

The Parts of Quarr

The Cell

Benedictine monks have read, prayed, and slept in cells for hundreds of years but St Benedict has nothing to say on the subject for he envisaged his monks sleeping in dormitories. He is mostly anxious that the beds of monks should be not a private preserve associated, for instance, with personal property but he does envisage monks being able to return to their beds sometimes for siestas or for reading.

Living in cells, however, is normal in the monasticism of the desert fathers and in the Eastern Church. St Benedict was mainly concerned with the primacy of community life though he could envisage community life being a preparation for solitary life in a cell. Camaldolese Benedictines have some monasteries based on community living and others which are based on a cluster of hermit cells but the tradition of the Solesmes Congregation, to which Quarr belong⁷, is for each monk to have a cell yet the emphasis is primarily upon communal life.

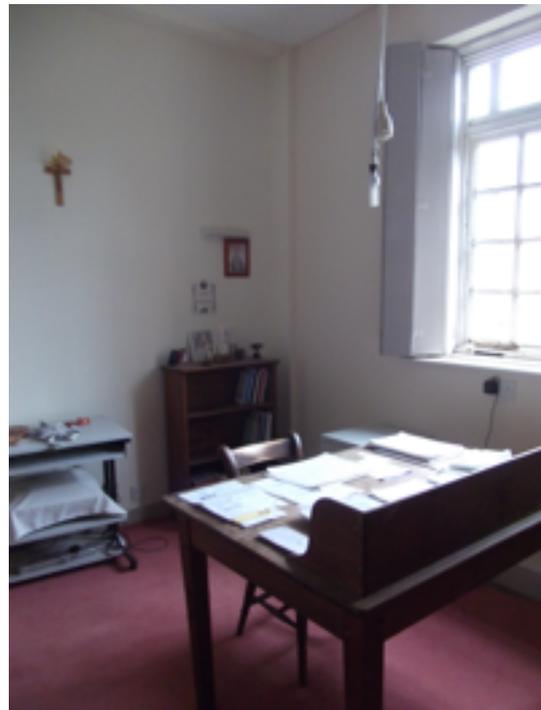
Solesmes insisted upon certain rules which are still in operation here.

No one is allowed into another's cell without permission of the superior (anything to be given a brother who is out is left at the door of his cell.) Cells have to be swept and tidied at least once a week, and the area of the cells is a region of especial silence. It is a part of the monastery where the strictest enclosure is practised (visitors are not permitted to visit the cells) This is all in order to make the cell a place where *Lectio Divina* and prayer can be practised without distraction. A monk here recalls what his novicemaster said about the Benedictine cell: it is not to be likened to a prison cell but to the cell of a beehive where a spiritual honey is made and stored.

The main purpose of the cell here is for sleeping and for that practice of reading, especially

the Scriptures, which turns into prayer. This is called *lectio divina*.

This is an essential part of Benedictine life and the necessary individual complement to the public Divine Office in the church. St Benedict is at considerable pains to stress its importance and character. The emphasis is primarily on the formation of spiritual life but Benedictines have always been readers so it is natural that the Order is associated with scholarship, most obvious perhaps in the Maurist Congregation of the Eighteenth Century of which Solesmes is the heir.



But sleep is important too. Benedict dislikes idleness ('the enemy of the soul') but he is careful to ensure that his monks have proper rest and undisturbed slumber.

As can be seen from the picture, the cells at Quarr, which are situated on the eastern side of the abbey, are quite large but simple. They always must have a crucifix. There is no running water so that must be fetched in a jug each morning. There are no carpets. Cells are austere but not uncomely. Like everything in a Benedictine house, they are there for a purpose—the sanctification of souls and the Glory of God. [BB]