



# Raven's Bread

*Food for Those in Solitude*

*Online Edition*

*November 2017*

## Thoughts In Solitude

The lonely person's function is to remain in existence as solitary, as poor and as unacceptable as God himself in the souls of so many people. The solitary is there to tell them, in a way they can barely understand, that if they were able to discover and appreciate their own inner solitude they would immediately discover God and find out, from His word to them, that they are really persons.

It is often said that exterior solitude is not only dangerous, but totally unnecessary. Unnecessary because all that really matters is interior solitude. And this can be obtained without physical isolation. There is in this statement a truth more terrible than can be imagined by those who make it, so readily and with so little awareness of the irony implicit in their words.

Indeed there is a special irony about solitude in community: that if you are called to solitude by God, even if you live in a community your solitude will be inescapable. Even if you are surrounded by the comfort and the assistance of others, the bonds that unite you with them on a trivial level break one by one so that you are no longer supported by them, that is, no longer sustained by the instinctive, automatic mechanisms of collective life. Their words, their enthusiasms become meaningless. Yet you do not despise them, or reject them. You try to find if there is not still some way to comprehend them and live by them. And you find that have no value in such a situation. The only thing that can help you is the deep, wordless communion of genuine love.

At such a time it is a great relief to be put in contact with others by some simple task, some function of the ministry. Then you meet them not with your words or their, but with the words and sacramental gestures of God. The word of God takes on an ineffable purity and strength when it is seen as the only way in which a solitary can effectively reach the solitudes of others—the solitudes of which these others are unaware.

Then one realizes that one loves them more than ever: perhaps that one now loves them really for the first time. Made humble by his solitude, grateful for the work that brings one into contact with others, one still remains

alone. There is no greater loneliness than that of an instrument of God who realizes that words and ministry, even though they be the words of God, can do nothing to change one's loneliness: and yet that, beyond all distinction between mine and thine, they make a person one with everyone they encounter.

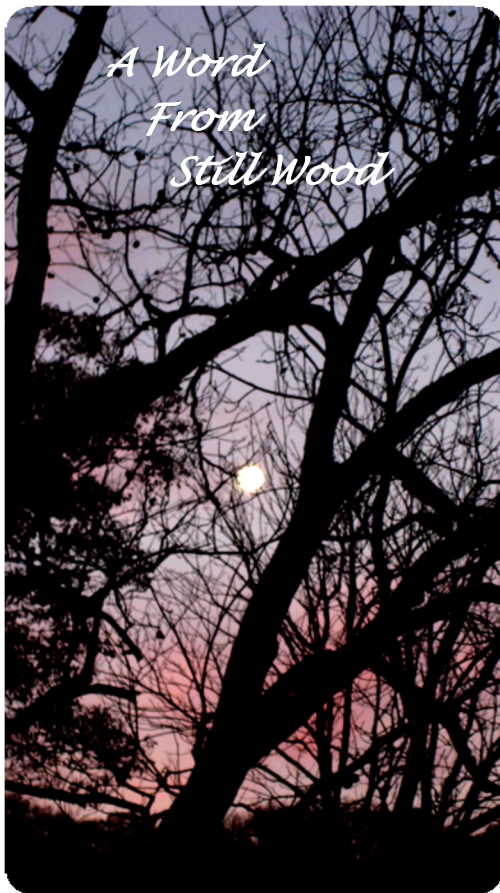
What then is the conclusion? That this solitude of which we have been speaking, the solitude of the true *monachs*, of the lone one, is not and cannot be selfish. It is the opposite of selfish. It is the death and the forgetfulness of self. But what is self? The self that vanishes from this emptiness is the superficial, false social self, the image made up of the prejudices, the whimsy, the posturing, the pharisaic self-concern and the pseudo dedication which are the heritage of the individual in a limited and imperfect group.

There is another self, a true self, who comes to full maturity in emptiness and solitude—and who can of course, begin to appear and grow in the valid, sacrificial and creative self-dedication that belong to a genuine social existence. But note that even this social maturing of love implies at the same time the growth of a certain inner solitude.

Without solitude of some sort there is and can be no maturity. Unless one become empty and alone, one cannot give self in love because one does not possess the deep self which is the only gift worthy of love. And this deep self, we immediately add, cannot be *possessed*. My deep self is not "something" which I acquire, or to which I "attain" after a long struggle. It is not mine, and cannot become mine. It is no "thing" - no object. It is "I".

The shallow "I" of individualism can be possessed, developed, cultivated, pandered to, satisfied: it is the center of all our strivings for gain and for satisfaction, whether material or spiritual. But the deep "I" of the spirit, of solitude and of love, cannot be "had", possessed, developed, perfected. It can only be, and act according to deep inner laws which are of our contriving but which come from God. They are the Laws of the Spirit, who, like the wind

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*A Word  
From  
Still Wood*

As we prepare this November issue, the wooded slopes surrounding us are usually a lively array of gold and amber, russet and copper, interspersed with evergreen. Not this year. We are still mostly green with bits of yellow and brown. Still we are intensely aware that while we are lacking fall colors, (disappointing,) tens of thousands of our brothers and sisters are lacking nearly everything save their own lives due to the ferocity of wildfires and hurricanes, and even human insanity of breathtaking scope. We try to accept our daily problems and inconveniences with grace and equanimity knowing it cannot compare with the courage, endurance and perseverance we witness everyday throughout our country and our world. We must use these gifts of quiet serenity and holy silence that surround us to remember in prayer those whose lives are overwhelmed by gale, and flood, by fire and strife, by panic and fear and loss. Those wracked by pain and numbed by grief.

We are humbled and truly grateful for your many expressions of care and prayers for Karen's complete recovery from the ordeal of this past summer...she is well enough now to attend exercise classes twice a week, and Paul is relaxed enough again to join her.

A very big THANK YOU to all the readers who have been so generous this year with subscriptions and special donations, especially those who send regular monthly contributions, that are enormously helpful to this ministry. We are pleased that we haven't felt it necessary to make any financial appeals despite rising costs. You are always there when we need you most, so in order to continue this ministry on a "give what you can" basis, we encourage you to remember *Raven's Bread* during the coming Christmas Season in your thoughts, prayers, and contributions.

Looking back at the numerous reflections and experiences you have contributed to the newsletter throughout this past year, we continue to be amazed at the breadth and depth and wide range of "foods" you provide to "those in solitude". We appeal to all of you to seize whatever opportunities arise to share with us the fruits, the challenges, the joys and insights,

and yes the hardships too, of this quite rare and exceptional way of life. You need not be a great author, nor even have any special literary skills...you need only honesty and the willingness to risk sharing your truth. If you come across a book, an article, or even just a passage from someone else that you think has merit, don't hesitate to forward it to us...it may prove to be the exact right thing for us to ponder at this moment. Remember, the holy scriptures often describe a holy encounter as coming about "in the fullness of time". We're never completely sure that the time is right but the inner readiness to say "here I am, I have this to offer" goes a long way in providing that "Aha!" moment in someone else miles away, perhaps even half way around the globe.

Speaking of gifts *in the fullness of time*, we cannot forget the Great Gift given to our earth over 2,000 years ago. We wish you heartfelt joy during the coming seasons of Advent and Christmas, Hanukah, the Winter Solstice, and the turning of the year. From our hearts to your hearts!

*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 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.ravenbreadministries.com> ; email: [pkfredette@frontier.com](mailto:pkfredette@frontier.com) and Blog for Lovers of Solitude: [www.ravenbreadministries.com/blog](http://www.ravenbreadministries.com/blog).



## *Raven's Forum*



### An Advent/Christmas Meditation

The eye with which I see God," wrote Meister Eckhart,  
is the same eye with which God sees me." You

think of that great mystic now as you plant pansies  
(blue with yellow eyes) in stone pots, watch

white-sailed boats fly up and down on a blue river watched  
by a yellow-eyed sun, but when that bright lid closes

who watches in the dark? The fisherman  
has his net. The spider  
has her web. You will have nothing

but some stars  
and an unaccountable longing to turn inward  
as if unto a great height.  
Is hope a net or is it a web?

The mauve rose of early evening has bloomed  
and withered on river's trembling stalk; now  
the silver hip with its silver seeds falling'  
on the cold, black ground.

Dogs howling on the opposite shore

Two owls, their muffled interrogatories.

The big oak, its rustling leaves, its

unaccountable longing to make sense  
of these stars tangled in my branches, silver  
saplings sprouting up where silver acorns fall.

Could hope be an eye?

The old words will not suffice to name what blooms  
and withers  
on time's trembling stalk. That which hopes that

which is hoped for the one  
desiring the one  
desired co-inhering  
possibilities observer  
and observed all things

crying out their helplessness, their

ache to see as they are seen to know  
as they are known to stretch the belly of  
infinity's palindrome giving  
birth being  
born thou

within me I adore thee words  
shooting down from a great dark height thou  
within me I adore thee words  
shooting up from a great dark depth thou  
within me I adore thee I

of me and I of thee my God we

adore.

**By Elizabeth Ayres  
(Raven's Bread Reader)  
NB. See Book Notes, May 2017**



## The 2016 Survey of Hermits and Religious Solitaries

### Initial Reflections



**A**s we analyze some of the raw data from the recent Survey, the very *FIRST* thing we wish to do is thank all of you who took time to respond. The very thoughtful and careful work which so many of you put into the Survey demonstrates your convictions that something profound is stirring in the “ether” with regard to solitary life. We had intuited this over the years that we have been “in conversation” with you via letter, email, phone, and blog. We enjoy and respect your insights and experience. You are part of what seems to be a world-wide movement, almost a “world-wide web” of deeply committed lives of prayer and chosen solitude.

Since it appears there has been significant development since our last survey in 2001, part of our analysis will include a comparison with the earlier data. At that time our reader base was 590 and there were 122 responses. This time our reader base is 1180 and 153 surveys were returned so the percentage of responses is less than the previous time— 20% to 13% . We are often flooded with surveys with an average response rate of 3% to 6%, so RB has done well enough to discern changes and trends.

One of the more interesting changes is the percentage of men responding (36%) compared to 2001 (29%.) We don't have the exact number of men in the earlier readership but we believe it to have been close to one-third. Now we see a rather dramatic increase to 43% males to 57% females. Are there more guys out there moving to hermit life or simply more discovering Raven's Bread? Moot question. With a more balanced input from the genders, we can draw more valid conclusions.

Our next question on both Surveys dealt with location. Of the 153 responses received this time, 116 were from the USA scattered over 39 states. Of these, the larger numbers were found in Missouri with 10; Pennsylvania and California with 9 each; Michigan with 6; Wisconsin and Texas with 5 each. There were 12 responses from the UK, coming from 8 counties; and 10 from Canada sent from 6 provinces. Six surveys were returned from Australia and two from Mexico. We have one each from 7 other countries, including Hong-Kong. What can we conclude? As far as the English-speaking world is concerned, we have a pretty fair representation. The responses from France, Ireland, Belgium, Finland, Germany and the Netherlands adds a bit of international flavor to our survey “soup”! This spread of data corresponds closely to the number of states and countries in the 2001 Survey. So the sources of information remain relatively the same.

Next we inquired about the current ages of our respondents. The largest numbers clustered in their sixties (50) and seventies (43). The next largest group is found in the fifties (14) followed by 12 each in their forties and eighties with one each in their thirties and nineties! Since not all of the respondents supplied their current ages, the total numbers are slightly less than 153. However, it appears that 70% of solitaries are in their 60's and 70's with 10% in their 50's. It still appears safe to posit that eremitic life is quite solidly a post-midlife vocation!

Ah, but when did these folk first respond to the Call? A number indicated that it was a life-long attraction—one wrote “from birth”. Others said it was a gradual evolution; a step by step movement so it was difficult to pinpoint exactly when they began. However, many could and did name an age when they actually began eremitic life. So these responses we will now examine.

Not surprisingly, the highest number of people were in their forties (32) and fifties (40) when they first forayed into solitary life. This again affirms our recognition that eremitic solitude is a second-half of life calling, when most of the tasks of career-building, family raising and developing a sense of self as a competent human being have been addressed. Only after this, do other questions arise: What more? Is this all? Now is it time to...? This is the opportune moment for us to be captured by the “spiritual,” an element of our life experience which has often been on a backburner . However, there are certainly exceptions: 5 people in their twenties and 10 in their thirties began the solitary journey. Also, 20 people in their sixties, 10 in their seventies and 2 in their eighties first embarked on the sea of solitude and prayer.

One final note. The world and how we live our daily lives has changed dramatically since 2001. The readership for **Raven's Bread** has doubled...but we are discovering the same profile for hermits and solitaries that we did at the beginning of this century. What does this say? There appears to be a “constancy” to this calling, one which generally makes itself heard in the second half of life. Independent of cultural changes, eternal values prevail. The desert fathers and mothers may even recognize us!

**To be continued.**

Continued from p. 1

Wood B. Hermit

blows where It wills. This inner "I" who is always alone, is always universal: for in this inmost "I" my own solitude meets the solitude of every other person and the solitude of God. Hence it is beyond division, beyond limitation, beyond selfish affirmation. It is only this inmost and solitary "I" that truly loves with the love and the spirit of Christ. This "I" is Christ Himself, living in us; and we, in Him, living in the Father.

Excerpted from  
**Disputed Questions**  
**Philosophy of Solitude**  
By Thomas Merton

Discussion Topic for February  
2018

Okay, you extroverted hermits  
and solitaries, let us hear how  
you deal with an "introverted"  
world?

Deadline: January 1, 2018  
Word Limit: 300



**Blessed are the twitter-less,  
They shall have fewer regrets.  
Blessed are those without Facebook,  
They shall get enough sleep.  
Blessed are they with no Instagram,  
They shall have more peace.....**



BOOK NOTES AND REVIEWS



**SOLITUDE: In Pursuit of a Singular Life in a Crowded World** by Michael Harris "Today, society embraces sharing like never before. Fueled by our dependence on mobile devices and social media, we have created an ecosystem of obsessive connection. Many of us now lead lives of strangely crowded isolation: we are always linked but only shallowly so. The capacity to be alone, properly alone, is one of life's subtlest skills. Real solitude is a powerful resource we can call upon—a crucial ingredient for a rich interior life. It inspires reflection, allows creativity to flourish and improves our relationships with ourselves and, unexpectedly, with others."

272 pp. \$14.99 pbk. Published by Thomas Dunne Books 2017.

ISBN 10:1250088607; ISBN 13: 978-1250088604

**SOLITUDE: A Return to the Self** by Anthony Starr "Originally published in 1988, Anthony Starr's bestselling meditation on the creative individual's need for solitude has become a classic. A pre-eminent work!"

240 pp. \$12.79 pbk. Free Press Reissue Edition 2005.

ISBN-10: 0743280741; ISBN-13: 978-0743280747

**JOURNAL OF A SOLITUDE** by May Sarton

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208 pp. \$12.13 pbk. Published by W. W. Norton & Company 1992.

ISBN-10-0393309282; ISBN-13: 978-0393309287