

From the Desk of Our Pastor

The Bells! The Bells!



Bells go back into hoary antiquity in practically every human civilization, and so it is no surprise that they appear in the early centuries in Christian worship. The Celtic church was especially fond of them. No doubt to some modern ears they may seem gaudy and superfluous in worship, relics of the past we can do without. (Perhaps they are associated with the Hunch Back of Notre Dame, or E.A. Poe's terrifying poem, "The Bells"). Still, when we see how they function in worship, we see bells are indeed important. I am not a "minimalist" when it comes to liturgy, and I am open to bringing out a fuller expression of Catholic worship.

The large church bell makes an incredibly important theological statement. This importance expresses itself in the very architecture of ancient churches where the bell tower was a prominent feature of ecclesial structures. They rang for the liturgy of the hours for prayer, but most importantly, the beginning of the mass, so everyone in town and in the fields knew that it was a sacred moment of prayer. They rang for the dead after funerals for all to contemplate the solemnity of the moment. Sadly, our Eldersburg church has no bell tower. But our Sykesville church does. Every time this bell is rung, it serves an evangelistic purpose. It is declaring to the whole town the most important thing in the world is about to happen, and everyone should be there.

Bells serve another function within the Mass itself. Here we specifically mean the Sanctus bells. Sanctus bells are the small handheld bells that are rung at critical moments of the Mass. They engage our senses and help us center our attention on the magnitude of what is before us. Most importantly, they are rung when, after the priest has consecrated the bread and the wine with words like "... graciously make holy these gifts we have brought to you for consecration that they may become the Body and Blood of your Son our Lord Jesus Christ," he lifts the Host and the Chalice, presenting the Lord to His people. At this moment, the bells serve as a joyful witness this awesome mystery.

Therefore, we will reintroduce the Sanctus bells on Holy Thursday. Traditionally, they are rung during the Gloria, expressing praise to God for the great sacrifice about to unfold. They are not rung again until they are heard as they joyfully ring out on Easter at the Eucharist. From then on, bells will again be a part of our liturgies.

Father John Worgul
Pastor