



# Raven's Bread

*Food for Those in Solitude*

*Online Edition*

*May 2016*

## Thoughts In Solitude

Indeed, "God moves in a mysterious way his wonders to perform" (William Cowper). To wonder is to look at our ordinary lives and see the extraordinary. We find God in the midst of our routines. Our experience of God can also resemble all or nothing. At times he seems very close, at other times he seems a thousand miles away. So be it. In truth, he is closer to us than we are to ourselves.

A viable connection exists between our interior life of prayer and our external environment. If we find beauty inside ourselves, it becomes part of our living and working environments. If we live an inner life of integrity, it influences our outer deportment. Our good thoughts, verbalized with a few considerate and helpful words, can be channels of grace for others. Having a solid sense of divine truth and being guided by that truth are not easy in our society. We must hold our sacred reins tightly so that we are not pulled off the spiritual trail. We look beyond superficial and distracting elements that can tear our souls apart and focus on that which strengthens and sustains soul unity.

If we touch our truest, deepest self, we find God. To let go of our inner loneliness is to find ourselves to be God's friends. It is no longer I, but someone other than I. We are taken beyond our self-centeredness because God is at the very center of ourselves. We are in awe of the holy wonder we experience in being with him in loving stillness. And in quiet stillness we begin to discover how much we are loved.

Wonder flows from a way of being and a way of living that have their roots in prayer. Prayer keeps our lives headed toward God and is the measure by which we are transformed in Christ. Transformation is measured by changes in behavior toward the good. With God's grace, sickness and other vicissitudes are taken in stride. When we are afflicted, perplexed, or bewildered, we are not overwhelmed because Jesus is truly with us. Because of him we do not lose hope. Ambiguity, ambivalence, and unanswered questions about serious illnesses do not disturb our inner peace. A desert mother wrote: *A great deal is gained spiritually by bearing illness quietly and giving thanks to God.*

To wonder is to begin to understand the deepest yearning of the human heart: to know God. Wonder leads

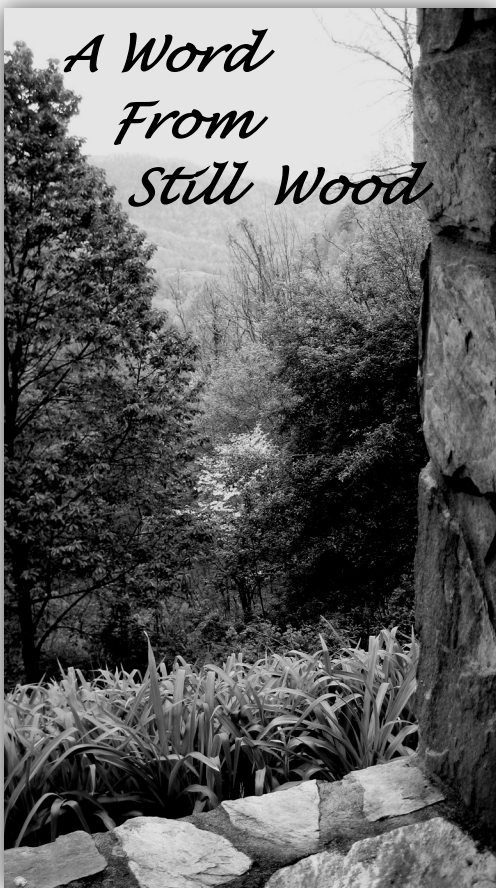
to contemplative moments that briefly quench our thirst for him. Contemplative moments are gifts from God by which we enter more deeply into the mystery of his divine life. His grace works in us, visibly and invisibly. In silence we open up to the Holy Spirit and let him be our guide. The Holy Spirit is not confined to the times and places we think grace should work in us. This can happen anytime and anywhere.

Wonder directs us to the beautiful "Ah's" of life. The wrap of silent wonder holds Jesus at the center of our lives. Jesus helps us experience a new and fresh outlook: we love more fully and wholeheartedly. Liberation from many things that do not matter is marvelous. We look at children and see the world from their eyes. Innocence reveals easy forgiveness and the simple truths of life. We look at old folks and learn the value of slowing down. Endured suffering blesses us with patience and perseverance. Wisdom comes from the heart. Despite our age, our hearts are light and our spirits are playful. The holy is found in everything. God, who is so beyond us, is within us, within others, and within the contours of everyday. We are content with the plateaus of life. Although nothing seems to be happening, there is movement toward God. He is a vast and silent mystery, and Jesus points us to that mystery. True wonder and true wisdom assure us that Jesus is within us and everywhere around us....

Everything in our lives flows in and out of prayer in our inner cloister. Praying brings positive energy to our living and also balances that which is light and dark in our days and years. Amid all that flows in and out of our lives, our inner cloister remains silent and calm, free of the world's rabble. Our inner cloister is preserved for God alone. It is a refuge where nothing comes between God and us.



*Excerpted from:*  
**A Precious Gift**  
*By Carolyn Humphreys, OCDS*  
*Paramount, CA*



## *A Word From Still Wood*

The annual miracle of the greening of the mountains from bottom to peak is taking place as we write this; along with this comes bird songs almost infinite in variety as we host nesting pairs as well as the migratory birds who stop over to rest before flying further north. Wild flowers decorate the forest floor with color, including the wondrous Trillium Grandiflora.

All this life and beauty bestows itself freely and abundantly if we but look out the window...and close down the "Window" we are currently viewing! Whenever we run errands in town, we are astonished to see so many faces glued to tablets, smart phones and I Pods, and ears growing "buds". People seem so concerned about missing something at a distance that they don't realize what is happening right under their very noses?

As lovers of silence and solitude, we are meant to be more cued into the world that actually surrounds us in the present moment (or "real time" as they say now days) that enlivens and enriches us if we are attentive. We doubt that anyone waits very long before this level of conscious awareness enhances the quality of their life and prayer.

As you all know, the main goal of *Raven's Bread* is to offer encouragement and, occasionally, guidance to modern day hermits. BUT... the only way that the newsletter can offer the lived experience of solitude is if YOU, our readers, are willing to share it with us. *Raven's Bread* maintains a fine focus on eremitical living. There are many erudite sources that encourage the "spiritual life" but very few (that we know of) which depend on the readership's personal experience of how silence and solitude have informed, shaped, changed, and yes, transformed their lives. We welcome the discoveries by "new-comers" of what it is like to them as well as the wisdom born of many years in solitude by more mature readers. Are we begging you to share your "bread" with other readers? Yes, we are! This community first formed through

such sharing—we thank you for it and urge you to keep it up. It matters less how you estimate your literary talent, than how much you value the gift of your insight and appreciation of eremitic living.

In the February issue your opinion was asked about doing another survey of hermit life; how it is developing in the 21st century. So far we've had only three direct responses: two in favor, and one against. This is hardly enough to give us a "feel" for what you really want. We are sure that more of you have some thoughts and/or feelings about the value of undertaking such a project as part of our 20th anniversary year in 2017. So...please email or drop us a line about this. We will surely appreciate it!

Speaking of appreciation, we are so grateful to all who have sent *RB* a little extra this year. Welcome to all you new readers who have joined our ranks. Also, a "shout out" to all you "lurkers" on our web site and blog!

*With our grateful love,  
Karen & Paul*

**Raven's Bread is a quarterly newsletter (FEB-MAY-AUG-NOV) for hermits and those interested in solitary life published by Paul and Karen Fredette. It affirms and encourages people living in solitude. As a collaborative effort, it is written for and by hermits themselves, delivered by postal mail or email. Please send your written contributions, address changes, and subscription donations to: [pkfredette@frontier.com](mailto:pkfredette@frontier.com) or *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.**

**An annual donation is appreciated, each giving according to their means. Please send payment in US dollars (PayPal converts foreign currency to US dollars). Anything extra goes into a fund to insure that all who want *Raven's Bread* can receive it.**

***Raven's Bread* derives it's 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> ; email: [pkfredette@frontier.com](mailto:pkfredette@frontier.com) and Blog for Lovers of Solitude: [www.ravensbreadministries.com/blog](http://www.ravensbreadministries.com/blog).**

# Following the Mystics Through the Narrow Gate

By James Finley, Ph.D., Fr. Richard Rohr, ofm, and Cynthia Bourgeault

*DVD Set Reviewed by Anonymous Hermit, East Texas*

*These thoughts emerge from the silence and solitude of the eremitical life and were inspired by the above named DVD Presentation. They reached RB via personal correspondence. Continued from February 2016 issue*

The experiential knowledge of our Oneness with God is like grasping him directly without gloves on, not as an object of thought outside of ourselves, but as our very own deepest True Self = God living intimately in us as us. (The Divine Indwelling—2 Peter 1:4) If we walked into a fancy restaurant and saw deranged people chewing on the menu where steak is listed, instead of enjoying the delicious taste of a juicy steak, we might think we are in the wrong place! Let's try McDonald's! The words and thoughts about a steak are not the reality of a steak which we can only know experientially by tasting the deliciousness of a steak. So also, our ideas, words and thoughts about God are not God. We only know God truthfully when we experience him intuitively beyond thoughts and words about him (contemplation). We experience an intimate Oneness with him so that his Presence living in us as us is known without a doubt to also be "who we really are". We are identified with him. "I want you to be One with the Father even as I am One" (St. John). "Taste and see the Goodness of the Lord."

God emptied himself of his Divinity to become human so that he might awaken us to the Truth that we are already Divine at our conception, and as precious to him at our birth as we will be at our death, when we see him face to face and recognize how much we are like him as we gaze into his comely eyes.

A precursor to this Divine Meeting and union is experiential contemplative love going on right now within each of us, if we are awake to it. It comes and goes as it pleases, like the wind. Our mind and ego has no control over making it appear. Suddenly, a little glimpse, a foretaste, an intuition of how immensely loveable, valuable, important and precious each of us is to God, just as we are, with all of our woundedness and daily failings. We can do nothing to change this pure gift of love through our mind, thinking it out of existence, or through the brutalities of our own will. God is simply living in the center of our being as the Divine Light of our Life, and he will never be extinguished in his Timelessness. As the Alpha and Omega, he never had a beginning and will never have an end. Nor will we—because, in him, "we live and move and have our being." God living in and as our True Self is what most efficaciously heals each and every one of us of our false ego-identity, making us aware of our Divinization and who we really are. "I live, no longer I (ego) but Christ lives in me" (St. Paul).

Contemplation is an intuitive experience of our Divinization, which makes us aware of *who we really are* and *who we are not* (false part of our ego). Knowing experientially *who we really are* pours the balm of compassion on the brokenness of *who we are not*, and heals its fragility and woundedness with mercy. Trying to punish the false part of our ego only tends to allow it to dig in its heels. We are precious to God holistically, and includes the false part of our ego.

Struggling to live out the ideals of the First Commandment to the full, by loving God directly and wholeheartedly, is simply what contemplation is all about. It affirms what we already know deep down, that we are created for God Alone. Realizing this enhances our love for others and creation.

This contemplative prayer is not something we have or come by as a possession, but someone we already are, as we uncover as a hidden treasure within us a direct love affair with God, which he is initiating within our deepest consciousness constantly from moment to moment. There is no way to *get it* because we've already *got it*, and only have to awaken to this awesome and unceasing love relationship that God is nurturing within us, as us. We are already Oned. "I want you to be One with the Father as I am One." This is Christ's primary purpose in showing up on earth to awaken us to our Oneness with him, with ourselves, with others, and with creation. Unity = Love and equality. Father Thomas Keating called this Divine love affair and Oneness "Hot Stuff"!

So often we hear of contemplative prayer experiences as a means or a way to love others better. Loving others is one of the beautiful fruits of this direct love affair and personal intimacy with God himself. However, contemplation is more importantly *an end in itself*, not merely a means to obtain something else. It is the experience of our Love union with God and, in loving God directly in this contemplative way, we are loving the whole human family in him, and moving them closer to God, which is the only reason they are in existence. The whole human family is inter-connected spiritually in the One Mystical Body of Christ. Every cell in this Divine Body is brimming with God's own Presence and Light, which makes each of us extremely valuable and important for the health of the rest of the cells. The intimate love affair of our union with God experienced in contemplation is at the heart of the wellness of the whole human family, who rarely have a clue about how loveable we are in our brokenness.

In contemplation, God is real to us, not as an object of our thoughts or ideas, but as a subject of our experience. What awakens in us is our intimate personal and spiritual union with God, who gives birth to the intuition of our loveableness beyond our wildest expectations! Our warts, mistakes and daily failings are absolutely irrelevant to God in the face of this Divine Lover communing with us constantly, loving each of us into existence in this present moment.

## BOOKS BY RAVEN'S BREAD READERS

### *One Little Life*

*A WHITE CHILD AND A BLACK WOMAN STRUGGLE AGAINST RACISM* by  
Sarah L. Seymour-Winfield

No reader will fail to be touched by the elemental trust and transcendent love which flowed between one little white girl and one humble servant during the two decades before the Civil rights Act.

### *LIVING THROUGH CANCER*

*A Practical Guide to Cancer Related Concerns*  
by Carolyn Humphreys

This book communicates to us that even when all things appear to be lost, there is still much to gain if we can fully open our eyes to see it...Essentially, power is taken away from cancer as a death sentence, or curse, or tragedy, and it is presented as an opportunity to learn and grow.

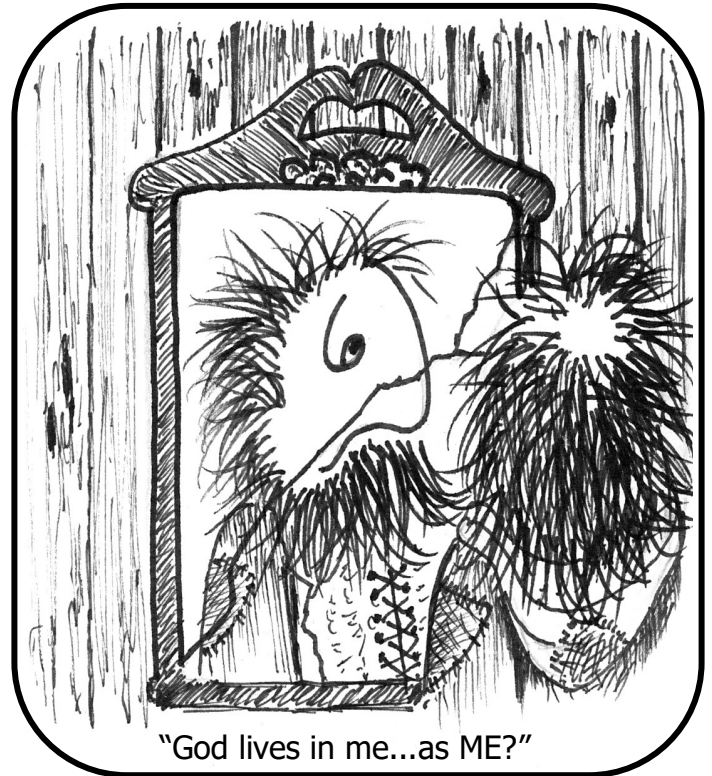
Both are available through Amazon.com

## HERMITS COMMITTED TO CARING FOR THE EARTH

A short video is available on YouTube about the ecological commitment of many hermits.

<https://youtube.be/Mut01AOWrrw>

## Wood B. Hermit



## BOOK NOTES AND REVIEWS



**SEEKING IN SOLITUDE: A Study of Select Forms of Eremitic Life and Practice** by Bernadette McNary-Zak (*RB* reader) *This monograph examines select forms of contemporary Roman Catholic eremitic life and practice in the United States. Given the sustained presence of, and increased interest in this lifestyle, this book responds to the question of the place of the hermit in American Catholicism in a way that attempts to understand it.*

150 pp., pbk; Published by PICKWICK Publications, 2014

ISBN-10: 1-60608-969-2; ISBN-13: 978-1-60608-969-9

**HIDDEN IN GOD: Discovering the Desert Vision of Charles de Foucauld** by Bonnie Thurston (*RB* reader)

*In celebration of the 100th anniversary of Blessed Charles de Foucauld's death on Dec. 1, 1916, this book highlights the profound conversion that led Foucauld to embrace the life of a hermit in the Sahara, where he was eventually murdered.*

160 pp.; \$14.95 pbk; Ave Maria Press, 2016

ISBN-13: 978-1-59471-659-1. Also available as an e-book.

**GLIMPSES OF GOD: A Guided Personal Retreat** by Richard Stoltz

*Richard was a Jesuit priest for more than thirty years, teaching, preaching and directing retreats throughout the country. He and his wife continued this shared ministry during their 25 years of marriage. Richard finished writing this book just months prior to being diagnosed with pancreatic cancer. All proceeds from the sale of his book will be donated to "Pancreatic Cancer Research."*

62 pp. \$8.95; e-book \$6.99 Published by Create Space, 2015

ISBN-10: 1519238592; ISBN-13: 978-1519238597

*(All of these books are available through Amazon.com)*