

Traveling Companion: Heaven on Earth with the Mad Monks

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While on vacation, I came across an article entitled, "Heaven on Earth with the Mad Monks," printed in the English newspaper, "Sunday Express." The author, Chris Goodman, a self-confessed member of the quick-fix generation, decides to take some time for himself to seek a little inner peace by visiting Glenstal Abbey in Ireland.

Everyone is looking for an escape from the shallowness of modern life and the monks are perceived as models of contentment. The author, seeking an antidote to city life or at least a refuge from reality TV, wanders the grounds of the abbey and chats with the "mad monks," as the TV portrays them; to discover the secret of life, lived to the fullest.

One of the most precious things I enjoyed while on vacation was my early morning stroll down the nearby country lane. A whole new world opened up its vistas for me as I took a leisurely stroll.

First of all, I encountered the early morning birds greeting the new day as they search for food, flittering from place to place. Some crows engaged in a cacophony of sounds that resembled hoarseness rather than an uplifting melody.

Secondly, there were the bunny rabbits that darted out in front of me as they heard my approaching footsteps. Darting along the roadway, they eventually found an opening that allowed them to escape into the thick undergrowth.

Thirdly, there were the foxes. One rambled down the hill, immune to my approach, but, as I got closer, it noticed me and darted across the field as I watched its red colored frame disappear. Other times, young vixens darted out in front of me and sauntered into safety. In the distance, I could see another fox, returning from a night of hunting, as it galloped back to his den of safety.

Fourthly, the sound of a gaggle of geese met my ears. They called out for attention and someone to satisfy their hunger pains. Moments later, a rooster called out to everyone within ear shot that it was time to begin a new day

The faint sounds of the early morning traffic multiplied as the morning blossomed. The world became alive as schedules had to be met, business begun and commitments ratified.

Overhead, I could hear and see the silver-bottom jets as they journeyed deeper into Europe. I knew that one day soon, I would fry the friendly skies to a more hectic life, but, for now, I would enjoy the distant sounds and more immediate peaceful setting.

Then there were the swallows, with their nests perched high in the gables of the house. The parents took turns bringing food to their young. The young waited with open beaks, eager to receive. Some time later, the young were coaxed out of their security nests and invited to fly. I watched them. They took bold steps in faith to fly to a nearby perch as mothers invited them to be braver. In the beginning, they flew back to the nest, only to be encouraged to leave it again and fly farther away.

I discovered that one should not knock a swallow's nest from a house, because it is supposed to bring bad luck. I did not test its validity. Instead, I realized that they taught me more about courage and faith just by watching them eventually soar into the sky and fly away.

I prized my moments of quiet during every morning's stroll as I heard the voice of God, not in the din of worldly noise but in the silence of nature. In a world when we have to be constantly in touch; constantly talking or texting, constantly rushing to places that seem important; constantly meeting deadlines, set by ourselves and others, we relish the quiet reprieve that allows us to touch, not only our own soul but the soul of God.

Unlike Chris Goodman, I didn't have to join the "Mad Monks" for a while. Instead, all I had to do was allow the silence of God to speak volumes during my early morning strolls.