



Raven's Bread

Food for Those in Solitude

Online Edition

February 2013

Thoughts On Solitude

While still a parish priest, I became interested in contemplative prayer and hermit life. I tried this way of life as best I could while in parish ministry. Retirement in 2001 allowed a more serious trial. I took diocesan vows as a consecrated hermit to signal it was an involvement in my diocese and an extension of my vocation as a priest.

I have found a whole new way of life has opened for me. In my retirement, I have found something to live for, something to work for. I am able to fulfill the spiritual aspirations of my young days, under the formula, seeking to live with God alone and for God alone. I can face up to death in a robust, healthy way. The consecration, vows and plan of life make what is already a way of life into something more definite, concrete, and committed.

I suspect that many people in my age group would welcome such an alternative lifestyle, with its renewed commitment and dedication, appropriate to the reduced capabilities of their age. In my own case, my place in the Church is as a secular priest, an ordained layman. Anyone can live as a hermit or "forest dweller" in a private way but if they opt for consecration according the Church's current canon law, they enjoy a defined place in the Church with a definite structure of rule and vows.

The hermit way of life has a long tradition in the Christian Church, both east and west. But it could well borrow from the wisdom of Eastern religions which provide for something lacking in the West, namely, a way of life appropriate for retirement/old age. Are we to be just left on the shelf, waiting to die? Hindu asceticism envisages four stages of life: 1. Student; 2. Householder; 3. Forest Dweller (recluse or semi-retired) and 4. Saddhu or saint.

The third stage of retirement is not the end but a new stage in life's journey and one looking forward to the final "graduation." Such a forest dweller corresponds to the hermit or recluse, living a virtually solitary life. The separation from the world, effected more or less obviously in a material sense, is more crucially a mental or spiritual separation. Paul Gurr wisely observed it is really how one sees oneself. One lives in the world with a certain objective detachment, able to look out on the world and its concerns with wisdom and compassion, without being em-

broiled in the passion of its causes. What is important for a person so called is not to strive to conform to a certain definition of hermit but to seek to answer the call to be alone with God in the given conditions of his/her life.

One embraces one's aloneness as a positive value, and the proximity of death as a next step (Saint). One sees one's home as a monk regards his cell or a hermit his hermitage, the place of encounter with God. The daily routine is not a chore but an opportunity to exercise what Buddhists call mindfulness. Even one who is not religiously inclined may, with necessary changes, still opt to be a secular hermit, of which there have been notable examples in the past.

Down through the ages, hermits, without betrayal of their calling, have often been engaged in socially useful endeavors: maintenance of a bridge or road, lighthouse keeper, counselor, the Russian poustinik or staretz ready to help at harvest time. Thomas Merton is a famous modern example of a hermit busy in correspondence, conferences and writing. Priests may have a busy round of parish supplies. I find academic research and writing very compatible with my way of life. As mentioned already, it comes down to how one perceives oneself in the world; as in the world but not of it.

I believe some dedication or commitment is the key to a full life, as opposed to the "unreflected life", which the Greek philosopher called "no life at all." In the Church, God-ward dedication is formalized into different vocations: priest, religious and layperson. Each vocation entails various stages until one is a fully realized priest, religious, etc. But no or little account is made of retirement, old age or death. What does it mean to be a priest of the Third Age? What does life call us to at an age, when one is no longer "useful"? The "Forest Dweller", (hermit or solitary) can usefully fill this gap, as we prepare for the Next Stage.



Eugene Stockton,
Lawson, NSW Australia



A Word From Still Wood

January! If there is ever a time when it is “*Back to the Basics*”, this is it. With holiday decorations/distractions past, we are faced with a season that is either depressing or challenging. At Still Wood, this January is a time to assess **Raven’s Bread Ministries** and ask how to keep it on track and growing. Can we make a good thing even better?

So many of you have expressed your thanks for our efforts to grow what Fr. Bede Jagoe began in the early ‘90’s. Allow us to express our thanks for your willingness to not only subscribe but contribute your thoughts, insights, questions and reflections which make **RB** such an authentic expression of evolving hermit life in the 21st century? We are part of a revival of an ancient calling, trying to translate the ideals of the desert fathers and mothers into our day and age. A different world requires adapting basic elements of eremitical life while enhancing their essence. We want to help meeting the needs of the spiritual family which has gathered around **RB’s** newsletter. So we ask: what more can we do? How can we facilitate your efforts, support your vocation? What needs do you perceive that might be met through **Raven’s Bread**?

We are thinking of “natural supports” similar to what the desert mothers and fathers offered to one another. When a brother or sister grew ill or elderly or needed assistance with some project (garden, digging a well, putting up a hut), those within a reasonable distance offered their help. Now with the benefit of easier communication, can

the **Raven** provide similar services? Connecting hermit to hermit when a specific need arises is the core idea. Instead of seeking help from people who do not understand our eremitical silence and solitude, could we not meet some needs among ourselves? As an example, when Karen was living in Colt Run, she had foot surgery that put her on crutches for six weeks. It’s tricky business carrying wood and stoking a stove when needing both hands to just stay upright! Fortunately, she could ask a friend who also appreciated eremitic life to spend a few weeks with her while recovering.

Another example: one way that hermits today earn income is via the computer but these are expensive investments. A friend who was upgrading his computer was glad to give Karen his older but still very usable one together with a printer. What an essential gift for a writer! Perhaps **Raven’s Bread** could be a center where such needs and resources could be matched up? Another service that our eremitic ancestors provided one another was mentoring, especially for newer candidates who sought guidance from the elders. Could **RB** connect beginners with experienced guides?

Since the eremitic vocation is generally a calling in the second half of life, most of us are experiencing some of the limitations that age and health issues impose. If some solitaries chose to live in a loose grouping, a “laura” perhaps, mutual assistance might make it possible to live our calling more easily for a longer time.

What thoughts do **YOU** have in regard to using the connections already in place via **Raven’s Bread** to provide hermit-to-hermit assistance in various forms? The sharing already offered through the newsletter will continue. Judicious use of internet services can be added, if we knew what was needed and/or wanted. We are at the brainstorming stage, opening a conversation about how **RB** can better support you in your eremitical calling. We look forward to your responses. As always, let us continue to pray for one another – hermit to hermit.

*With our 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 affirms and supports people living in solitude. It is a collaborative effort, written for and by hermits themselves and is sent by postal mail or by email.

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.*

Our phone number is: 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 funds (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 its 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) ; email: pkfredette@frontier.com

**DISCOVERING LECTIO DIVINA:
Bringing Scripture into Ordinary Life**

by James C. Wilhoit & Evan B. Howard

These trustworthy spiritual directors invite readers to feast in the house of prayer. They not only offer a manual for lectio divina but a practical spirituality of the Word as well. Steeped in the traditions of desert followers, reformers, scholars, monks and ordinary Christians, this book offers bread that nourishes our every need.

158 pp. Paperback. 2012. IVP Books.

ISBN-13: 978-0830835706. \$15.00

**THE SPIRIT OF SILENCE:
Making Space for Creativity**

by John Lane.

This book is for those who wish to look beyond the speed and superficiality of our modern lifestyle to find depth and spiritual space. It is devoted to clearing the clutter from our minds and to feeding the creative heart and soul..

120 pp. Paperback. 2006. Green Books Ltd.

ISBN: 1-903998-74-3. \$18.00

Both available through Amazon.com

Wood B. Hermit



A student among the teachers of silence.

**BULLETIN
BOARD**

Native American Ceremonial Items Needed
An incarcerated member of the Iroquois Nation asks for following sacred items to celebrate their festivals:

Prayer Rug:

Approx. 3' x 4', any pattern or color except solid black or blue;

Ceremonial Pipe:

15"-18", any style, wooden stem; any material bowl;

Abalone Shell: 4" to 6" diameter max

Gourd Rattle or Turtle Shell Rattle:

Hand Drum: any size or style;

Feather Fan: any size or style;

Sacred Herbs:

sweetgrass braids, sage, bearberry leaves, red willow bark, flat cedar (arborvitae);

These items can be new or used. They have to be mailed directly from a ministry like *Raven's Bread* or an authorized supplier like *Crazy Crow Trading Post* (www.crazycrow.com). *RB* will accept donations in kind or money to provide these sacred items and will mail them to the *RB* reader currently imprisoned. Thankful prayers will rise on sacred smoke!

Now on sale!

**Where GOD is Ever Found,
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\$18.95 ea. Softcover 250pp.

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Grateful Thanks to all the Early Bird Buyers!

Hermits Up Front and Personal

(Published with a nod to our readers Down Under & elsewhere in the Southern Hemisphere where autumn is about to begin.)

I live on Herring Creek in Tall Timbers Maryland, where giant loblolly pines pierce the clouds with fingers made of sharp needles. Where massive pin oaks shoot bark-covered rockets up into the sky. It's a town perpetually growing the inspiration for its name, and at this time of year, all the trees shed their respective fruit. Miniature acorns and mammoth pine cones litter the ground, crunching underfoot, threatening the blades of my landlady's lawnmower, and I wonder what transpires in the languid, resinous thoughts of these longtime neighborhood residents. The shedding, after all, is beyond their control, brought on by a confluence of light, temperature and hormones that causes them to release, relinquish, let go, abandon, surrender and sacrifice what they have spent all summer making with sticky fingers of sap, humming in their hopeful, gummy hearts songs of praise for that which has been promised: an arboreal birthing that embodies their participation in the work of the creator God, in whose verdant image and leafy likeness they have been fashioned.

Is this autumnal yielding difficult for them? Do the older trees lean over the younger and whisper long slow words of consolation? Perhaps tonight, as the wind rustles their leaves and makes their old boughs creak, perhaps I shall hear the wise elders repeat what the mystic theologian, Meister Eckhart, said many sheddings ago: "Where clinging to things ends, there God begins to be." (*Excerpted from unpublished Spiritual Autobiography*)

*Elizabeth Ayres, Tall Timbers, MD,
Founder of the Center for Creative Writing: CreativeWritingCenter.com*



I am a hermit," I reminded myself as I locked my doors, doffed my shoes, loosened my belt, turned off all phones, put my pets outside and sank to my meditation cushion, glorying in my isolation from all the busy-ness of the outside world. My every muscle relaxed. My cushion fit the contour of my body, and I settled in for a long meditation. The day was mine and I was thankful for such bounty.

But as I reached for The Silence, a sliver of a thought entered my mind, reminding me of all the labor needed to give me my cushion. The hundreds who planted and cared for the cotton field, harvested the bolls, by hand or machine, worked in mills to make the cloth and then those needed to design and make the cushion. That still left those who worked to package and ship the cushions to stores to be sold, purchased and finally, brought to me.

The profusion of ideas from that one thought held me in an unyielding grip, and my mind continued to open. I saw that, hermit or not, every morsel of food I eat is also the work of many hands, from tilling, planting, watering, weeding, harvesting and then, to the market. Others, certainly not hermits, took that produce, whether grain or livestock, eggs, juice or coffee, to process it into edible forms so that I, a hermit, could have my daily bread and my solitude.

"I am a Hermit?" I asked myself, and knew my meditation was shattered. Though my body is isolated, I saw that the infrastructure needed to permit my eremitic life, requires many people to sustain it. The Ravens which fed the biblical hermits of centuries ago come not to my door. I pondered over the multitude needed to activate electricity for my home, gas for my car, machines for the roads I drive, not to forget all those who manage the wonderful underground sewers.

"What have I ever done to deserve such bounty?" In a world entirely held together by Reciprocal Maintenance, I was faced with the sobering question of "What am I doing to balance the toil and labor of others which I, so thoughtlessly, have used to support me?" Even as I quailed in shame, some Unseen, Hidden Power tapped me on my shoulder to show me that we all walk different pathways but nonetheless, are unalterably One with The One and God can be served in any pathway given us.

Almost with a loving, chiding smile, I was shown that the Meditation was not mine. Mentally I have said, "My meditation. My life of solitude. My home. My cushion. My thoughts. My time." Everything said or thought was mine, mine, mine. The smile gently showed me it was God's meditation. God's life. God's time. God's cushion. God's relaxation. Whether God's time is spent in the counting house, a monastery cell, prison cell, or loved home, matters naught, for even as we strive to serve Him, it always was and always will be God serving God.

I was shown there is no difference and then ...as I sat on God's cushion, God's peace and God's meditation in God's time, was given me. I knew that workers on every pathway smiled, relaxed and were blessed. There is no difference and I Thank You God for showing me that nothing is mine. It's All God's. All God, and so am I.

Ethel Bradford, Salt Lake, UT