

## **Ringing Bells During the Mass – (Part 2 of The Eucharistic Prayer) – Holy Joy & Holy Reminders**

Most Catholics around this area and around most of the world are usually at least somewhat familiar with bells being rung during a few important moments throughout the Catholic Mass. The history, background, and liturgical detail surrounding this is quite extensive, but we can at least say a few things to help us understand why bells are still rung and how it can help us pray and enter into the truth and beauty of what is happening during each and every Mass. First of all, in the Old Testament, the first High Priest for the Israelites, Aaron, was required to wear his high priestly vestments that had bells attached to them. This was required when he ministered/worshipped God as he entered the Holy of Holies and God's presence in the Ark of the Covenant. The noise of the bells on his High Priestly vestments helped everyone recognize that something holy was happening as well as help protect Aaron from evil and joyfully worship God all at one time (see *Exodus 28:33-35 & Exodus 39:25-26*).

Fast-forward now to Catholic Church history, and bells were not really used extensively until tower bells were constructed by Churches and monasteries in the 400s and 500s, which were mainly rung to indicate the time for prayer or Mass was about to begin. This grew in practice little by little, and eventually, in the thirteenth century, these big tower bells were rung not only at the beginning of Mass, but also during the consecration and presentation of the Eucharist. This was to alert not only the people within the church, but also everyone in the town or in the fields to be aware that something miraculous and holy was currently taking place within the Church building, which was that Jesus – the infinite God become man – was becoming present in the Eucharist! Very quickly, this practice changed from using only the big tower bells during these moments of the Mass, to using smaller sets of bells that could be easily rung by one person (three or five bells together like we have today).

The ringing of bells was eventually required at very specific moments of the Catholic Mass for about 400 years (from about 1560s to about the 1960s), and once again, the purpose was to help the Catholic faithful or certainly also visitors to understand that something miraculous and holy was happening at the moment, which should encourage not only joyful worship but also humble and reverent adoration. Currently, the ringing of bells at Mass is not officially required, but certainly included as optional and seemingly encouraged during a few traditional moments throughout the Catholic Mass. I'm writing this article on Palm Sunday of 2024, and we just reflected last week on the Epiclesis during the Eucharistic prayer and the calling down of the Holy Spirit, which is one of these times that the bells will be rung by altar servers during the Mass. Another time the bells are rung is during each elevation by the Priest of the bread that has become Jesus' body and the wine that has become Jesus' blood. Jesus fully present to us at this moment, the bells remind us once again to be joyful in the miracle that is occurring as well as deeply reverent for the infinite God become man who is now fully present in the Eucharist for our sake.

One last unique aspect to bells that I'll include this week is that they are rung during the Gloria hymn both on Holy Thursday evening (the Mass of the Last Supper) and at the Easter Vigil Mass, which is the first celebration of Easter and always takes place on Saturday night before Easter Sunday. This ringing of bells during the Gloria hymn once again, reminds us of the great gift, mystery, and joy of our faith, however, bells are also forbidden during the rest of Holy Thursday Mass and all of Good Friday and the morning of Holy Saturday as well. This is because we truly enter into the last few days of Lent with the reminder that we are not in heaven yet, and God is acting powerfully in our souls to lead us to His love for us on the Cross and help us truly rejoice at Easter and in heaven forever!!