



Digital Commons@

Loyola Marymount University
LMU Loyola Law School

Spiritual Essays

Center for Ignatian Spirituality

2006

Church bells

Fr. Randy Roche

Loyola Marymount University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.lmu.edu/spiritualessays>



Part of the [Catholic Studies Commons](#), and the [Religious Thought, Theology and Philosophy of Religion Commons](#)

Repository Citation

Roche, Fr. Randy, "Church bells" (2006). *Spiritual Essays*. 387.

<https://digitalcommons.lmu.edu/spiritualessays/387>

This Essay is brought to you for free and open access by the Center for Ignatian Spirituality at Digital Commons @ Loyola Marymount University and Loyola Law School. It has been accepted for inclusion in Spiritual Essays by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons@Loyola Marymount University and Loyola Law School. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@lmu.edu.

Church Bells

In busy, fast-growing urban areas, not many of us encounter the ringing of a large bronze bell that resonates through our bodies and also stirs our spirits. Few churches now make use of real bells, having replaced them with electronic systems. Where do we find contemporary experiences in which our bodily senses are affected at the same time as our spirits?

In our culture we are surrounded by sound, some of it loud, from movies, entertainment centers, concerts, parties, and personal headsets attached to a variety of electronic sources. But our bodies are more than a collection of sensors. We want to resonate with something that involves both spirit and body together, to have experiences that we can perceive with our bodily senses and that also transcend them.

The sound of church bells, in a context of faith, often did reverberate through the hearers, evoking not just the recognition of a time signal announcing an event, but also providing a sensitivity to the presence of God, or to a movement of the spirit within them. Physical sensations and spirituality were compatible elements for those with open ears and hearts. We have the same needs and capacities today.

If we know what we are looking for, we have a much better chance of finding what we seek than if we go about with a vague desire for "something more." If we want experiences of transcendence, we might stand near the ringing of a big church bell, or, we might, for example, join a group of people who agree to pray together, and to become centered and focused on our bodies as temples of Spirit. Our bodies can resonate with stillness as well as with loud sounds.

If we seek to meet God, we cannot know when or to what degree we might have experiences that literally shake us or that move us deeply, but we can be certain that we will be affected in some way. Many people report sensations of warmth throughout their bodies when they have turned their whole attention to God and to the experience of being in the same space and time as their creator, lover, and friend. God's love is more powerful than any force on earth, and can touch body, mind, and spirit all at once. When we are open to Love, and read a Scripture passage, or look at an infant, or gaze up to the stars, we will often be affected in our physical senses as well as in our hearts. If tears sometimes come to our eyes when we become aware of our

connections with realities about us, we have probably encountered both a gift and the Giver of all good gifts.

When we spend some of our valuable time on quiet availability to the Spirit who is present in everything and in everyone, we will often discover that that our attitude has changed from self-centered negativity to outward looking care and concern, or that the time we were praying has passed quickly without our being aware. The affects upon us of meeting the Transcendent vary from person to person and moment to moment, but each of us comes away enlivened to some degree: sometimes we are "shaken up" and at other times, brought into deep peace. Busy people often report trying to pray at the end of the day, but falling asleep. Rather than having missed out on a positive experience, reflection might reveal that God who loves us and knows us perfectly, can move in us to bring about a state of peacefulness, followed seamlessly with restful and restorative sleep. Contact with God affects both spirit and body, sometimes quite gently, and wholly according to our needs.

The desire to have an experience of both spirit and body does not create the experience. We can turn on the switch to the finest of entertainment centers, and cause our eyes and ears to be filled with sensations, but spirit, like love, moves only within a context of freedom. By entering a time and place of quiet, we will often find that our physical senses and our spirits become unified, and that we become satisfied. "Church bells" are all around us, if we choose to "hear" with our hearts.