

Bells in the Catholic Tradition

With the rise of the monasteries in the 5th and 6th centuries in Europe, bells were understood to represent the *Vox Dei*, the voice of God calling the monks and nuns to prayer and work, *ora et labora*. The monastic bells were a reminder of their vow of holy obedience. They stopped all activity to remember the presence of God in their lives.

Bells were also used to mark the Liturgy of the Hours. This sanctification of time taught the faithful about the loving relationship between human and divine in segments related to the hours of the day and the watches of the night. Each bell and the accompanying prayers contained the mysteries of the faith – unconditional love of a parent God for God's children.

Surrounding villagers would stop in the fields and barns to recall God's faithful and loving promise of salvation. The holy hour of Vespers, when the sun sets and night, the harbinger of evil, began its journey across the land was an important event in the life of the believer. The Angelus prayers prayed at these bells, dispelled the fears associated with the encroaching darkness. Vespers prayers urged the faithful to remain steadfast and vigilant as the nighttime advanced believing that *Phos Hilaron*, Christ Our Light, would conquer darkness and evil as the Incarnate Savior conquered sin and death.

O Light gladsome of the holy glory of the Immortal Father,
the Heavenly, the Holy, the Blessed, O Jesus Christ,

Having come upon the setting of the sun, having seen the light of the evening,
we praise the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit: God.

Worthy it is at all times to praise Thee in joyful voices,
O Son of God, Giver of Life, for which the world glorifies Thee.

As morning dawned, the bells rang out the hour of Lauds, bespeaking the promise of salvation to the entire countryside. God keeps God's promises.

Medieval communities used bells to mark significant occurrences in the lives of the folks, death, birth and festival. With the institution of the great Catholic centers of learning connected to the monasteries, university bells marked the rising of students, the hours of the day, class time, prayer time, time for retiring and the joy of commencement.

Modern carillons in communities, especially at universities all over the world, carry on this tradition marking both sacred and secular elements of the day and the life of the people. Carillons with ranks of metal cast bells are the biggest musical instruments in the world. The new Barry University Carillon, a gift of the Bevilacqua Family Living Trust in memory of Dr. Michael and Eleanor Bevilacqua, is an electronic carillon used to mark the events of Barry University life and to remind us of the presence of God in the Barry community.

Those who tell the stories of the early days of Barry College tell of the Sister who rang the bell in the tower of *Cor Jesu* Chapel from a rope hanging down from high in the belfry to call the

women and Adrian Dominican Sisters to class and to prayer, to rising and at close of day. During the planning for the new Barry Carillon, evidence of the attachment for the roped bell was found in the tower, but the bell itself has been lost in the mists of Barry's history.

May the voice of God in the Barry community remind us that our saving God is always present in good times and challenging times, that the Incarnate God is as close to us as the next human and that God will always be God for us – as it was and always will be.

Vocatus atque non vocatus Deus aderit

Bidden or not bidden, God is present

Thomas Severino

Our thanks go to Thomas Severino, Institutional Advancement Associate Vice President, for graciously writing this article in support of our 2012 Founders' Week celebration and the first public playing of Barry University's Bevilacqua Family Carillon.