



Raven's Bread

Food for Those in Solitude

Online Edition

August 2025

Thoughts In Solitude

(Any) retreat experiences are meant to gesture toward the ways time apart can help us gain wisdom, amplify the good and resist the intolerable—"a way to act human in these years the stars/look past" as William Stafford writes.

Paying passionate attention to what is most meaningful to us, to what we have reverence for, is urgent in a desecralized world. Retreat is like the mote of dust the raindrop forms around. In difficult times especially, I believe it's one of the best things we can do. After all, refusing easy despair and seeking meaning in the face of our certain deaths, is part of what makes humans matter.

Our places of retreat—holy rivers, mountains and deserts, hermitages, monasteries, pilgrim's paths, cabins in the woods, arts temples, ashrams, garden sheds, simple white rooms an empty spaces—mark divine territory, both outer and inner. They stand today as among our least assailable sanctuaries for independent thinking, solitude, silence, spirit, creativity and for connection with self, others and the planet. We step over the threshold and encounter the unmediated and the real. We comes to know ourselves, and being fully present, paradoxically, we can return and respond fully to the world in all its beauty and darkness.

A retreat is a place, but it is also an act of independence. A resolute effort of will is required. While it's easier to go with the powerful tide of the mainstream, which requires no thought or cultivation, we can choose to withdraw our attention, step back Like prayer, piano playing,

tennis, yoga and meditation, retreat is a practice, - the effort you put in shapes what you get out of it. The practice of retreat attunes you to the extraordinary, to the sacramental world.

*"For everything there is
a season, and a time
for every matter"...and
Now is the time for
DONATING
to Raven's Bread
Ministries*

When I began writing this book I suspected my retreats made *me* suspect. Now I realize I'm part of a long lineage, a network like mycelium, under the ground, centuries old. Of dissidents, who, over the ages, have accorded with Walt Whitman to "resist much, obey little" when it comes to claiming time apart. I feel confident now that there will always be people who seek a slower, gentler, more contemplative life, and that retreat is more valuable as a method than ever.

Most of us, even in this accelerated age, can devise ways to step away temporarily. Just look at the edges. The margins hold retreat spaces, where we can connect to the total attention of the hermit, to the gentleness and simplicity of the monk, to the pilgrim's sacred ground, to the naturalist's reverence, to the artist's and the thinker's passion for truth and beauty, to the embodied inner journey of the yogi and meditator.

Retreat is not a flight, but a way of real engagement. Often it's not a comfortable place to be. When we give serious attention to the fullness and possibility that exists in the inner world, we bump into our own contradictions and chaos, which is reflected in the outer world. Retreat is a gentle call to a certain kind of inaction, one that encour-

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Recently, I had a surprising conversation with an older woman while waiting in a dentist office. She was already seated there when I arrived, and I noted she was wearing a thick sweater under a shawl and had a blanket across her lap. I smiled admiringly at her foresight in preparing to sit in an air conditioned waiting room and wished I had also arrived as thoroughly prepared.

My interest in this wise woman was further piqued when she turned to me and asked: “Are you saved?” I believe that was the first time I had ever been so directly interrogated about my possible salvation. Having “come up” Roman Catholic, I responded: “I was baptized when I was two weeks old.” But that was not the answer she was looking for. No, she clearly wanted

to know the day and the hour when I was “saved”. I murmured something about having always felt loved by God, but that didn’t satisfy her either.

She explained that she wanted to know the event that convinced me that my salvation was assured...when I knew I was loved by God and that this would never change, in the here-and-now and in the hereafter. She allowed that a person once “saved” might fall away for a period of time, but that this didn’t affect the truth that one was saved forever.

I struggled to come up with something that would satisfy her, finally realizing that she wanted a “story”. After a quick (internal) review of my life, I realized that I didn’t have any such tale beyond the conviction that I have always known a loving presence in my life, one that I trusted and to whom I shall always be united. Luckily, the nurse then called my name and I disappeared into a treatment room before I had to admit that I could not describe any dramatic moment on which to base this assurance.

Discussing this experience later with Paul, he chuckled softly and suggested that I had likely had my first encounter with an authentic Missionary Baptist. During his many years of ministry throughout the South, he has been asked if he were saved more than once (despite the fact that he was an ordained Catholic priest). That fact clearly did not qualify as the event which “saved” him.

I’m still wondering how I could adequately answer the question about whether or not I am “saved”. And, maybe I can’t. At least not in a way that would satisfy a Missionary Baptist. I do know that, at heart, it is pure Grace flowing from un-earned Love. I recently stumbled upon an old article by Daniel O’Leary entitled *Everywhere and nowhere* utilizing the “Rainmaker” story to explicate the role of breath and stillness in recovering a true rhythm of being, “the invisible life force that links all created things.” O’Leary concludes that the task confronting us (like the rainmaker) is to become fully conscious and in tune (with God) to reconcile in ourselves, like Jesus did, a disintegrating village, a fractured humanity, and a splintering universe.”

Perhaps it is our task as Ravens, as true Rainmakers—to help restore what Buddhists and Indigenous Peoples call “right relations” in our time and place. And maybe this is what being saved is really all about.

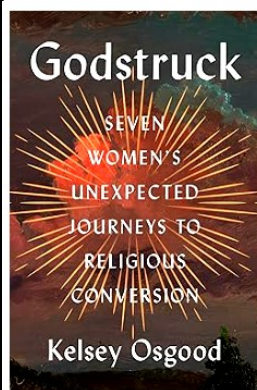
With Grateful Love, Paul & Karen

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: ravenbread97@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.ravenbreadministries.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 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).

A Special Book from a Special Friend



Godstruck:

Seven Women's Unexpected
Journeys To Religious Conversion

By

Kelsey Osgood

A candid, thought-provoking exploration of contemporary women's experiences of religious conversion and the relationship between faith and fulfillment in our time.

Religious involvement has been declining in the West for decades—and, though men have historically outnumbered women among the disaffiliated in the U.S., a greater share of the young adults leaving religion today are women. A young, secular Kelsey Osgood would have been surprised to hear that she would be among those moving in the opposite direction. And yet, after the conversion to Orthodox Judaism that transformed her life, she began to wonder about the other contemporary women who, like her, had been startled to find a home in organized religion.



Kelsey Osgood is a graduate of Columbia University and Goucher College's creative nonfiction MFA program. Her work has appeared in *New York*, *The New Yorker*, *Time*, *Harper's magazine* and elsewhere. She is the author of the *New York Times* article "What We can learn From Solitude" November 29, 2020, featuring Raven's Bread ministry.

Thoughts In Solitude

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ages us to contact our clearest selves and poses the question, What constitutes action anyway?

As for the ancient split—the lessons of this book...confirm for me that these supposed opposites are actually indivisible parts of a whole. There can be no words or music without silence—simply noise. A candle can flicker only within darkness.

To retreat is to unify and transform: we can reconfigure ourselves, and the world, and find within us an enduring kind of liberation. "Freedom is a pretty strange thing," artist Ai Weiwei said. "Once you've experienced it, it remains in your heart and no one can take it away."



Excerpted from

In Praise of Retreat:

FINDING SANCTUARY IN THE MODERN WORLD

by Kirsteen MacLeod

Published by ECW Press, 2021.

JUST A REMINDER

Raven's Bread Ministries continues to offer by email (only) a brief monthly reflection of support, encouragement, and inspiration for those embracing the life of a hermit/monk/solitary in the world entitled A Raven's Offering. This reflection is mailed on the 15th of those months in which the Raven's Bread Newsletter is NOT published.

You do not automatically receive this email reflection by being a subscriber to this newsletter. To receive A Raven's Offering by email, please send your name and your email address to:

ravensbread 97@gmail.com



Our Annual Raven Reminder

Once again it's August and by this time next year (God willing) we will be celebrating the 30th anniversary of publishing this newsletter for hermits, fellow solitaires and contemplatives around the globe. It has been an illuminating, soul-expanding and spiritually nourishing gift beyond anything we could have imagined at the time. We are so grateful for each and every one of you. Over these many years, you have enriched our lives beyond measure.

We are grateful for all your cogent contributions to the newsletter, your helpful suggestions, and, of course, your financial support. That said, we humbly and sincerely request your continued support for this ministry in these critical times throughout this country and around the globe. While we suggest a \$15/year donation from readers, it is not a subscription fee, and we will respond to whomever requests the newsletter regardless of financial contribution. While we are well aware these days that while costs just keep increasing and benefits seem to be decreasing, we still hope to continue serving the eremitic community for as long as our resources hold out. For that to happen, each of you is essential. We ask simply that you give whatever you can, whenever you can.

With our deepest Gratitude, Paul and Karen

*“When they come for the innocent
without crossing over your body,
cursed be your religion
and your life.”
Daniel Berrigan, SJ*



BOOK NOTES AND REVIEWS



IN PRAISE OF RETREAT: FINDING SANCTUARY IN THE MODERN WORLD

by Kirsteen MacLeod

At a retreat cabin in the woods, Kirsteen MacLeod fell for the solitary and reflective side of life. In her profound and evocative book, she explores this fascination, delving into history while she experiences personal retreats. Following in the footsteps of hermits, pilgrims, naturalists, artists and other outliers on the wild margin of society, she learns that retreat is not an escape, but an inner adventure that engenders wisdom.

357 pp. Kindle & pbk. ECW Press, 2021 ISBN: 978-1-77041-473-0 (Softcover)

THE MONASTERY OF THE HEART, AN INVITATION TO A MEANINGFUL LIFE

by Joan Chittister

A powerful guide for all who are seeking a more purposeful life today, in this time of social upheavals and global transformations...written for seekers of any faith or none—individuals, couples, families, and small groups—who are looking for true meaning while facing seemingly countless options both spiritual and secular and are feeling overwhelmed by choices.

225 pp. Kindle & pbk, BlueBridge, 2012 ISBN: 9781933346571

STRENGTH IN STILLNESS: THE POWER OF TRANSCENDENTAL MEDITATION

By Bob Roth

Medical experts agree that the epidemic of stress is damaging our physical and emotional health at young and younger ages. While there is no one single cure, the Transcendental Meditation technique is a simple practice that dramatically changes how we respond to stress and life's challenges.

224 pp. pbk. Simon & Schuster 2018 ISBN-13 978-1471161636