



Why Do We Ring Bells During Mass?

Bells have been a common part of divine worship since Moses.

Depending on the church you attend, you may hear the sound of bells ringing at pivotal points in the Mass. While it is no longer a universal practice in the Catholic Church, it points to an ancient historical practice that awakens our senses during the liturgy.

Bells were an integral part of divine worship, both to sound a joyful noise before the Lord and to ward off evil spirits. This particular feature of bells is still preserved in the *Roman Ritual* blessing of bells where the priest prays, "At its sound let all evil spirits be driven afar."

As Christianity grew, bells were slowly added to the liturgy in various ways. At first bells were mounted in towers outside of churches to call people to worship, but soon enough handheld bells were used for similar purposes. For example, it is believed St. Patrick used such a hand bell and "whenever Saint Patrick had set up a new Christian community or parish somewhere in Ireland, he would choose one of his disciples to lead it after he left, and present them with a bell to call the parishioners to prayer, and to use during religious ceremonies."

More in line with the Old Testament, small bells were adapted in Eastern Churches in various ways, such as bells that were attached to the thurible that carried incense used at divine worship.

In the Roman Rite hand bells were eventually used by altar servers to mark important moments during the Mass. It currently remains an option, as it is noted in the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, "A little before the Consecration, if appropriate, a minister rings a small bell as a signal to the faithful. The minister also rings the small bell at each elevation by the Priest, according to local custom" (No. 150).

The bells have great spiritual power and alert our senses to what is unfolding before us. They not only provoke our attention, but are also a "joyous noise" at the pivotal moments in the Mass when God comes down from Heaven and takes the appearance of bread and wine.

It is not meant to be a distraction, but another way to praise God and focus our wandering attention.

<https://aleteia.org/2018/01/18/why-are-bells-sometimes-used-during-mass/>