



Raven's Bread

Food for Those in Solitude

Online Edition

May 2017

Thoughts In Solitude

A tree gives glory to God by being a tree. For in being what God means it to be it is obeying Him ...

The more a tree is like itself, the more it is like Him...

This particular tree will give glory to God by spreading out its roots in the earth and raising its branches into the air and the light in a way that no other tree before or after it ever did or will do...

The pale flowers of the dogwood outside this window are saints. The little yellow flowers that nobody notices on the edge of that road are saints looking up into the face of God.

This leaf has its own texture and its own pattern of veins and its own holy shape, and the bass and trout hiding in the deep pools of the river are canonized by their beauty and their strength.

The lakes hidden among the hills are saints, and the sea too is a saint who praises God without interruption in her majestic dance...

For me to be a saint means to be myself. Therefore the problem of sanctity and salvation is in fact the problem of finding out who I am and of discovering my true self.

Trees and animals have no problem. God makes them what they are without consulting them, and they are perfectly satisfied.

With us it is different. God leaves us free to be whatever we like. We can be ourselves or not, as we please. We are at liberty to be real, or to be unreal. We may be true or false, the choice is ours. We may wear now one mask and now another, and never, if we so desire, appear with our own true face. But we cannot make these choices with impunity. Causes have effects, and if we lie to ourselves and to others, then we cannot expect to find truth and reality whenever we happen to want them. If we have chosen the way of falsity we must not be surprised that truth eludes us when we finally come to need it!

Our vocation is not simply to *be*, but to work together with God in the creation of our own life, our own identity, our own destiny...We are even called to share with God the work of *creating* the truth of our identity. We can evade this responsibility by playing with masks, and this pleases us because it can appear at times to be a free and creative way of living. It is quite easy, it seems to please everyone. But in the long run the cost and the sor-

row come very high. To work out our own identity in God, which the Bible calls "working out our salvation," is a labor that requires sacrifice and anguish, risk and many tears. It demands close attention to reality at every moment, and great fidelity to God as He reveals Himself, obscurely, in the mystery of each new situation. We do not know clearly beforehand what the result of this work will be. The secret of my full identity is hidden in Him...

The seeds that are planted in my liberty at every moment, by God's will, are the seeds of my own identity, my own reality, my own happiness, my own sanctity...

Everyone of us is shadowed by an illusory person: a false self. This is the person that I want myself to be but who cannot exist, because God does not know anything about this person. And to be unknown of God is altogether too much privacy.

My false and private self is the one who wants to exist outside the reach of God's will and God's love—outside of reality and outside of life. And such a self cannot help but be an illusion.

We are not very good at recognizing illusions, least of all the ones we cherish about ourselves—the ones we are born with and which feed the roots of sin. For most of the people in the world, there is no greater subjective reality than this false self of theirs, which cannot exist. A life devoted to the cult of this shadow is what is called a life of sin...

The secret of my identity is hidden in the love and mercy of God...

If I find Him I will find myself and if I find my true self I will find Him...

The only one who can teach me to find God is God, Himself, Alone.



Excerpted from:

New Seeds of contemplation

By Thomas Merton

Reprinted in "Thomas Merton, Essential Writings"

compiled by Christine M. Bochen



It is spring in the Smokies and greenery is unfurling everywhere we look. The forest floor is carpeted with ferns and wild geranium and trilliums while creamy bloodroot and golden ragwort compete with wild mustard and creeping stonecrop. The pastures are emerald and newly plowed fields look rich and fertile. However, there are fewer of these latter in our rural mountains which once depended on tobacco as the main cash crop.

With the decrease in smoking nationwide (which we heartily support), there are far fewer government allotments of tobacco seed. So we see many fields left fallow as we drive along Hwy. 209. Nature, as we all know, abhors a vacuum, so She sows her abundant plants (some call them weeds) to hold the land in place and prevent our typically heavy rains from washing it away. But what are these fields being saved for? What is the value of fallow ground, especially when most of it has a vertical tilt, excellent for growing 'bacca but what else?

A few enterprising farmers have increased their cattle herds—you know, those cows with shorter legs on one side? But trucking the animals to market is a tricky task on the mountain roads. A few are experimenting with sheep and trusting their brave Border Collies and Great Pyrenees to ward off the coyotes, wild cats, and bear that tend to prey on the flocks.

There are other farmers turning to viniculture and are producing special wines from the grapes that flourish on the sunny hillsides. Blueberries offer another alternative but, again, transporting them fresh to waiting markets is still challenging. Apple orchards produce abundantly in the low lands but are chancy at the higher elevations. Yes, corn is grown but not for “mountain dew” (anymore!), but largely as fodder for cattle during the winter months.

As we look at the many fallow fields and empty farmhouses dotting the landscape, we are led to ponder the value of these empty spaces. In our spiritual lives too, it is common to encounter fallow periods when nothing of value seems to be happening. Our inner landscape seems to be hosting nothing but weeds and briars and we tend to just feel antsy all over. We can't sit quietly in prayer as once we did; spiritual books offer unappealing fare; all our practices seem rote and possibly useless. Is this the end of an era, such as these mountain farmers face who built an entire culture around growing 'bacca? Quite possibly it is and we are called to wait...and to wait some more through seasons which will bring about unimagined changes to our inner world. The fallow time is a prelude, a preparation, and also a period which strips us of past ways of prayer so that something new can emerge in our relationship with the Divine. All that is asked of us is to kneel in our empty fields and await their new flowering. It will come. We need not understand in advance when or what the new crop will be; just allow ourselves to be plowed and furrowed by Life in preparation for whatever fruit our God plans for us to offer our anxious and unquiet world.

*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 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 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>; email: pkfredette@frontier.com and Blog for Lovers of Solitude: www.ravensbreadministries.com/blog.**



The Sacred Use of Solitude

By Carolyn Humphreys

Excerpt from Article in Religious Life Review



It is known we need solitude to find our true selves. It is not so well known we need solitude to find our fellows. The right use of solitude allows us to focus on their positive traits, good qualities. Popular social events become less important because solitude provides time to discover what is real in people. We are all brothers and sisters in Christ. In Him, we strive for holiness. Holiness fosters positive change. If we want this change, we have to change ourselves first.

It has been said that in solitude we are least alone. Solitude is a special time when we hold others and their concerns in our prayer. The silence of solitude allows for a clear concentration on this service of the heart. There are many broken people and troubled places for which to pray. No one truly understands the mysterious working of grace wrought by prayer. Grace is alive in the strangest of circumstances, even though the people in those circumstances may not be aware of it. In being alone, we broaden our awareness of the many people in need of prayer.

At some point, advancing in authentic spirituality will require knowledge only attainable in solitude. Saints and sages advise us to slow down be still, be quiet, and with God's help, face who we really are. In his book, *The Way of the Heart*, Henri Nouwen wrote: "In solitude I get rid of my scaffolding, no friends to talk with, no telephone calls to make, no meetings to attend, no music to entertain, no books to distract, just me — naked, vulnerable, weak, sinful, deprived, broken nothing. It is this nothingness that I have to face in my solitude, a nothingness so dreadful that everything in me wants to run to my friends, my work, and my distractions so that I can forget my nothingness and make myself believe that I am worth something. But that is not all. As soon as I decide to stay in my solitude, confusing ideas, disturbing images, wild fantasies, and weird associations jump about in my mind like monkeys in a banana tree. Anger and greed begin to show their ugly faces... The task is to persevere in my solitude, to stay in my cell until all my seductive visitors get tired of pounding on my door and leave me alone."

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EVENTS OF INTEREST

MAY 20, 2017 GOD IS IN THE GARDEN:
CELEBRATING 25 YEARS OF THE QUIET GARDEN MOVEMENT
LONDON, UK
WWW.QUIETGARDEN.ORG
&
2017 GATHERING
SATURDAY, OCT. 28, 2017
LIVERPOOL CATHEDRAL, IN THE LADY CHAPEL
www.liverpool.ang

When we speak of the Way, we may imagine a mountain path on which we travel upward to the summit...but this image is too limited...and unrealistic. There are many mountains.

In Zen, we are encouraged to recognize we cannot prepare for these mountains but we can be ready. It reminds me of the kid's game of hide and seek where the person who was IT had to close their eyes and count to ten while everyone else ran off and hid. Then the IT kid would shout out, "Ready or not, here I come!" That's how it is...the spiritual path is more like closing your eyes as the IT kid and shouting out "Ready or not, here I come!"... and we run off looking for what is hidden. *Contributed by Liz*

Wood B. Hermit





AZIMUTH OF GOD: Meditations on Absence & Presence by Elizabeth Ayres (Raven's Bread Reader)

"The Azimuth poems are questions—like Job's to God— and the questions are answered, yet one cannot, beyond the experience of the work itself, say how. It is a superb architecture, crafted by a brilliant poet. It is a vehicle through which a deep spirit can, at last be set free, like the Sufi's through the whirl of the dervish dance. And that's what I call this Azimuth of God series. Dervish poems." (Helena Clare Pittman)

79 pp. \$17.87 pbk. Published by Veriditas Books 2017.

ISBN-10: 0-9904258-4-7; ISBN 13: 978-0-9904258-4-7

SEASONS IN MY GARDEN: Meditations from a Hermitage by Elizabeth Wagner (Raven's Bread Reader)

"In this insightful and engaging book, Sr. Wagner invites us into a spiritual life where one touches God and the true self among bare trees, blooming roses, and a listening heart. Wagner tends her garden and plants seeds in the soil of our souls. A delightful book, filled with wisdom!" (Colette Lafia)

242 pp. \$16.95 pbk. Ave Maria Press 2016.

ISBN-10: 1-59471-634-X; ISBN-13: 978-1-59471-534-8

GREEN LEAVES FOR LATER YEARS: The Spiritual Path of Wisdom by Emilie Griffin

This author writes grittily, wittily and transparently. Her green leaves are Edenic, not the result of naivete but of continued growth despite physical impediments and personal loss. Her challenge, like that of others who have lived a long time, comes from not knowing exactly what lies ahead—life is an open-ended novel, the character still in development, the plot not yet tied off neatly—yet a life for which God has an ongoing purpose.

183 pp. \$10.79 Published by IVP Books 2012.

ISBN-10-0830835662; ISBN-13: 978-0830835652

Books Suggested by Christopher Kronen

IN THE BEGINNING WAS LOVE

Contemplative Words of Robert Lax,

Edited With An Introduction by S. T. Georgiou

Templegate Publishers, 2015

This is a handy-dandy, 144 page anthology of his poetry and other writing, including photographs.

THE WAY OF THE DREAMCATCHER

Spirit Lessons with Robert Lax,

Poet—Peacemaker—Sage

Revised Edition by S. T. Georgiou

Templegate Publishers, 2010

A series of short, pithy interviews on diverse topics of spiritual interest. 208pp including photographs.

This last book is not so much spiritual but on the practical side. It might help some individuals with an eremitical orientation answer the unavoidable question of how to generate enough income in a manner consistent with their lifestyle:

THE JOY OF NOT WORKING

A Book for the Retired, Unemployed and Overworked

By Ernie J. Zelinski, Ten Speed Press 2015/16

This is a classic; I still have my 2003 edition of this book.

(All books are available on Amazon.com. If you would like to have a copy of any one or all three of these books, just let me know and I will oblige.)

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