I rejoice. I spend the solitude of my nights in His Presence. Such silence is not forgetfulness but an inner speech that gives silence and solitude its value and life. This living and life-giving speech comes to the world daily from many hearts in these houses of peace; these hermitages."

## **A Word from Still Wood**

The morning air was pleasantly cool as we trod through wet grass beside a rocky creek. We were carrying several baskets towards our neighbor's field where rows of high-bush blueberry shrubs flourished. Their branches drooped, heavily laden with marble-size fruits that literally tumbled into our baskets. We picked quietly, serenaded by birdsong and a burbling branch. Looking up to the high sky and surrounding mountains, we knew that if heaven touched earth anywhere, we had found it! Our only concern was that the sheer abundance of luscious berries far exceeded what we could ever pick or use. Many of them would simply be left for the birds, deer and bear to feast upon.

Abundance has been the theme of our summer. Daily downpours have encouraged the lush forest to advance and engulf our little acre. Dozens of hummingbirds; numberless moles; butterflies beyond counting - all combine to overwhelm our hearts with wonder at the generosity of our God. Even ***Raven's Bread*** has enjoyed an astonishing spurt of growth with subscriptions edging toward 850. Our good readers have responded to our quarterly topic with numerous reflections and also sharings on other questions of interest to hermits and solitaries. We only regret that, like the blueberries, this abundance cannot be "collected" into just one issue. The overflow will appear in later numbers. Thank you one and all!

Among the offerings for publication in ***RB*** is "*A Pilgrimage of Silence - In the Footsteps of John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila*" by reader Robert Trabold of Jamaica, NY. This approximately 1700 word article is too lengthy to publish in ***RB*** but could be of interest to many of you - so we offer it to anyone who wishes it for a donation to cover copying and postage.

As you know, ***Raven's Bread*** is a forum of exchange where many different approaches and experiences are shared. As editors, we try to give every voice a chance to be heard but we don't necessarily endorse or advocate all that we publish. Opinions expressed are those of the writers; not necessarily those of the editors.

Many of our readers tell us how they look forward to each issue and we have felt frustrated by the slowness and uncertainty of sending ***RB*** by bulk mail. The May issue even seemed to have been completely lost somewhere in the vast caverns of the postal service's sorting centers. It was delayed more than three weeks. What to do? A little math helped us calculate that the amount of money we saved did not compensate us for the meticulous sorting and bundling involved in preparing a bulk mailing, not to mention the anxiety and disappointment of many readers. Since many of you have been generous, ***RB's*** coffers are a bit "flush" just now. So in the abundance of the moment, we have decided to send the newsletter first class again. We will do this as long as funds permit.

We thank all who make it possible for ***Raven's Bread*** to fly to your doors. What can we offer but grateful prayers and... "Ah! Blueberries anyone?"

**With Grateful love,  
Karen & Paul**

**The small truth has words that are clear;  
the great truth has great silence.**

**TAGORE**

**(with thanks to *Heron Dance*)**

## **zzzStories of Solitudezzz**

I am a 42 year old hermit, nature illustrator, and writer of sorts. I am putting together my journals, accompanied by photographs and drawings, of the past three years during which I have made the slow transition from "part-time" to "full-time" hermit. There is a lot to share and although it has been a difficult time health-wise, with slow but inexorably progressive MS, these have been the most wonderful years of my life. I am also a Benedictine Oblate, and have lived the contemplative life for many years now. I worked both as a medical doctor and art therapist until four years ago when I had to take early retirement due to health problems. During the years working in hospitals, I was a sort of "Sunday hermit." I learned a lot, through seeing much human suffering. Since having MS, I have learned a lot, too. All this experience adds strength and power to the prayer I send out from this beautiful place. I find, as physical weakness progresses, an increase in spiritual strength and insight which has proven to be abundant recompense for the loss of a little muscle power. One always learns new ways of doing things.

I have a little woodland garden; it is a habitat for many wild birds, insects, bats, and butterflies. I grow, in as much as possible, my own vegetables in raised beds and I spend a lot of time outside - simply "being" and in great thanksgiving for this very special calling which, although it is far from easy at times, unites me, through God's love, with all the world. It is great to know there are so many other hermits out there - praying, loving, being.

### ***Co. Antrim, N. Ireland***

I have been a solitary, with ups and down, since 1976. I joined the Roman Catholic Church (having left the Presbyterian church as a teenager) in 1977. Like everyone, I have a long tale to tell of the winding path by which the Lord has led me to my current life.

I live in a non-electrified, plumbing-free wee homestead on the corner of a friend's farm, surrounded by the rolling fields and forested mountain ridges of Central Pennsylvania. Round about is a thriving Amish community, traditional Protestant denominations and a vigorous "alternative" community of many spiritual types who are working diligently and creatively to promote and preserve the ability of all to live gently, productively and healthily in this beautiful setting as "the world" attempts to crash in on us.

Though my soul longs for a tiny cell bare of possessions and days free to spend in prayer and contemplation, what I have is a cluttered house with doors open to all (enter at your own risk!) where assorted rescued beasts share the space. I have a few goats that I breed and whose milk and cheese I sell to friends. A few sheep have joined the family and their first fleeces await my learning to spin.

I worked for 18 1/2 years at an institution for people with mental retardation. When it closed, I was able to arrange for two of the women to live (in a modern house) with my nearest neighbors. I am their "day program provider." This means they are under my roof 8 hours a day, 5 days a week.

But yes, I am a hermitess despite the crowding. I have found that in belonging to the

Lord, our time and homes are not ours; they are His, and He may fashion any sort of life for us. As hermits, we risk a great temptation to retain control or at least the illusion of control. A primitive lifestyle at the end of a half-mile lane in central PA in winter can abolish that temptation and shatter that illusion! So can caring for folks whose tempers and bodily functions are sometimes out of control.

What I do have is endless opportunity to give thanks and praise for created beauty and goodness, to offer up trials and tribulations for individuals known and unknown, and for the peace and redemption of the world.

Even when my house is empty of living people, the "communion of saints" is ever present. None of us is ever totally alone. We live in God's presence and in the fellowship of all those who have preceded us as well with those others who are attempting in solitude.

Your publication is a wonderful way to remind people that they are not alone in their journeying. I believe that we all help to carry one another. In my low times, I find great comfort in the knowledge that others pray for me.

The February issue mentioned suggestions for a self-description. One reader rejected "kin" and "kinship" as unfamiliar or inaccurate. To my ears, "network" and "association" sound too yuppie, too corporate. May I offer "fellowship" or "circle" as a word that conveys unity and diversity with roots and projections beyond the 20th or 21st century; one with a more inclusive, "cozy" sound? RB is about support and encouragement and sharing, yes?

**Woodward, PA**

**Discussion Topic for November 2004 Issue:**

(a continuation of the August topic)

Have you set apart a particular "sacred space" for prayer in your hermitage? If so, please describe it?

**Deadline: September 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*

**zzzDiscerning A Solitary Religious Vocationzzz**

**Brother Randall Horton  
Anglican Hermit in the Diocese of New York**

The following dialogue are questions 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. What is a Solitary?***

**A.** A Solitary is the modern name for Hermit. Hermits represent one of the oldest forms of religious profession in the Church. Another term for them is Eremitical Religious or eremites. They are monks or nuns who are under vows held by a bishop instead of the

superior of a community and live as solitaries, not cenobites. Since the married state is a form of community, solitaries are, by definition, celibate.

***Q. I think I may have a Solitary vocation. What steps should I take to find out?***

**A.** First, you should have a spiritual director, preferably one who knows something about Religious life. It is helpful if your director is a Religious him or herself. A caveat: do not rely too much on a parish priest in this area of discernment since most know little about Religious life. The best thing most parish priests can do is to refer you to someone else! Next, visit as many Religious houses as you can so as to learn as much as possible about the various orders.

***Q. Why do the Religious I talk to about trying my vocation say I will need to undergo a psychological evaluation?***

**A.** Because there are few lifestyles which attract so many psychologically unstable people as does the Religious life! I am not implying that the presence of some unresolved issues is necessarily a bar to a vocation (if we all had to possess perfect emotional health, who among us would ever be professed?) But it is necessary to know what the problem areas are in order to discern whether they constitute a major obstacle or not. Aspirants to the priesthood or diaconate also must undergo such testing. Over time, even those with a genuine call, may become psychologically "unhinged" due to various factors.

***Q. Why is it that the ministries I am already involved in seem to be of secondary importance to some of the Religious I have spoken with? Isn't ministry what vocation is about?***

**A.** Not necessarily. What you believe you should be doing and what you are called to be are two very different things. A Religious is not one whose life is centered around doing this, that, or the other thing; it is centered around being a person whose main focus is prayer. Since prayer is a state of being, a Religious' vocation is ontologically based. He may do other things, but prayer is the heart of all else. The mere fact that you may be called to a particular ministry is not, in itself, a sign of vocation to the Religious life. In fact, it may be a sign of vocation to something very different.

(To be continued in the next issue)

**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*)**

### **"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* August 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](mailto: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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**[email: fredette@nclink.net](mailto:fredette@nclink.net)**

## BOOK NOTICES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### **ON THE TABLETS OF THE HEART; Little Exercises in Learning to live a Compassionate Life** by Craig David Larsen

*Compassion is more than learning to see the world through God's eyes. It includes learning to see others' true needs through their own eyes. Only then do we have a chance of meeting those needs instead of offering a cheap substitute. Larson writes, "While (this workbook) is done from my standpoint as a Christian, I hope it will also encouragement and resources for people from other faith traditions as well."*  
2002. Softcover, 67 pp. Cygnet Publishing, Box 61, Durban, Manitoba R0L 0P0, Canada

### **SNOW CRYSTALS** by W.A. Bentley & W.J. Humpheys.

*A photo book for contemplatives - 2,433 illustrations. The whole book is photos of snowflakes - each one different, amazing, like being inside the mind of the Creator.*  
1961. 226 pp. Paperback. \$31.50. Dover Publications. Order through Amazon.com (used copies available at reduced price)

### **WEBSITES OF POSSIBLE INTEREST:**

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

[www.contemplativerudder.com](http://www.contemplativerudder.com)

The Jesus Abbey - for spiritually seasoned married couples.

[www.contemplativerudder.com/theabbey](http://www.contemplativerudder.com/theabbey)

Desert Fathers, Then and Now. [www.stmacariusmonastery.org](http://www.stmacariusmonastery.org)

Margot King on Desert Mothers. [www.hermitary.com/articles/mothers.html](http://www.hermitary.com/articles/mothers.html)

Resources and Reflections on hermits and Solitude. [www.hermitary.com](http://www.hermitary.com)



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