



# Raven's Bread

*Food for Those in Solitude*

---

*Online Edition*

*August 2011*

---

## Thoughts On Solitude

Not long ago I was wondering about the meaning of "living apart" in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and how it relates to the universe/creation. This was occasioned by the death of my wife, Marge. As I approach the first anniversary of her death, I try to keep the Beatitude, "Blessed are they who mourn for they shall be comforted," in mind.

Looking back now, at this past period of grieving and reflecting on my "hermit-like" existence, I'm unsure what is to be expected of such a life-style or the Beatitude's promised comfort. The aloneness, the disappearance of a certain synergy, coupled with the ache of separation surely mirrors the "dark nights" which have their place in the solitary life. It is difficult for me to describe the physical aspect that accompanies the brokenness one feels, the severing of what was so deeply relational with the loved one, (even with God), the emotionality of it. Part of the definition of bereavement, experienced uniquely by each person, is "to be robbed; to be dispossessed." One is bereaved; one is robbed of a profoundly mutual relationship.

The whole self (which had once been part of a relationship) seemingly exists no longer; there is identity confusion. A veil has lifted and the reality one once knew, has shifted, is now made unreal. Needless to say, one's faith is challenged. The many theories and belief systems one has held about the hereafter become disruptive demons, threatening one's clarity of mind.

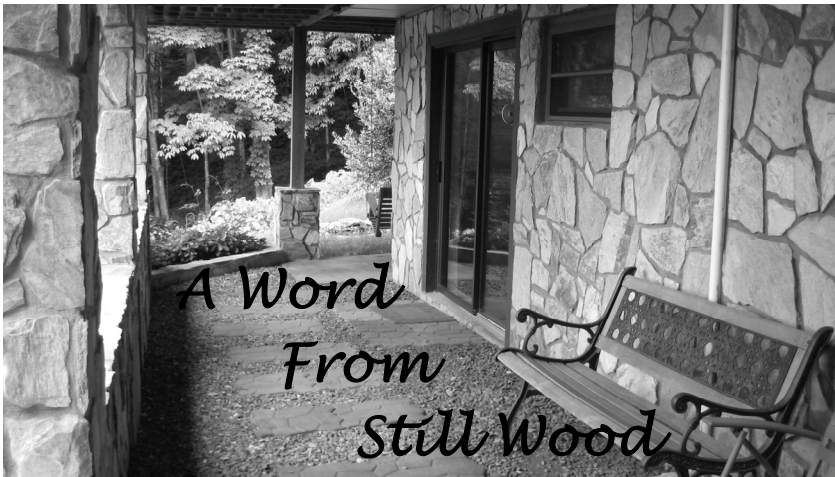
I came across another aspect to this aloneness in my reading. I cite from an article which had first appeared in the periodical *Commonweal*, Sept. 9,

2005. The writer, John J. Savant, speaks of trying to find his late wife "in her otherness, her new state as a spiritual being; and with her, to discover the difficult yet compelling reassurance of an abiding mutual need. The article is entitled, "*The Dead Need Us*". Savant continues, "And I do mean a mutual need. It is hard to imagine how a soul (I would rather say 'person') can be ready to pass from the last temporal flutter of breath to the deathless vigor of divine love. So much dross remains: the unresolved anger; fear-spotted faith; the abiding vanity and stubborn prejudice. So much baggage impedes our entry into the kingdom prepared for us. This is why, as a dear nun recently reminded me, "The dead need us."

I now look upon bereavement in the context of "living apart" and its similarity to the "purging of the false self" as one suffers (?) any ascent in prayer: losing one's life to gain it. I try to ponder (however, not with much success) how the apostles and first disciples of Jesus may have experienced their bereavement at the loss of Jesus and the seeming failure of his mission. This, of course, before intuiting his divinity and the Resurrection. They weren't ready to lose Jesus; perhaps Jesus wasn't quite ready to leave them either?



**John Petrenka  
Emmaus, PA**



*A Word  
From  
Still Wood*

High Summer, a brief season we can easily miss if we focus on the future rather than live the present moment. Mid July to late August is one of the more restful times of the year. Nature seems to be waiting quietly as garden and field swell toward harvest. The surge and spread of growing is past and the major work of harvest and preserving the yield of the earth is still ahead. Like a pregnant woman near term, the land settles peacefully as grain, fruits and vegetables slowly ripen. It's time to enjoy the shade of porch and tree with a book or just lie on our backs, contemplating the shapes of huge white clouds drifting ponderously across the heavens.

It is the time of the Singing Nights, the rhythmic song of crickets, cicadas and other night creatures combining in a sleep-time symphony outside our windows. The last of the fireflies occasionally flicker in the deep woods surrounding Still Wood and owls call to one another in soft "whootles". Bats swoop by, silently catching all those stinging and biting critters so bothersome to those of us with skin. We entreat them to sweep up the "no-see'ums" which cause us to shift and slap while sitting on the deck by the water garden, lulled by the gurgle and splash of water cascading over rock.

High Summer is also a time for dreaming and seeing "visions" so we would like to share with you a vision we are holding. Our one acre is surrounded by a thousand acre tract which is again "on the market." It is currently held by a hedge fund which, we know, will sell to the high-

est bidder. Recently, a developer of a high end "health ranch" had optioned it and was drilling multiple wells to insure it would have enough water for the spas, hotel, restaurant, golf course, and other facilities that were planned. We and our neighbors were concerned that they would lower the water table so much that our wells and springs would run dry. We also worried about how people would reach this area with only a single two-lane access road. We prayed, and as the recession deepened, the project was eventually dropped and the land returned to the hedge fund.

Our vision for these mountain slopes, woods and streams is a land conservancy which would preserve the complete ecosystem now here, from black bear down to the endangered trillium. Such a property would need some oversight, of course, so we plan to be first in line! But might it be possible that here and there on such a sizable tract, hermitages could be built by those who, in exchange for gentle use of the land, would also help to maintain the property in all its promise and integrity? Perhaps some of you would be willing to "hold this vision" with us?

As summer winds down, we say thanks to all of you who responded to Brian Campbell's *Raven's Bread* Survey. We are grateful and encourage more of you who love the solitary life, whether you call yourself a hermit or not, to respond. See [www.dwellinalone.org](http://www.dwellinalone.org). Not only will you contribute to the quality of his dissertation, you will have added to the understanding of the revival of hermit life in our times. When all of the results have been compiled and analyzed, we will publish them in *Raven's Bread* and make them available to those who want them.

Those of us who treasure solitude and simple living know that we have been given this gift not for ourselves alone but so we can nourish our world in the secret ways of the Spirit. As Thomas Merton phrased it: Hermits are "waiting upon the first far drums of Christ the Conqueror, planted like sentinels upon the world's frontier."

*With 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 seeks to affirm and support people living in solitude. **Raven's Bread** is a collaborative effort and thus depends on the shared reflections, stories, news, notices, letters and information from hermits themselves.

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)

**BULLETIN** ❧❧❧❧❧❧❧❧❧❧  
❧❧❧❧❧❧❧❧❧❧❧❧❧❧❧❧ **BOARD**

**Conferences and Retreats**

focused on

**“The Quest for the Cosmic Christ”**

Offered by Elizabeth Ayres,

a Benedictine Oblate and Companion of Green Mountain Monastery. She has authored “*Invitation to Wonder*” and “*Writing the Wave*.” Her newest work-in-progress, “*Memoir of a Quest for the Cosmic Christ*” “is a synthesis of mystical experience, quantum physics and the new science of an evolutionary universe. If you are interested in exploring Christ’s “third nature” (true God, true man, true cosmos) contact Elizabeth at 301-737-7945 or email:

[epa@creativewritingcenter](mailto:epa@creativewritingcenter)

**Hermitage in Planning Stage**

Traditional Roman Catholic seeks other traditional Catholics interested in starting a hermitage patterned after the Carthusians. Property in southern California divided between male and female hermits. Interested persons must be financially independent and physically able-bodied but most of all, yearn for God and His Mother.

If God is calling you to live in the desert, “alone with the Great Alone,” contact Gardean @

[JMary2000@aceweb.com](mailto:JMary2000@aceweb.com)

Tel: 213-477-3221

**DISCUSSION TOPIC FOR NOVEMBER 2011**

Does having a computer with connection to the internet help or hinder hermits?

**PLEASE SUBMIT BY OCTOBER 1, 2011**



**BOOK NOTES AND REVIEWS**



FOR THOMAS MERTON LOVERS:

**A BOOK OF HOURS: AT PRAYER WITH THOMAS MERTON (An Audio Breviary)**

Composed, collected and conducted by Kathleen Deignan, CND. Select readings, psalms and poems of Thomas Merton are assembled to create an experience of *audio divina*. Fourteen prayers, each about eleven minutes long, can be used to begin and end each day. Jonathan Montaldo of the Merton Institute for Contemplative Living and Paul Avgerinos of Studio Unicorn join Deignan in guiding listeners to a place of contemplative presence. This double CD set can be ordered through [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com), [www.cd-baby.com](http://www.cd-baby.com) or [www.kathleendeignan.org](http://www.kathleendeignan.org) @\$14.67 or MP3download, \$13.86. Also available as a book for \$10.00 or used at [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com).

**Merton, The Coincidence of Opposites & the Archeology of Catholicity**

An essay by Christopher Nugent in *Cistercian Studies* #26, 1991, pp. 257-270.

BY RAVEN’S BREAD READER:

**LETTERS FROM A WOODLAND HERMIT** by Anonymous. “I felt the gentle promptings of the Holy Spirit urging me to create something positive and hope-filled that would encourage others to see God in the everyday.” Order through [humblecottagearts@yahoo.com](mailto:humblecottagearts@yahoo.com) 4”x 6” softcover, bound. \$10.00 plus \$5.00 S&H.