

"There have always been persons who by temperament or situation are alone in the midst of people, without understanding why. But there are others who, living active and rigorous lives in the world, leave it all behind and go into the desert. Such a hermit vocation is not for the young, for it dare not spring from either idealism or rebellion. Yet there comes a time when one simply becomes tired of pretenses and games. A thirst for integrity takes over, a passion to undertake the austerity

of living in complete honesty, without convenience, support, or distraction. This call into solitude is a pilgrimage into darkness and crucifixion, for it annihilates the self one once knew and fostered.

"It is a lonely path, hidden from the eyes of the world that neither knows nor cares – certain that the hermit is a failure. Free from the lure of possessions, power, and status, the contemplative life has no practical use or purpose whatever. Hermits are pilgrims, dependent on pure faith – that this is where God would have them be. To walk into silence is to be stripped of certainty that one has an answer to anything – until the questions that once plagued the mind nestle in the soul as friends.

"One would hardly enter such a valley of shadows willingly. Yet amidst all the options one has, strangely, there is no choice. Nothing else matters except to be a person of prayer. And some day, in the gentle quietness, standing among the ashes of dreams and ambition, one may be blessed with the only certitude likely to be given: that to seek is to be sought, and to find is to have been found.

"To be drawn into this dread solitude is really an invitation to keep company with God's loneliness – God emptied in total identification with us – ignored, hidden, forgotten profoundly poor. Drawn by this Presence, the hermit stands with rejected ones everywhere, living the joy of simplicity – freed to want nothing more than to grow old loving one's God."

from *The Solitary Voice*, Advent 1999, reprinted with permission