



Pastor's Notes: January 13, 2019

You may have heard it or not, but during the Mass, our main bell has now been set up to toll during the consecration. Thanks to the efforts of Dcn. Gaspar DeGaetano, during our recent renovation which included the updating of our electrical infrastructure, a remote bell toller was included, allowing us the capacity to remotely trigger the bell tolling mechanism. Ringing the Basilica bell at precious moments in the Mass allows the joy of worshippers at the Basilica to be shared with the greater community not present inside the church.

Ringling of bells has been a traditional practice of Catholic Christians long before Muslims started singing from their *minarets*. It is, first and foremost, a call to prayer. The bells in the monasteries since the early Church have rung out to the monks in the fields and to the faithful who would attend the Sacred Mysteries. Besides being merely a call to prayer, it was also a prayer itself, announcing the reality of what was happening and glorifying God with sweet reverberation throughout the land.



A great reminder of this is the famous painting by Jean François Millet entitled *The Angelus*. In the painting it shows farmers working in a field, but they have stopped, taken off their hats, and bowed their heads in prayer. In the distance one sees the steeple of a church, where presumably a bell is hung and being rung at that moment. Traditionally the Angelus is prayed at 6am, 12 noon, and 6pm, and it is rung by three sets of three rings, with space in between for the prayer that accompanies it, after which it is tolled for a certain period, allowing for the concluding prayer of the traditional Angelus. If you have been downtown, you may have heard our bell toll this way at 6am, 12 noon, or 6pm. I have oftentimes heard it myself when walking around town. The Angelus prayer is prayed here at the Basilica every 12 noon daily Mass when the bells ring from our bell tower.

Furthermore, bells are rung inside the church at precious moments of the Mass, in particular the *epiclesis* (when the priest puts his hands over the gifts, invoking the Holy Spirit to come upon them); and at the words of institution, “This is my Body”, “This is my Blood”; and the elevation of the Host and chalice. In countries like Mexico, for instance, these sacred moments are further celebrated by external signs, even including lighting fireworks outside the church to signify that the miracle of the Incarnation has once again appeared on our altars and the saving sacrifice is made present. Now, we won't light fireworks, but we do now have the capacity to ring our bell to announce to Chattanooga this news of great joy: “Do not be afraid; for behold, I proclaim to you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For today in the city of David a savior has been born for you who is Messiah and Lord.” (Luke 2: 10-11)

The bell that we ring is historically significant and even older than the church itself. It was cast for our parish in 1873 in West Troy, New Jersey. It is notable in that it was cast with the name of “Rev. P. Ryan, Pastor,” inscribed on the side. Fr. Patrick Ryan, of course, was the one who would eventually give his life as a model of charity in action during the yellow fever epidemic of 1878 and is now a Servant of God on the path to canonization as a saint. It is my hope and prayer that the ringing of the bells here at the Basilica of Sts. Peter and Paul may call you to a deeper life of prayer, but may also be cause of great joy for what God has done for us in our midst – the Great “I am” has become Emmanuel, God is with us.



Sincerely in Christ Jesus,

Rev. J. David Carter, JCL
Pastor and Rector