



Instruction on the use of bells during Mass

Office of the Bishop

The use of bells during Mass is a beautiful practice that has been cherished by the Church for many centuries. I send you this information on bells for your use. Although I encourage (but not mandate) this practice at your parishes and missions, it will be practiced at the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception. The General Instruction of the Roman Missal states:

“A little before the consecration, when appropriate, a server rings a bell as a signal to the faithful. According to local custom, the server also rings the bell as the priest shows the host and then the chalice.” (GIRM 150)

The use of the bell during the celebration of Mass is a practice that is ancient in the Liturgy and continues to be of value. If the sound is pleasant and the servers are well trained to use it with reverence and attention, the bell enhances and accentuates the solemn moments of the Sacred Liturgy. The bell has traditionally been rung at the *Sanctus* and during the elevations of the Sacred Species at the consecration. The original purpose of the bell was to draw the attention of the faithful to the central point of the Mass. In times when modern amplification methods were absent and the Eucharistic Prayer recited *sub voce*, this was a very practical means to assist the faithful in their participation at Mass.

However, focusing the attention of the faithful was not the only object in the use of the bell. Bell ringing has a rich tradition in the Church dating from the sixth century. Church bells receive their own particular blessing. The music of the bells is a sacramental by which the faithful seek Divine protection from evil spirits, storms and calamities. Church bells are used to announce events (e.g. funerals, weddings) and to call the faithful to prayer (e.g. the Angelus).

What becomes known as the *Sanctus bells* appears in the Mass during the 13th century. The ringing of the bells is a reminder to the faithful of the great event of the transubstantiation of the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of the Lord, and is an invitation to adoration and praise.

The current rubrics indicate that the bell may be rung during the *epiclesis*, this replaces the ringing during the *Sanctus* as this is an acclamation now sung by all the assembly, and at the elevations of the Sacred Species after they are consecrated. *The bell may also be rung as the celebrant genuflects during the consecration.*

The following may be observed when the bells are used;

- a. At the *Epiclesis* when the priest extends his hands over the bread and wine the bells are rung once.
- b. When the priest elevates the Sacred Host the bells are rung three times. The priest places the Host on the paten/ciborium, genuflects and the bell is rung once.
- c. When the priest elevates the Chalice the bells are rung three times. The priest places the Chalice on the corporal, covers it with the pall (if this is being used), genuflects and the bell is rung once.

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