



Raven's Bread

Food for Those in Solitude

Online Edition

November 2015

Thoughts In Solitude

How do we draw all the major aspects of desert spirituality into our becoming prayer—the fruits of desert spirituality? I do not mean to imply that the term spirituality refers only to the way we pray or to the amount of specific prayer in our lives. I began with a sort of home-grown descriptive definition of spirituality as “essentially our being-before-God, and how this works out in all aspects of our lives. There is a profound interconnection between how we pray and how we live out our being-before-God. Silence, solitude, and simplicity deeply affect both our prayer and our life.

The desert is symbolic of our own inner deserts and our desert journeys whether brief or long. And reflection on the desert can help us not only to survive but also to see the deep possibilities for enriched life in our own personal deserts. The desert is silent and elicits silence—a silence that attunes us to a new range of hearing. If we are to hear God’s word in Scripture now, if we are to hear the word of the Holy Spirit within us, if we are really to hear the word of others, we must be silent enough to receive their words more than superficially. And if we are to hear the word out of the depths of our own spirit, we must be quiet enough to attend. Silence attunes us to all dimensions of the word.

The desert is a place of solitude and invites me to go into myself and thus to enter into the ground, the basis, of relationships. Such solitude opens in me a more profound capacity for true communion. In the Scriptures God repeatedly speaks to leaders in their solitude, preparing them for deeper communion both with God and with their people. The gospels are studded with references to Jesus’ seeking solitude for communion with his Father—a solitude and communion that always seems to result in greater compassion for and service to others. It is in that solitude, which Henri Nouwen calls “the furnace of transformation,” that one can come to know oneself deeply, to be freed of the dominance of the ego self and of the compulsions we unthinkingly absorb from our culture, and to be open to the true self. It is there that one comes to know the bond with others, the deep existential Christian relationship that is the true foundation of community, and

that alone gives meaning to togetherness in worship and work and leisure. And thus one is called to a new reality of concern for others and service to them. Solitude, then, is the ground of Communion.

The desert in its stark terrain is utterly simple, and it calls me to strip off veneers and pretensions—elimination of the unnecessary—to come to a much more profound appreciation of the gift of life and all that really sustains it. Yet again, as we refer to Scripture, it becomes apparent how God communicates life and love and meaning in very simple ways. Correspondingly, God accepts the simplest worship and rejects the ostentatious performances some would take pride in offering. Jesus lived simply and taught simplicity—simplicity regarding material things, simplicity within (that is to say, purity of heart and quiet of mind), simplicity in relation to others. Essentially he asked for the simplicity of the true child who has matured into adulthood. Thus, true simplicity enriches inner life.

In each instance—silence, solitude, simplicity—my relation to God is opened and deepened, my capacity for relation to others is expanded and enriched, and I come to much greater self-knowledge and personal freedom. Thus, as we have said so often: the desert blooms.

How then do these qualities of desert spirituality nourish a prayerful life, a life of becoming prayer? Karl Rahner defined prayer very simply, very profoundly: it is “ultimately the loving response—somehow made explicit—which accepts *God’s will to love*.” So the first thing to recognize is God’s initiative. It is *God’s will to love*—to love us and all creation—that is the source, the foundation, the enabling of genuine prayer.



Excerpted from:

Silence, Solitude, Simplicity, A Hermit’s Love Affair with a Noisy, Crowded, and Complicated World

By Sister Jeremy Hall, OSB

(Sister Jeremy, a former reader of Raven’s Bread, now prays for us in the next life.)



A Word From Still Wood

Have you ever stood in a shower of golden leaves, feeling them brush your shoulders, hearing their papery rustle as they settle to the ground, and marveled at the munificence of a God who has created all these living, vital bits of nature and who will cause new ones to unfold in the spring? The “dying” leaves are not worthless but, on the contrary, will nourish the soil and replenish it so Mother Earth can continue to sustain all her children.

Pope Francis engages us all in his encyclical letter, saying: “Together with our obligation to use the earth’s goods responsibly, we are called to recognize that other living beings have a value of their own in God’s eyes: ‘by their mere existence they bless him and give him glory’.... We are taught that, where other creatures are concerned, ‘we can speak of the priority of *being* over that of *being useful*.’ Each of the various creatures, willed in its own being, reflects in its own way a ray of God’s infinite wisdom and goodness.”

Pope Francis says further when commenting on the story of Noah, who remained innocent and just in God’s eyes, that “All it takes is one good person to restore hope!” We who live as solitaries are often profoundly aware of the goodness of creation and of our personal responsibility to be good stewards of the earth. We also recognize that we have an obligation to restore hope to an increasingly violent and destructive world.

Our lead article is an excerpt from a book published by a former **Raven’s Bread** reader who spent her last twenty years living as a hermit. Sr. Jeremy was a highly educated woman who retired into solitude after teaching college all of her religious life. Her book is born out of her contemplative experience and speaks to us with the common sense bred of Benedictine monasticism.

As we compile this last issue of **Raven’s Bread** for 2015, we want to say Welcome! to all of the new readers (100+) who have subscribed to the newsletter during this past year. We appreciate having you with us and hope you will find nourishment in these pages which offer the personal wisdom of other hermits and lovers of solitude. Moreover, we encourage all you new “readers” to also be “contributors”, sharing your own insights, questions, and experiences in our ongoing conversation about eremitic life.

Lastly, we owe a great debt of gratitude to all of you who have donated so generously to **RB**, especially since we announced that we were no longer asking any set price for the newsletter, books, or resources we make available on our website. The prices

listed there are only a suggestion (we can’t remove them altogether without upsetting the “shopping cart” method used to make these items more accessible to you.) For those of you with internet access, take a look at the rich postings on the **Raven’s Bread** blog pages (See address in box below). The comments and responses are indeed priceless!

As this issue goes to press, we prepare for further tests to determine just how effective was Karen’s recent round of Infusion Therapy. To ALL of you who have offered your prayers, expressed your care, and conveyed your affection we are deeply grateful. We count on your continued support as we climb this steeper portion of “the journey” .

We wish all of you a blessed holiday season. As autumn turns to winter, may your roots go deep, may your branches be strong, and may you experience the loving tenderness of your Maker. To those of you in the southern hemisphere, may you enjoy the gift of spring renewal—new leaves, new life, abundant fruit!

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



The Nadir of the Year, A Time without Illusion

By Jean Schaefer



November, with your classic gauntness, your fleshless structure, you are a venerable wreck—yet, hauntingly, bare-bones beautiful. Gone is summer’s vegetative cover, autumn’s harvest blanket. Weathered, in a tireless sun, washed by a year’s rains, the flocking is off your fabric, light shows through your seams.

Winds that only yesterday whispered the lyrics of endless, sunlit days have gone sighing off. Night birds that hooted softly through intoxicating summer nights now communicate in brief, harsh squawks as they assess the serious business at hand—survival.

Rustle has turned to crackle, wood song to wood creak, and the strength of a midday sun offers no warmth.

But November’s visions are those of an artist whose unappreciated canvases have been stored in a vault of indifference all too long. A jaded public, finally weary of the softer seasons’ color assault, and surfeited with the obvious, the too-easy composition, now acclaims the integrity of this new perspective, the stripped down simplicity of theme, the masterful handling of color values given the challenge of a restricted palette.

Out of this world of white and brown gray subtleties, new landscapes emerge, extended vistas open up, the horizon recedes. Clouds of enormous purpose race to fill a wide sky. Sweeping over miles of weathered roofs and dry fields, they offer a scenario of swift-changing, curved patterns that contrast with the long thin shadows of tossing branches that are tracing crazy grids on the ground.

This dominance of space dictates a single view rather than multiple focal points, a total grandeur in place of detailed richness. Applying these concepts to the interior life, at this barren period, it is as if a solitary statement is being sought to express the essence of selfhood, while leaving the myriad and complex components later, perhaps in some far-off summertime. There is no talk of composition or function or purpose; the only issue is, is the structure sound?

More than anything else, the bare trees that dominate the landscape symbolize this theme. Any tree can look good under a spring sun, gussied up in flossy leaves, its shape concealed in green abundance. But in November, concealment is no longer possible. Straight and flawless, bent or scarred, each tree stands alone, in spare simplicity, for all to see. No apologies, no explanations.

We are a little like the trees of November. Near-naked in our minds and emotions, experiencing a personal nadir of the year, we see ourselves and certain aspects of our lives very clearly. Our inner architecture is sticking out in all sorts of lumps and angles. We are no longer able to cloak our motives, deny our discontents, or cover up our core reality. Yet even as we feel the weight of our vulnerability, we are compensated by the discovery that, somewhere along the way, our roots have burrowed deep — deeper than frostline — and that we are sinewy with survivors’ strength. We do not have to be young or thin or strapping or beautiful, or extraordinary in any way. It is enough to be what we are. And to be accepting of what one is, is to be whole.

November is without artifice and without illusions; an unblinking realist in the face of loss and decay. But it is also fiery-rose dawns, white gulls swooping over empty streets, full larders, short days, long views. It is shafts from a low-hanging sun slanting between rows of tree trunks, the brief phenomenon of violet light at sundown, the delicacy of treetop tracteries, sepia against the blue intensity of an early-darkening sky.

It’s a night skyscape, a canvas by Ryder: a pale moon that whitens landscape, and silvers tree limbs. Banked clouds, gold-edged, moontouched. Cold sky, hot stars — light years away.

Soon now, December, with multiple coats of white, will fill the depressions, cover blotches and bumps, round all the angles. There will be still new perspectives to ponder, but we will not be quick to forget the time from which we have just emerged.

With unhurrying pace, we move toward the winter solstice and its renewable mysteries, toward the glory of lights, to the great celebrations.





BOOK NOTES & REVIEWS



VERY GRATEFUL
The Story of My Hundred-Year-Old Mother and Me
by Bobbi Fisher
(a *Raven's Bread* reader)

Ms. Fisher winds her account around her personal draw to solitude and celebrating the final two years of her Mom's life. As her mother gradually loses her ability to speak, Bobbi slowly becomes conversant with her true self during months of solitude. "Circling seventy", she discovers her "self" as separate from her mother while claiming the gifts she has received from her.

132 pp. \$9.95 pbk.
Published by VG Press, Sudbury, MA,
ISBN: 978-0-692-48821-8(pbk)
ISBN: 978-0-692-49906 (ebook)

IN THE BEGINNING WAS LOVE:
Contemplative Words of Robert Lax
Edited, With An Introduction by
S. T. Georgiu (a *Raven's Bread* reader)

This is a unique introduction to Lax as contemplative and hermit on the Greek island of Patmos for three decades. These spiritual selections, mostly gathered from his poems and journals, portray Lax as a mystic filled with a deep love for both Creator and creation. Described by Merton as having an "inborn direction to the living God; he was much wiser than I, had clearer vision, and was corresponding much more truly to the grace of God than I; he had seen what was the one important thing."

140 pp.; \$15.95 pbk.
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Amazon.com/books.



Consider the Raven
By Kate Farrell



Black and bold and shaggy
Raven roams the wilds
Masking an omen of sadness,
An alarming form to see.
Bearing deep secrets,
 hidden from most,
Whispers of so many things,
a perilous envoy is he.

But wait, consider the raven:
Bringer of daylight, up before dawn,
Flicks of blue and green
 among his glossy feathers,
Sparkled with silver when struck
 by the sun.
Like a fireball he's stirring the heavens,
Adjusting the sun, the moon,
 and the stars,
Or, at least, so it's been said.

A pest for the farmer and golfer as well.
A scavenger, trickster, conspirator he,
Attacking, recalling the face of a foe,
Holding grudges forever, it's said.
Raven remembers and will repay
Though it takes generations of crows.

But wait, consider the raven:
Intelligent, brightest of all
Among the avian races.
Playful and kind, a helper in need,
Friend of reclusive, solitary ones.
Wisest, mysterious, magical bird
Ancient, revered,
 a crow of distinction is he.

So, consider the raven:
More helpful than harmful it seems.
"Consider the Raven"
The wisest one told us so long ago:
All that is needed is given
In spite of our dramas and schemes.

And so, consider the raven:
Adjusting to perils or bliss,
Mingling with humans forever,
 it seems.
Oracles, omens, legends abound.
The truth is he lives by his wits.



Wood B. Hermit

