

From the U. S. Catholic Magazine.

Origin and Blessing of Bells.

The use of Bells is very ancient in the Church, and may be traced to a period anterior to the eighth century. It is uncertain, however, by whom they were invented. Some writers contend that they were first used by St. Paulinus, bishop of Nola, in the fifth century; an opinion which is scarcely provable, as that prelate makes no mention of bells in the description of his church which he has transmitted to posterity. It is asserted by others that they were introduced by Pope Sabinius, the successor of Gregory the Great. Venerable Bede assures us that towards the close of the seventh century, large bells were cast in Campania, and from this circumstance acquired the name of *Campana* in Latin. Bells of a smaller, or tinkling instruments, (*tininnabula*), were in use long before the Christian era, as is attested in the twenty-eighth chapter of Exodus, and in the writings of Suetonius, Ovid, and Tibullus. The Romans used them in order to notify the people of the opening of the markets, and of other occasions. These instruments very probably suggested the idea of bells of greater dimensions.

During the first three ages of Christianity, the faithful, compelled as they were to screen themselves from persecution, had no public signal for the performance of their religious worship. But when the Church obtained her freedom under Constantine, it is likely that some method was adopted of publicly convening the faithful to the offices of religion; and it is supposed that the first means resorted to for this purpose was the use of wooden mallets or rattles.* The wooden mallet is retained to the present day among the Greeks. In certain monasteries, the inmates were assembled by the sound of the trumpet; in others by the chanting of *alleluias*. But the invention and introduction of the larger bell gradually suspended all these imperfect signals, and in the tenth century its use became general.

With the use of bells was introduced the erection of belfries for the purpose of giving to the former a more advantageous position; and hence those lofty and massive towers which surmounted the churches of the middle ages, and which were destined to contain bells of various dimensions.

The blessing or consecration of these instruments which were intended to convene the faithful for the worship of the Almighty, or to perform other offices connected with the public welfare, was a natural consequence of their sacred and benevolent destination, and its advantages may be easily understood by those who do not deny the efficacy of prayer, in averting many of the evils to which we are exposed, and in drawing upon us the blessings of heaven.

"When man fell from God by sin, his whole nature became corrupt and rebellious; and at the same time, partly as a consequence, and partly as a punishment, even inanimate nature became disorganised with him. In the original formation of creatures, they had been created good, absolutely and relatively good; they were subservient to the wants of man, and destined to administer to his comforts. But sin disturbed this benevolent arrangement. And the devil, availing himself of this disturbance, has converted God's creatures into instruments of temptation and aggression; while man himself has played into the tempter's hands, and abused those same creatures for every lawless and vicious purpose.

"St. Paul, in the eighth chapter of his Epistle to the Romans, announces this melancholy degradation of the inanimate world, and its unwilling subservience to vanity, that is, to the malicious hostility of the devil, and the wicked propensities of man; and he represents them as in a state of indignant impotence at their being made instruments of offence against their common Creator. For we know that every creature groaneth and travaileth in pain even until now. For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly but by reason of him that made it subject, in hope. For the creature also shall be delivered from the servitude of corruption into the liberty of the glory of the children of God." (Romans viii, 20, &c.) Meanwhile, however, and awaiting this happy restoration of all things, the same apostle observes in another place that "every creature of God is good" when "sanctified by the word of God and

player;" (Tim. iv;) and in this he approves a practice which the Church has ever since adopted, as her most ancient rituals and eulogies attest, of blessing, with religious invocation, all the ordinary materials of life. She blesses the houses in which we dwell, the ships in which we sail, the fire with which we are warmed, the bread which we eat, the water which we drink, the animals on which we feed, the clothes which we wear, the banners under which we fight, the arms we employ, the fields which we cultivate, and the crops which we raise upon them. By her holy prayers and exorcisms she changes, as it were, the moral character of these things. She deprives them of their liability to mischief and abuse, which the devil's malice and men's passions are disposed to give them, and restores them to their proper rank of utility, and religious subserviency for which they were originally created.

"But in doing this the Church does not believe, neither does she teach her children to believe, that any thing which she has blessed possesses any virtue in itself, independent of the will or of the power of God; but full of confidence in Him, who has blessed us with spiritual blessings in Christ, and whose will, as St. Paul proclaims in his Epistle to the Ephesians, is 'to re-establish all things in Christ that are in heaven and on earth,' she devoutly prays that God would revoke, in regard of these his creatures, the malediction which our sins have forced him to pronounce upon them; that he would once more give them his blessing, so that when we use them they may not prove hurtful to our bodies, or prejudicial to our souls; that they may never minister to our ambition, our avarice, or concupiscence, but that they may become excitements to gratitude, and occasions to bless and praise his holy name.

"These principles will explain the ordinary benedictions of the Church as applicable to objects of familiar use amongst us. But there are occasions when she withdraws certain objects from all profane and secular purposes, and devotes them altogether to the purposes of religion. Then her ceremonies are more imposing, her prayers more solemn and multiplied, and she employs a holier material in blessing them, the unction of oil and crism. This she denominates a *consecration*; and in this manner she consecrates churches and altars, chalices and patens, and the bells that are 'to praise God in their high places,' and to toll for his exclusive worship.

"Now, to speak only of the last,—as being the immediate object before us,—the bell has long been considered by the Church in point of material, as the noblest herald in her service, as the trumpet to summon her children to their holy duties, to admonish them to lift up their hearts to God, to bow down their heads to adore his awful mysteries, to bless his holy name, to implore his help in their necessities, and to pray for the living and the dead. In the sublime language of her liturgy which the bishop recites in her name, she prays that 'He who stilled by his voice the troubled sea, would vouchsafe to rise up to the help of his people: that he would shed upon this instrument the dew of his grace, that he would give a virtue to its sound that should scare away the enemy, and strengthen the faith of his Christian people. That as David's harp drew down the Holy Spirit, and as the thunder of the Lord thundered on the adversaries when Samuel offered up the holocaust of the Lamb, so when the sound of this metal shall move upon the air, that troops of angels may storm around the church, and guard her believing children with an everlasting protection.' These are the benefits, spiritual and temporal, which the Church prays for, and hopes to receive, not from the bell itself, but from the *sound* of the bell, or the *tinkling* of the bell, but, on occasion of its use, from Him who employs the humblest instruments in the performance of his greatest mercies.

"Now the ceremonies which she employs in its benediction are these. She commences with certain select psalms, to implore the merciful protection of God, 'from whom proceedeth every good gift,' both in time and in eternity. Then she blesses water and salt, emblems of purity and wisdom, and having mingled them together, she washes the entire surface of the metal, both within and without. Now, inasmuch as the bell is symbolical of what the Christian ought to be an occasion of its summons, this ceremony points out the necessity of inward purity, as well as outward sanctity, and teaches us that while we labor

to exhibit nothing in our exterior but what is edifying to our neighbor, and conducive to virtue, we should so carefully regulate the inward man that nothing may subsist there but what conscience can approve, and what God may behold with complacency.

"Next, the bishop makes upon it the sign of the cross,—that holy sign which shall appear in the heavens when the Lord shall come to judgment. And then with the holy oil, the *Oleum Informorum*, he seven times anoints it on the outside, and four times in the inside with the sacred crism. The unction of oil is the symbol of grace which softens the asperities of the law, and makes the cross of Christ sit easier on our shoulders, at the same time that it strengthens the soul in her fearful conflicts with Satan, with the world, and her own unruly passions. The seven crosses, which are traced on the outside, bespeak the dauntless courage of the Christian. That so far from blushing at the practices of his religion, it is his duty to bear it visibly about him, and to glory, with the great apostle, that he carries the stigmata of Jesus Christ on his person; and this so effectually, that his character of Catholic may never be mistaken, but that by the modesty of his deportment, the wisdom of his words, by the sobriety of his tongue, the temperance of his habits, by his patience and forbearance, and his quiet acquiescence in the holy will of Providence, the world may recognise him for what he is, a worthy disciple of the holiest of Masters. Finally, as the quality of oil is to penetrate even metals, it teaches that he should be thoroughly imbued with the spirit of his master Christ, so that whilst he outwardly bears about him the mortification of Jesus, he may inwardly encourage his love for his precepts, an affection for his sufferings, and be, both in heart and mind, a devoted servant of him who 'hath anointed us in Christ, who hath also sealed us, and given the pledge of the Spirit in our hearts.' (2 Cor. i. 22). And this interior unction of the Holy Spirit is shadowed out by the four inward applications of the holy crism, on occasion of which the Church prays that all who assemble at the sound, may surmount all temptations of the enemy, and diligently pursue the maxima and precepts of their holy faith.

"And here it may occur to be asked, why the number of crosses and anointings, should be precisely seven, and four, neither more nor less. Every one who is at all conversant with the holy Scriptures and the writings of the Fathers, knows well that there is a mysterious character attaching to the number seven, a character of completion and perfection.

"Now as the material bell is the voice of the Church, and whilst it summons to the preaching, it illustrates the spirit and the progress of the Gospel, these seven external anointings may seem to imply the seven-fold gifts of the Holy Spirit enumerated by the prophet Isaiah, *The septiformis munera*, &c., and the four anointings with crism, in the inner side, at the four divisions where the tongue or the hammer is made to strike, will apply signify the preaching of the Church, and the general diffusion of the Gospel from its centre to the four quarters of the globe. *In omni terram exivit sonus eorum, et in fines orbis terre verba eorum.*"

To be Continued.

VENERATION OF ANGELS.—The October No. of the Gospel Messenger contains a "Sermon for the festival of St. Michael and all Angels," from which we make the following extract:—

"Such are the evidences, that the angels entertain a lively interest in human concerns. And as we not now prepared to give an answer, or rather to assent to the declaration implied in the inquiry of St. Paul, 'are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?'"

"Let us briefly apply the subject: As the angels bear such a relation to mankind, as they ever have sympathized with our race, even from the creation, when we are told they shouted for joy, and have performed for us valuable services, is it not reasonable, is it not proper and the dictate of gratitude, to honor them just as we do human benefactors, regarding them of course as instruments of the divine

bounty, and through them looking up to him who is the author of every good gift?"

Nothing is said of the Invocation of Angels—but two points are acknowledged to be based on Scripture.—1.—That the Angels know what occurs on earth, and 2.—That they are to be honoured. Had the preacher referred to Zachary 1. 12: "And the Angel of the Lord answered and said; O Lord of Hosts, how long, wilt thou not have mercy on Jerusalem, and the cities of Judah, with which thou hast been angry? This is now the seventieth year," he might have added, that besides their "usual manner" of benefiting man by conveying to him messages of comfort and hope and monition from the Almighty, angels also pray to God in his behalf. This we apprehend was omitted as a savouring too strongly of Popery.

Angels know what occurs on earth—even to the secrets of man's heart—his repentance. Such a knowledge therefore does not imply the Divine attribute of omniscience. Why therefore do Episcopalians charge Catholics with idolatry in asking the prayers of Angels and of Saints who are as Christ tells us, "as the Angels of God in heaven."—Math. xxii. 30. Is it in holding that they pray to God, or in believing that their prayers are asked? Error is never consistent.—U. S. C. Miscellany.

ARCHCONFRATERNITY OF THE MOST HOLY AND IMMACULATE HEART OF MARY FOR THE CONVERSION OF SINNERS.—The pious parish priest of a poor church called *Notre Dames des Victoires*, situated in the very midst of the dissipation of Paris, being afflicted at the utter neglect of religious duty on the part of the most of his parishioners, began in December, 1836, some pious exercises directed to obtain the conversion of sinners, through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin. In January, 1837, the society was formally commenced, and its fruits were observable in the paschal communions, which increased in that year from 720 to 9950. The Holy See formally approved of the pious Association, by a Brief, dated 24th April, 1838. Already 2382 subordinate confraternities have been formed, 522 of which are out of France in various countries of Europe, and in Asia, and in Eastern Oceanica, and America. The number of members inscribed in the Register at Paris, up to October of last year, was 292,856, of whom 127,763 were men. Numerous and extraordinary conversions have been the result of the prayers of this Society, many of which are narrated in the Manual, first published in 1839, and which has already gone through nine editions. A branch confraternity has been established in St. Mary's church, of this city, and power has been given to erect branches throughout the diocese, with the permission of the Vice President, appointed by the Bishop conformably to powers communicated by the Director, Mr. Dufrechot Desgenettes. The rapid diffusion of this pious Association is for us an indication that God will speedily grant many and extraordinary graces through the intercession of the Ever-blessed Virgin. We regard this union of prayers as a most powerful means for drawing our erring brethren to the unity of the church.—*Catholic Herald*.

* The wooden rattle is still used in many places, during the three days of Holy Week, when the bell remains silent.

* Vid. Pontificals, sub finem.

* Discourse of the Rev. Dr. Weeden.