



Raven's Bread

Food for Those in Solitude

Online Edition

August 2024

Thoughts From Solitude

Because we are human, at times we will experience loneliness. On the surface, this can lead to life-draining ruminations about our personal worries and woes, so we strive to set these negatives aside and go deeper. We need to get out of our own way. In solitude, we set aside temporal desires as we reflect on God. As our reverence for God increases, our loneliness decreases, and it can even disappear.

Regular periods of solitude are good for the soul. In Matthew 6:6 Jesus tells us: "But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you." Being alone, in a quiet room, can still our mind, silence our thoughts, and prepare us for spiritual growth and quiet prayer. Frequent periods of solitude renew and deepen our faith and hope.

When loneliness passes, and changes into solitude, we are in for unanticipated spiritual wonders as we spend more time with God and ourselves. Self knowledge reveals the facades we hide behind. The easiest person to deceive is the person in the mirror. What lurks in the dark corners of our soul? Long held grudges? Addiction to social media? Are the things that aggravate us in others the things we are most ashamed of in ourselves? The more we learn about God, the more we learn about ourselves.

Edith Stein wrote: "One finds time for so many useless things: to read up on all sorts of useless stuff in books, magazines and newspapers, to sit in cafes and gab away a quarter hour, a half hour. Shouldn't it be possible then to eke out a morning hour during which one does not scatter oneself but concentrates, to gain strength in order to cope with the entire day?" We can reduce TV and social media time, get up earlier or sit in the back yard, a shed, park or cemetery. We may lead

busy lives. However, if we ask ourselves why we do what we do, moments of solitude become manifest and available to us.

Solitude is far beyond escapism; rather, it is a deeper immersion into what is truly "real" beyond the daily hustle and bustles. We go down into our depths and confront the way we are living, what we have been avoiding, missing, or needing.

We are aided by finding, developing, and expanding treasures in our soul. As an example, we begin to notice things that we passed by or did not appreciate before: a snowy field in early morn, the sun on ripened grain, stars glittering at night, a sleeping newborn baby, or the wisdom of an elderly person. Many inspiring things in life are mysterious, and are more appreciated in solitude because words fail to describe them. Solitude gives us the opportunity to discern how and why we do things. As solitude cleanses our

soul of noise and clutter, our soul becomes a place of sustenance and restoration, validating our unique worth as God's own sons and daughters.

Obvious answers to where we find God are in church, in nature, in the bible, or in the goodness of others. A lesser known, but extremely important place where we find God is through revering his divine presence within us.

Yes, God is at home in us, but often we are separated from him by the darkness of sin. In his familiar quote about God's beauty being ever ancient and ever new, Augustine said, "You were within me, but I was outside myself..." When we get right with God, Teresa of Avila advises, "We need no wings to go in search of him, but have only to look at his presence within us."

*"For everything there is
a season, and a time
for every matter"...and
Now is the time for
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Excerpted from: "From Loneliness to Solitude"

HUMAN DEVELOPMENT AUTUMN 2023

By Carolyn Humphreys, O.C.D.S, O.T.R/L
(a regular contributor to Raven's Bread)



Through the open windows of our studio, we hear the steady rain; we see leaves bobbing up and down, and are overwhelmed by the lush green-ness that surrounds our home here at Still Wood. Karen smiles and murmurs: “Yes!” We are living in one of the last remaining temperate rain forest lingering on the North American continent.

No wonder one of the best books written about the southern Appalachians begins: “It was raining in the Smokies.” When is it not? We have wondered this summer. Although it seems that the rest of this country has suffered from both extreme heat and drought this year, the scenery here is exceptional; luxuriant with every shade of green.

Our flower beds are overflowing with plants both intentional and not. Flowers we first planted a few years ago have re-seeded or spread and are now blooming again providing spots of color amid myriad green weeds. Though labeled “annuals” that we expected to flourish only one season, they are popping up again and again — gifts that keep on giving! Intertwined among these are the ubiquitous weeds—we prefer the truer term, wild flowers. It seems all plants around here produce their own flowers

(in due season) such as Asian Dayflowers, Goat’s Beard, fire pinks, trilliums, Jack-in-the-pulpits, star chickweed, violets, larkspur, and (of course!) dandelions. Were it not for these latter, the “green space not lawn” around the house would seem depleted! We caution you about certain of our favorites such as hardy begonias, phlox, and creeping astilbe which turn up in unexpectedly...everywhere. Did we mention the ferns, the ivy, and the various ground covers that hold our mountainside in place? And, oh!, Note the daisies and daylilies sprouting abundantly, stubborn and strong.

You may have guessed by now this simile for the spiritual life that develops when given space and nourishment in our hearts, but often with just our reluctant permission. We cannot force this to happen. In fact, early spiritual shoots may appear unexpectedly, causing us to question whether we should allow them a place in our daily lives. Perhaps they should receive attention on Sundays and at retreat times. Sometimes the appearance is triggered by a gift from someone we know as were five primrose plants an elderly friend dug from her garden as a wedding gift to us. Now dozens of primroses in many shades and colors get transplanted from rock garden to water garden to pet cemetery! Kindness received from others can flourish similarly in our hearts and souls.

Clearly one of the most amazing things about life in a rain forest is the abundance of life it nourishes—as long as we don’t meddle with The Plan. Each and every plant has its own needs, its proper place, and its time to bloom. This is true of a healthy spiritual life as well. We must *allow* it to flourish where and when and how God wills. Like wildflowers, no one approaches the Holy in exactly the same way or on a set timetable. Patience and reverence for what is growing and coming to fruition in us is essential to eventually seeing the beauty and recognizing the amazing Love at work in us. We wish you abundant life as you tend your inner garden.

With Grateful Love, Paul & Karen

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 donations to: ravensbread97@gmail.com or **Raven’s Bread Ministries**, 18065 NC 209 Hwy., Hot Springs, NC 28743 or via PayPal at our website. Our website is: <http://www.ravensbreadministries.com>. Our phone number is: 828 622 3750. Our videos are posted on YouTube. An annual donation is appreciated, each giving according to their means.

Please send payment in US dollars (PayPal converts foreign currency to US dollars). All donations go into a fund to insure that anyone who wants to receive **Raven’s Bread Newsletter**, or **Resources**, or **Library books** or an individual retreat space when available, can receive these services.

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 Annual Reminder

So, here we are. The August issue of Raven's Bread for the (really) 28th time! Can you believe it — we have been publishing this quarterly newsletter for over twenty-eight years? Our commitment to serving the eremitical community is even stronger now than when we began, largely because *your interest, your support, and your contributions* have emphatically reaffirmed the need to encourage the values of solitary living. Your sharing of insights and experiences, your written contributions and responses to items posted in **RB** and the gratitude expressed in letters and emails have been so uplifting. This August newsletter is special in that it is our annual reminder for your financial support. Some of you may even remember our earliest suggested donation of \$7.00 per year. A few years later, we bumped it up to \$10.00 domestic / \$12.00 foreign, and there it has remained. Of course, expenses have NOT remained the same since 2008. Nor has our wonderful readership which has significantly increased. All are welcome! We know that some of you cannot make a monetary contribution to this ministry but to those who can, we are suggesting that a yearly gift of \$15.00 would be profoundly appreciated...more, if and when you can. Many of you do send "gifts" over and above for which we say wholeheartedly: Thank you and God Bless Your Generosity.

Paul & Karen

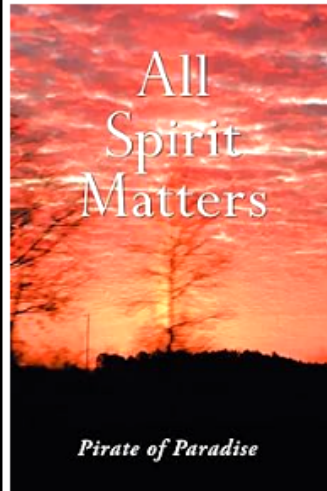
Wood B. Hermit



"Take nothing for your journey but a walking stick — no snacks, no backpack, no credit cards, no change of clothes, just wear your sandals and wherever you wind up, stay there until you're ready to leave." Mk 6:8 ff (Pers. Trans.)

All Spirit Matters

Paperback – July 8, 2024



Each of us is called to be a special kind of mystic when we are formed in the womb in the Divine Image. Mystics seek to conform to the Divine Image from womb to tomb, for as the Indian Sufi Kabir sang, What hope of cutting loose after one's death The noose stifling heaven in every breath? As now, so shall be - seek liberation In Life, or be interred in illusion! This com-

pileation of prose and mystical poetry draws upon the life and teachings of Jesus of Nazareth, a mystic who is revered as a rabbi in Judaism, messiah in Christianity, prophet in Islam, bodhisattva in Buddhism and a wise and compassionate teacher and healer in secular settings. References from several faith traditions are included throughout to emphasize the shared wisdom and spiritual heritage of humanity. Through these reflections, we explore the relationship and reciprocity of life-forms on the Tree of Life. We aim to foster harmony and healing among and across various form-branches. We seek to find common ground on universal themes, as well as unique expressions within our own secular and faith traditions. Hopefully these reflections will prompt us to conduct our own experiments on mystical universals in ways that are congruent and consonant with our primary language of Spirit Matters.

by **Pirate of Paradise**

108 pgs. Trafford Publishing \$16.99

By the same author:

All Shall Be Well

60 pgs. Trafford Publishing \$7.95

*The divine way is indeed
the downward way.
Henri Nouwen*

"Seeing" The Fairy Door by Donna Royer

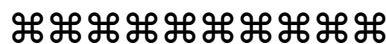


When you enter my home in the woods, you are greeted by natural wood, living plants, rounded edges, and hand crafted walls and floors—as well as a small, whimsical, fairy door for the observant. A seeming oddity in my hermitage, even amongst the variety of unusual décor, because it has neither a back story nor does it seem to serve a functional purpose. It is, however, a tangible reminder to me about the importance of not taking life too seriously and the re-enchancement of the everyday. Unlike the stained glass dragonfly above it which ties me to memories and the past, the fairy door's function is to ground me in the present. It invites me to see the mundane through a lens of possibility and imagination, open to perceiving the magical miracles overflowing in my life, and it invites me to engage these with child-like awe, wonder and joy.

A friend recently shared a story about an esteemed authority on fish. When confronted with a new student, she'd have them sit at a bench in front of a goldfish in a bowl, asking them to note their observations which they'd share with her at the end of the day when she returned to put the fishbowl away. The next day the same thing would happen. And the next. And the next. By this point the student was truly struggling to note anything new, yet each evening the authority praised the

student's insights on the fish's form and behavior, and each morning placed the same fishbowl on the counter and assigned the same task. After many days, the student, feeling frustrated and somewhat silly, reported how the scales in different areas of the body shimmered differently in the light, how the gill on the side furthest away from the glass always seemed to open slightly before the other, and how the fish seemingly responded differently to the student's face by the bowl than it had initially. That evening the authority once again praised the student's observations, but added, "You now see **your** personal perceptions and the possible effects of your interactions on **this** specific fish, as well as its objective features—you now know how to truly see. You're ready for the next assignment.

Close-up nature photography, intentional mindfulness, prayers, walking in nature, refraining from multi-tasking, slow stitching, silence, simplicity, solitude ... each is a practice I use to mentally frame time, space, and circumstances such that I truly 'see' the mundane. None are perfect tools, but each allows me to sometimes perceive the sacred breaking through. They ask me to be attentive and present—undistracted by expectations, thoughts, hopes, plans, or other things. The act of practicing them can transform a moment in time into a liminal space, allowing me and the world to be joyfully re—enchanted by the Holy Spirit. This is the prayer—contemplative, hidden and private—which animates me and changes my house into a hermitage.



A MESSAGE FROM JUDI SARKISIAN, PH.D.

Dear Karen and Paul,

Thank you so much for your years of dedicated service and encouragement to those who choose to live in solitude. Your publication is an inspiration and a comfort to many.

I am looking for opportunities to advertise several rentals I have here in the Mojave Desert, that may be suitable for hermits who wish to experience solitude in remembrance of the Desert Fathers. I have not been off the ranch in several years, so have been able to avoid larger populations, but cannot claim to be a hermit. I have had renters here in that capacity. It works well.

My web page is www.sarkisianranch.com, you can see there is a labyrinth here for guests, Stations of the Cross, Buddhas, Medicine Healing Circle etc. It is very peaceful and quiet, fully fenced and secure. I do have gatherings on occasion, but they do not impact on the guest homes. Any assistance you can give me to reach out to those who may benefit from this environment will be greatly appreciated.

Thank you again for your efforts to honor and support the benefits of solitude, contemplation and inner path development.