

Raven's Bread

Food for Those in Solitude

Online Edition

August 2015

Thoughts In Solitude

While studying the Life of St. Antony, the father of hermits, I recognized six different ways he lived his eremitic life. For five decades, he practiced localized and travelling ministries balanced by deep withdrawal. In the present day, hermits, anchorites and solitaries discover and practice this same rhythm.

As a very young man, St. Antony first tested his call to contemplation and to solitude, living for fifteen years near a holy man or Abba, on the edge of their village, Coma. He left the Abba to enter complete solitude, 'doing good in silence', his second way, for twenty years. For some modern hermits, this rare reclusive hidden path may become an intensive formation phase, its carefully discerned years chosen by God, as they 'face the terror and roughness' of the inner way in God. Others may find that their solitary and reclusive vocation has become their service till the end of life, fully given to God in intercession for the Church and world.

Aspirants demanded that St. Antony hand on what he had learnt and tested in eremitic life. This led to his third, and quite unexpected way. He left the life of endless solitude, finding that he could now live an integrated, inner solitary communion among people, welcoming and teaching spiritual seekers hungry for guidance about living into loving relationship within the will of God. He himself became an Abba. The recovery of the Antonian desert traditions today, fully lived out by hermits and incorporated into the formation of spiritual directors, gives us access to Antonian spiritual riches. Nevertheless, conversations taking place on the internet suggest that, especially for solitary lay hermits, there is still some lack, after initial discernment and formation, of focused, ongoing eremitic formation. The pattern of daily life, including participation in the sacraments and the life of prayer, dwelling place, appropriate means of frugal but sufficient financial support, social engagement and 'outer' ministry, must be carefully discerned in a continuous process throughout the course of a life.

Some of the spiritual fathers and mothers of the present day who are companioning and forming both aspirants and those with confirmed vocations, express An-

tony's own work in the fourth way: a more structured living out of the Abba-disciple relationship underpinned by formation in practical life (work), spiritual life (prayer as duty of service) and social life (*caritas* ministry and recreation). Antony's own work in the fourth way involved direct Abba-disciple teaching, commissioning others as an Abba, delegation and supervision, and writing. Some modern-day hermits, usually involved in accompaniment, also become leaders in recovering the charism of the eremitic life. Some have worked at this recovery, acting as beacons through writing and other media. Some have founded new eremitic communities, or have worked within their orders reclaiming ancient, lapsed eremitic forms within their founding charisms.

Antony's fifth way was a travelling ministry of encouragement to solitary and coenobitic hermits across great distances, with periods of stationery solitude between that of ministry and engagement.

Finally, Antony's sixth way exemplifies the critical need for justice activism and encouragement in working for human rights and freedom of worship. The tradition of justice activism is rooted in St. Antony's own actions, inspired by the biblical prophets and Jesus himself, and prompted by their love of God, of people and of creation. All around the world, many hermits and contemplative solitaries are committed justice and environment activists.

These six Antonian eremitic ways of life lead into deepening silence in and before God—always for God, and always for the world. "About prayer itself they had little to say; the life lived towards God was the prayer; and about contemplation, who could speak?" (*Sayings of the Desert Fathers*)



By Carol McDonough, County Cork, Ireland
Excerpted from articles published in "*The Way*"
www.theway.org.uk



Every summer seems to have its own gifts and particular ways of becoming memorable. This year that gift is RAIN, which is nourishing the “temperate rain forest” that covers the coves, holding the slopes in place, and turning everything to glorious green here in the Smokies. Even fallen trees and great rocks like our beloved Petra shimmer with emerald moss. Well, it’s not ALL wonderful because some of the green turns out to be mold and mildew - some outside, some inside! The latter has us checking behind furniture; keeping an eye on closets; and scrubbing dark corners with “Mold & Mildew Remover”. An obvious example of “too much of a good thing.”

Despite this pervasive rain, we were able to enjoy the gift of family visits in late June. Paul’s brother, Marc, helped out with some indoor “rain” problems caused by plumbing leaks and Karen’s brother, Mark, provided a welcome chance to catch up on family matters, both old and new. As we prepared this newsletter we reflected on how affirming our **RB** family interactions are for us. Responses to the May issue’s questions raised by John Mullin’s letter have been encouraging and insightful—as you will see in the **Reader’s Forum**.

We, as editors, have prayerfully considered all the issues John raised and your wisdom as well. We have concluded that there will be no policy changes in the way **RB** treats your contributions to the newsletter or how our web ministry to the many

internet visitors out there is handled. We will honor requests for anonymity as long as we know who you are. Attaching a broad geographical region to contributions is helpful but specific addresses are not necessary and we ourselves never give out specific addresses to anyone, even media folk who contact us from time to time. We keep **RB’s** mailing list sacrosanct.

The lead article for this August 2015 issue may help to relieve the anxieties of some as to whether they are living a “real” hermit life. The image of a hermit as a total recluse is not the only valid lifestyle for a solitary. As Paul responded to a recent query on how to combine marriage and solitude: “Would that we could offer some kind of direction, road map, or check list for individuals and couples drawn to the eremitic life in this twenty-first century. But we cannot. Those of us doing this are more or less breaking new ground, learning as we go. Each individual is in such different circumstances, with the Lord, and with their community responsibilities, that there is no one size fits all.”

God already has his Elijah, his St. Antony, his Julian of Norwich. Each of us must pray daily for docility to the promptings of the Spirit. As the Lord has assured us: *My Grace and my Love are enough for you!* Each issue of **Raven’s Bread** endeavors to present new insights into this particular calling but cannot spell out the details of a one and only way to live in silence and solitude. Each of us is meant to embody a unique expression of the hermit vocation. This can be tough and lonely at times. All we can offer is encouragement, knowing that others are also seeking God in solitude according to their circumstances.

This requires great personal dedication and trust that if we have somehow “gone off track”, God will let us know. As far as we know, hermit life offers us great freedom of spirit to love God, ourselves and others. A bit of wisdom: *“Vulnerability & radical truth are the doorways to knowing and loving yourself.”*

The love and prayers of all you “Ravens” out there who have expressed concern about Karen’s health have touched us deeply. Thank you. She is currently going through an eight week long Infusion Therapy aimed at putting Sr. Lymphoma into remission. So far, all the signs are hopeful.

*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. It affirms and supports 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.**

A VETERAN'S REQUEST

I'm trying to find veterans living off the grid, including those in camps with other vets in order to assist Dumeetha Luthra, an independent journalist. She's interested in speaking to such veterans to learn why they feel it's necessary. Is it a failure of the government to understand and address the needs of returning vets, or is it a choice made for different reasons? She hopes to highlight the choices veterans face when they come home. Whether those choices can be supported and helped by different groups of people or whether they are failing veterans in a more fundamental manner. I will not share any names or contact information with Ms. Luthra without your express permission. I hope you will consider it.

Contact: James "Famo" Famolaro
9259 Hayes Rd., Marcy, NY 13403
TEL: (315) 939-9599

JAMFAMOL@uat.edu

"Famo" D co. 10th FSB (OEF IV)

ARE THERE ANY JEWISH HERMITS OUT THERE?

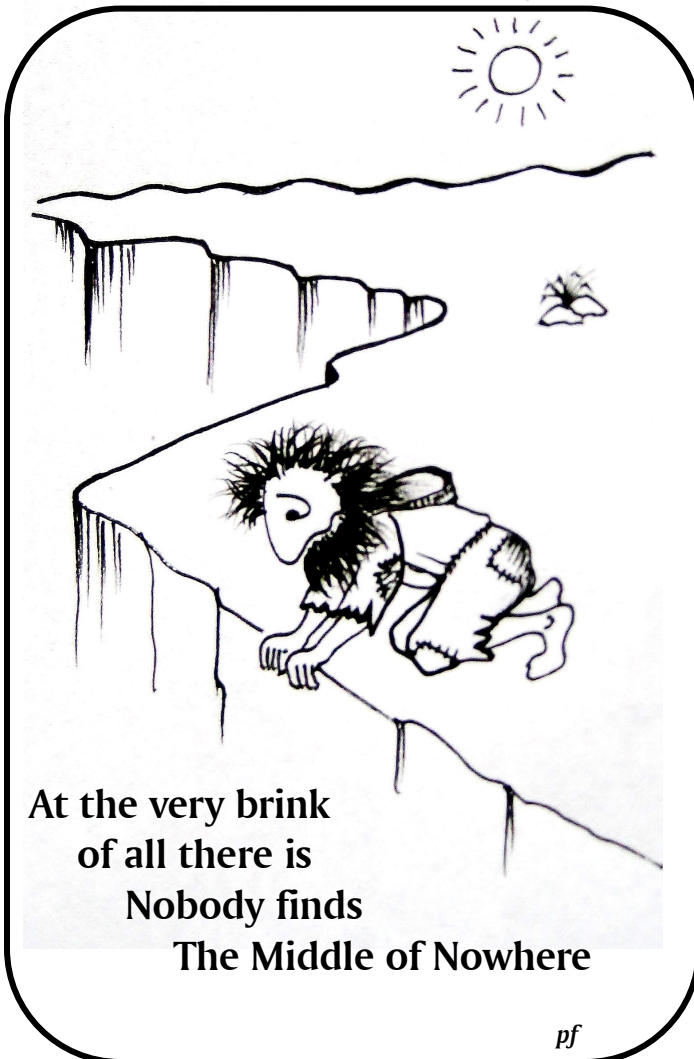
I would love to hear your story! We can learn from each other. Please write to:

Mel Rosenthal, P. O. Box 211, Sciota, PA 18354

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Paul & Karen Fredette at:

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**BEGGAR IN THE EVERGLADES**

by Diana Woodcock

Ms. Woodcock, a long-time Raven's Bread reader, has published another chapbook of her exquisite poems about the natural world which testify to immersion and affection. Her poetry blurs and dissolves biological divisions as the poet knows herself "kin to all of nature." These are praise poems, responses to the spiritual dimensions of landscape and wildness.

Published by Finishing Line Press, P. O. Box 1626, Georgetown, KY 40324

Pre-Orders are \$14.50 plus \$2.99 shipping and will be shipped on October 16, 2015

Order on-line at https://finishinglinepress.com/product_info.php?products_id=2417**PRACTICING SILENCE New and Selected Verses**by Bonnie Thurston (A *Raven's Bread* Reader)

Although the literary form is poetry, this is a book about the spiritual life. Focused around monastic themes, it speaks to the spiritual seeker by presenting a range of spiritual experiences in accessible language. The poems on interior prayer will speak to contemplatives in any religious tradition. The collection closes by exploring the experience of anchorites and solitaries.

128pp.; \$19.99 pbk; ISBN: 978-1-61261-561-5

Ebook: \$9.95

**Silence: A User's Guide, Volume I: Process***By Maggie Ross, Anglican Solitary*

Silence, solitude, beauty. Such has been my own perichoresis. So when a book comes along that shows me how to enter more fully into that dance which is my participation in the life of the Trinity, I want to share it with others on the journey. *Silence: A User's Guide* is just such a book. In its pages I find my relationship with God in and through silence revealed in unexpected—and therefore highly energizing—ways. I won't strive for a traditional review here, it's impossible to do justice to this book in a limited amount of space. What I'd like to do, instead, is just highlight what it's done for me, and suggest that it might do likewise for anyone engaged in what Ross calls "the work of silence."

I found the book illuminating. At the end of Chapter One, "Lost Silence," Ross presents a diagram of two different ways of knowing that impact contemplation or what she refers to as the En-Christing process. Rooted in ancient and medieval wisdom and also in contemporary neuroscience, the diagram helped me understand what happens (or doesn't happen) when I enter into contemplation.

I found the book affirming. To live as a solitary in this world—especially for those of us without formal vows—is to inhabit a liminal landscape where doubt and uncertainty appear with intrusively frequent regularity. As I read Chapter Two, "The Work of Silence," I could see how God works within my uncertainty, which, in turn, empowers me to be more faithful to my vocation of attentive waiting.

I found the book liberating. There was a moment in Chapter Three, "Language About Silence," where Ross looks at the false self/true self dualism and substitutes her own image for the necessary dialogue between what she calls, "the self-conscious mind" and "the deep mind." In that moment, reading her words, I felt all my self-critical judgments fall away. I rejoiced in the wonder of my strangely silent, strangely solitary life. I gave thanks for the ineffable mystery that continues to remake me each day. I found the author's treatment of other buzz words (e.g., contemplation, experience, intention, inward/outward, mysticism) similarly freeing.

Contemplative life is, to borrow Ross's phrase, a "free fall in the love of God." For anyone who desires such a life, this book is an indispensable companion.

Reviewed for *Raven's Bread* by Elizabeth Ayres, the author of four books and the founder of the Elizabeth Ayres Center for Creative Writing, which specializes in aspiring writers. Her website is: <http://www.CreativeWritingCenter.com>