SILENT HOMILIES

The Bell That Stops the Day

Why the Church still rings the Angelus



Silent Homilies

Little Treasures

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Before You Begin

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This is not a long book, and it is not meant to be. The best Catholic treasures are often small enough to carry and large enough to change the way we notice a sound we already knew.

What follows is a prayer most Catholics can hum without knowing they know it, and a bell most villages used to obey three times a day. The Angelus is not a hymn for specialists. It is six sentences and three Hail Marys, hung on a bronze tongue in a tower, so that ordinary people in ordinary weather would remember that God once asked a girl a question, and she said yes.

Read it if the bells near you have gone quiet. Read it if they still ring and you no longer know why you stop, or why you do not. These pages are a walk through a custom that once stopped ploughs, kitchens and city streets, and can still stop a person standing at a sink.

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Chapter 1

Why a Bell at All

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Before cheap clocks sat on every mantel, a parish needed a voice that could travel. The church tower was that voice. It told a village when to rise, when to bury, when to run for a fire, and when a soul had left a body. A bell is not decoration. It is a public sentence spoken in a language nobody has to learn. You do not need Latin, or even faith, to know that the parish is saying something. You only need ears.

The Angelus borrowed that older office and gave it a particular job. Three times a day the bronze was not announcing a death or a wedding. It was announcing an old conversation: an angel, a girl in Nazareth, and a Child who would be God with us. People in fields and workshops could not get to Mass at noon. They could still drop a tool for the length of three Hail Marys. That was the pastoral point. People could not always leave work for Mass. The prayer came to them instead.

Christianity does not only happen in a sanctuary. It happens where wheat is cut and bread is baked, if someone will give those places a signal. The bell was the signal, and the prayer was short on purpose. A long office would have been a luxury the field could not afford. A short one could be said with dirty hands. That is not a small thing. Mary did not receive Gabriel in the Temple. Nazareth was an ordinary house, and the Incarnation means that God entered human work, kitchens, workshops, pregnancies, meals and exhaustion. The Angelus is the Church refusing to leave that news indoors.

If the bells near you now only ring for funerals, the parish has not become more spiritual. It has become quieter about the Incarnation.

Reflection

A bell does something a noticeboard cannot do. It finds you where you are. You may be halfway through a job, or arguing, or simply not thinking about God at all, and the sound still arrives. That is why the Church liked bronze. It did not ask whether you were in the mood. It told you the hour had come.

The short prayer is part of the same mercy. God did not become man in a ceremony that only the learned could follow. He became man in a town most of the empire ignored, and the Church has tried, at her best, to keep that news small enough to carry. Dirty hands are not a problem for the Angelus. They are almost the point. Work is one of the places the Word chose to dwell.

If your own day has no tower, the question is still the same. Where does the news of Nazareth reach you? A kitchen, a ward, a classroom, a car between two jobs: these are not lesser rooms. They are the rooms the Incarnation already entered. The bell, when we have one, is only the servant of that fact.

And if the only bell left in the parish is the funeral bell, do not despise it. Grief is allowed a voice. But a Catholic tower has more than one sentence. The Angelus is the sentence about life entering the world. A parish that can still say both is telling the truth about the faith.

A Short Prayer

Lord, who once used a voice in Nazareth, use even a rusty bell, if that is what we have. Amen.

Chapter 2

Three Hours, One Sentence

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The traditional hours are dawn, noon and dusk, roughly six, twelve and six, though a winter parish and a summer parish have never agreed on what dawn looks like. The point was never a stopwatch. The point was to cut the day into three, so that work would not swallow the morning, the midday and the evening without a seam of prayer.

Monks and clergy already marked the day with regular hours of prayer. The Angelus eventually gave ordinary working people a much shorter way of letting prayer interrupt the day. A ploughman was not expected to keep Terce and Sext. Three pauses were enough. The Church has often been willing to make a prayer short enough for a working body to carry. That is not a weaker prayer. It is a decision about who the prayer is for.

The same prayer is said at each ringing. Saying it again is not laziness. The Incarnation is worth repeating more than it is worth varying. Morning, midday and evening are three different weathers in a human life. The sentence does not change, because the fact does not change. The Word was made flesh. That remains true when you are tired, when you are hungry, and when you are walking home.

If you can only keep one of the three, keep noon. It is the hour when the day is most sure of itself and least inclined to remember God. A pause then is a small refusal of the idea that work is the only real thing happening. The other two hours matter. Noon is simply the one most of us are most likely to lose.

Reflection

Fixed hours can look fussy until you notice what a day does without them. Work expands. The phone expands. The next task arrives before the last one has been offered to God. The Angelus is a seam. It does not despise the work on either side of it. It stops the day long enough for the day to remember who entered it.

The early Church already knew this instinct. The Acts of the Apostles speak of the hours of prayer, and the psalms were always a way of returning to God at appointed times. Monks kept that pattern with great beauty. The Angelus is the same instinct made small enough for a person who cannot leave the field. Catholicism has room for both the choir and the plough.

Saying the same words three times is a form of trust. We do not need a new sentence at dusk because the news has not become less true since morning. Repetition here is not emptiness. It keeps the Incarnation from becoming yesterday's announcement.

If one hour is all you can keep, keep it without apology. A single pause, honestly made, is more of an Angelus than three perfect recitations that never touch the day. The tower, when it rings, is not grading you. It is reminding you.

A Short Prayer

Jesus, born of Mary, divide my day, so that my work does not eat the hours whole. Amen.

Chapter 3

The Words Themselves

†

The prayer takes its name from its first Latin word. Angelus Domini nuntiavit Mariae: the Angel of the Lord declared unto Mary. Then the answer: And she conceived of the Holy Spirit. A Hail Mary. Behold the handmaid of the Lord. Be it done unto me according to thy word. Another Hail Mary. And the Word was made flesh. And dwelt among us. A third Hail Mary. Then a short concluding prayer, asking that we, who have known the Incarnation by this greeting, may be brought by the Cross and Passion to the glory of the Resurrection.

That is the whole thing. It is Luke's first chapter, folded small enough for a field. Gabriel speaks. Mary consents. The Word takes flesh. The Church does not add a fourth mystery because there is no fourth fact of that size. Everything else in the faith hangs on those three lines. The Cross, the Resurrection, the Church, the sacraments: all of them suppose that God has already come among us as a child.

People sometimes treat the Angelus as a Marian extra, a pretty custom for May. Read the verbs again. The centre of the prayer is not Mary's fame. It is Mary's yes, and the Child who arrives because of it. She is honoured because of what God did through her, not instead of Him. Catholics do not praise a door for being the house. We thank it for opening, and then we go in to the One who came through it.

If you have never said it slowly, say it once today without the bell. Speak the three couplets as if you had not heard them since childhood. Notice which line you hurry. For many of us it is the middle one, the consent. We like the angel's news. We are less eager to become the person who says, be it done.

Reflection

Luke's account is quieter than a poster. Gabriel is sent. Mary is troubled. She asks how this can be. Then she consents. The Angelus keeps that order, and the order matters. God does not force the door. He asks. Mary's yes is free, and it is also the most fruitful human word ever spoken, because the Word becomes flesh through it.

That is why the Hail Mary sits between the sentences. We are not decorating the Gospel with a favourite prayer. We are answering the news in the Church's own voice, the way Elizabeth answered when Mary came to her. The Hail Mary is Scripture and the Church's prayer held together. Said here, it is a way of staying with the scene instead of hurrying past it.

The last couplet is John's, not Luke's. "The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us." The Angelus joins the two Gospels without a lecture. Announcement, consent, dwelling: that is the shape of Christmas, said in under a minute. A field could hold it. A kitchen can still hold it.

If the middle line is the one you hurry, stay with it tomorrow. "Be it done unto me according to thy word" is not only Mary's sentence. It is the shape of every Christian yes, said in a particular hour, with the day still unfinished. The Angelus is practice for that kind of answer.

A Short Prayer

Holy Mary, who answered once, help us not to mumble the answer we inherited. Amen.

Chapter 4

When We Bend the Knee

†

At the words "And the Word was made flesh," the custom is to genuflect, or, if you are in a field or a kitchen, at least to bow. The body is being asked to agree with the sentence. God did not become an idea. He became small enough to be carried. A Catholic body is allowed to know that, and to show that it knows.

The genuflection is the same gesture used before the tabernacle, and the likeness is not an accident, but it is not an identity either. The Angelus and the Eucharist belong closely together. At Nazareth, the Word truly became flesh. That happened once. At Mass, that same Jesus Christ, already incarnate, crucified and risen, becomes sacramentally present to us under the appearances of bread and wine. We are not watching a second Incarnation. We are meeting the same Lord. The body that has learned to bow at noon will often find it more natural to bow at the consecration. Habits travel.

In Eastertide the Church changes the prayer, and we will come to that. Even then the instinct remains: the news is large enough to interrupt posture. Medieval guilds and farmhands understood this without a lecture. They stopped because the bell told them the news was not only a story about the past. It was still the reason the day had a centre.

If genuflecting in an office doorway would only make a scene, bow your head. If kneeling would be impractical, a small inclination is enough. The important thing is not making a show of the gesture. It is allowing the body, even for a moment, to join the prayer. A three-second bow at a desk is a more honest Angelus than a perfect curtsy performed as theatre.

Reflection

Catholicism has never been content to leave faith in the head. We kneel, stand, sign ourselves, bow, and genuflect, because the Word became flesh and the body is not an embarrassment. The Angelus makes that claim in the middle of a working day. For a few seconds the body is allowed to know what the mouth is saying.

The distinction from the Eucharist is worth keeping clear, because the two mysteries are close and not the same. At Nazareth, God took a human nature. At Mass, the risen Christ gives us His Body and Blood under the signs of bread and wine. One is the coming. The other is the abiding presence of the One who came. The Angelus remembers the coming. The altar gives us the Lord who came. A parish that loves both will not confuse them.

A bow in a kitchen is not a lesser kind of prayer. It is a small agreement. You are saying, with the neck if not with a sermon, that this news is large enough to interrupt the task. God is not marking the elegance of the gesture. He is receiving the attention.

If you have never bowed at that line, try it once when nobody is watching. You are not hiding the prayer. You are agreeing with it. A body that has practised the news will recognise it more quickly when the bell, or the consecration, asks for it again.

A Short Prayer

Word made flesh, teach my body the news my mouth already knows.
Amen.

Chapter 5

How the Prayer Grew

†

The Angelus did not arrive complete on a single morning. Like most Catholic customs that last, it accumulated. By the thirteenth century many places rang a bell at dusk, and people said three Hail Marys. That evening ringing is the oldest layer. It sat near the curfew bell, when fires were covered and streets grew dangerous. Prayer at dusk was not a mood. It was how a town ended the day without pretending it had been in charge.

The morning ringing came next. Franciscan houses, and then many of the parishes that learned from them, began to greet the Incarnation at first light as well. Dawn already belonged to the Resurrection in the Church's imagination. Adding Mary's yes to the first hour of work was a way of starting the labour on the right story. Later kings and bishops encouraged the morning bell. The custom was spreading, not being invented in one decree.

Noon arrived last, and for a while for a more urgent reason, which belongs to the next chapter. What matters here is the shape. Evening, morning, midday: the three greetings grew toward one another until they were one prayer said three times. Pope John XXII, in the early fourteenth century, encouraged the evening devotion and attached an indulgence to it. Later popes blessed the wider pattern. By the eighteenth century the form we still use was settled enough to print.

If you like clean origins, this history will frustrate you, and that is no bad thing. A prayer that remembers the Incarnation should be allowed to grow the way a village grows, until the whole place knows what the sound means.

Reflection

A custom that grows is not a weaker custom. The Creed grew. The liturgical year grew. The Angelus grew. What stayed steady was the news: an angel, a girl, the Word made flesh. The hours around that news were a pastoral discovery. Evening first, because the day was ending and people already stopped for the curfew. Morning next, because work was beginning. Noon last, because the middle of labour is the easiest place to forget God.

John XXII did not sit down and compose the booklet we now call the Angelus. He encouraged a devotion that was already being said, and he gave it the Church's blessing in the form of an indulgence. That is how a great deal of Catholic prayer becomes public. Someone is already doing it. The Church notices, steadies it, and hands it on.

There is a freedom in that history. You are not failing the Angelus if your parish never had a fourteenth-century bell. You are joining a prayer that took centuries to find its three hours. The words are older than the timetable. Luke and John were there long before a pope attached an indulgence to the dusk ringing.

If the slow growth comforts you, let it. God took years to become a man in Nazareth, in the ordinary sense that the child grew. The Church has taken longer still to learn how to remember that morning. Patience with a custom is a kind of patience with ourselves.

A Short Prayer

Lord, who took years to become a man in Nazareth, be patient with the slow way Your Church learns to remember You. Amen.

Chapter 6

The Noon Bell and Belgrade

†

In the summer of 1456 the Ottoman army stood before Belgrade. Europe was tired and divided. A Franciscan preacher named John of Capistrano, already old, and the Hungarian commander John Hunyadi held the city against odds that still look severe on a map. On 22 July the siege broke. The news travelled faster than most victories do.

Pope Callixtus III, a Spaniard who had only recently taken the chair of Peter, had already asked Christendom to pray. He ordered bells at noon, and prayers for those defending the frontier. After Belgrade the noon ringing did not simply retire. It stayed, and over the next generations it was joined to the older Hail Marys of morning and evening. What had begun as an urgent plea became the middle hour of the Angelus. The historians are right to keep those two stages distinct. The noon bell was not born as a complete Angelus. It grew into one.

This is a detail almost nobody now attaches to twelve o'clock. A person checking a phone at noon is standing, without knowing it, in a line that runs back to a frightened city on the Danube and a pope who thought prayer and bronze might still do something. The Church has often kept an hour after the crisis that created it. She does the same with Good Friday. The danger passes. The memory is allowed to stay, because the prayer was never only about the danger.

St John of Capistrano died a few months after the victory, on 23 October 1456. Hunyadi died of plague within weeks of the siege, on 11 August. The bell outlived both of them. The people who asked for the noon prayer did not get to hear it become a custom. We did. The least we can do is find out why the tower still speaks at twelve, if it does.

Reflection

Most of us do not hear a noon bell and think of a siege. That is understandable. Customs outlive their first occasion, and they are allowed to. The useful question is what the Church decided to keep. She did not keep a war. She kept an hour of prayer. The Hail Marys that later filled that hour were already about Nazareth, not about a fortress on the Danube.

Callixtus asked for bells and intercession. Capistrano preached and encouraged the defenders. Hunyadi commanded. None of the three is the author of the Angelus, and the book should not make them so. They are the reason one of its three hours has a particular story. A Catholic can be grateful for that story without turning the prayer into a memorial of a battle.

There is something humbling in the dates. The two Johns were dead before the custom had settled into the form we know. A great deal of the Church's ordinary prayer is like that. Somebody asks. Somebody else, years later, is the person who actually says it. We are often the second person. The noon bell is a reminder that we inherit prayers we did not invent.

If twelve o'clock is only a notification on your phone, you have not left that inheritance. You have only lost the bronze. The hour is still there. A pause at noon, even a short one, is a way of standing in the line without pretending you were at Belgrade.

A Short Prayer

Christ, who heard the prayers of a frightened city, let noon find us on our feet and not only on our screens. Amen.

Chapter 7

The Field That Bowed

†

In the 1850s a French painter named Jean-François Millet worked on a canvas that would travel farther than most sermons. He called it The Angelus. Two peasants stand in a potato field at dusk. A fork is stuck in the soil. A basket sits between them. Both figures bow. On the horizon, small as a fact you might miss, there is a church steeple.

Millet later said he was remembering the bell of his own childhood, when his grandmother made everyone stop. Critics argued about whether the couple were praying or merely tired. The argument is almost the point. From a distance, prayer and exhaustion can look like the same posture. The Church has never been ashamed of that resemblance. The Angelus was made for people who were tired.

The painting hung in the imagination of Catholic Europe for a century. Schoolchildren who had never seen Barbizon knew the silhouette. It taught, without a catechism, that the faith belongs in working clothes. It also taught something sadder as the decades passed. The field emptied. The steeple stayed. Fewer people knew why the two figures had stopped.

If you look the picture up after this chapter, do not treat it as nostalgia. Treat it as a question. What in your day still has the authority to make you put the tool down? If the answer is only a notification, the tower has been replaced, and not by something kinder. Millet was not painting a golden age. He was painting a pause that a grandmother had insisted on.

Reflection

The small steeple is the part of the painting that does the theological work. The field is large. The figures are tired. The church is far away, and still the bell reaches them. That is the Catholic claim about sacred time. It does not stay inside the building. It crosses the field.

Prayer and exhaustion looking alike is a mercy, not a confusion. A person who has been digging potatoes does not need a second face for God. The bow is enough. The Angelus never asked the poor to become elegant before they were allowed to answer Gabriel. It asked them to stop.

There is a sadness in the later fame of the picture, and it should be named honestly. A painting can keep a custom in the memory after the custom has left the field. That is better than total forgetfulness, and it is not the same as prayer. Millet's canvas is a question, not a substitute. The steeple in the distance is only doing its work if somebody, somewhere, is still stopping.

Your field may be a desk, a ward, or a school corridor. The question does not change. Is there anything in the day that is allowed to interrupt you with the news of Nazareth? If there is, you are closer to those two figures than the century between you would suggest.

A Short Prayer

Our Lady of the fields, teach us to stop when the news of Your Son is rung, even if the field is now a desk. Amen.

Chapter 8

The Prayer That Changes Colour

†

From Easter Sunday until Pentecost the Church sets the Angelus aside and says the Regina Caeli instead. Queen of Heaven, rejoice, alleluia. The Son you were worthy to bear has risen, as He said. The substitution is not a slight. It is a liturgical instinct as old as knowing that you do not wear mourning to a wedding.

The Angelus is an Incarnation prayer. Easter is a Resurrection morning. For those fifty days the Church wants the first sentence in the mouth to be joy, not only the old announcement. Mary is still there. The angel is implied. The Child is now the Risen One. The bell, if the parish is awake, still rings. The words put on white.

Some places forget the change and keep saying the Angelus through Easter week, the way some houses keep a purple cloth on a statue because nobody took it down. It is not a crime. It is a missed feast. Learning the Regina Caeli is a small competence, like knowing when to stand at a wedding. The words are shorter than the Angelus. Children can learn them in an afternoon.

If your parish rings at noon in May and you are unsure which prayer belongs, look at the calendar, not the weather. Eastertide is a date, not a feeling. The tower should know the season even when the people in the street have forgotten the colour of the vestments.

Reflection

The change of prayer is one of the simplest ways the Church teaches the liturgical year. Easter does not set Mary aside. It lets her rejoice. The woman who said yes in Nazareth is the woman who is greeted as Queen of Heaven, because the Son she bore has done what He said He would do. The two prayers are not rivals. They are two seasons of the same story.

Alleluia in the Regina Caeli is not decoration. It is the reason the Angelus steps aside. For fifty days the Church refuses to speak as if the tomb were still the last word. A parish that keeps the Easter words at noon is letting the bell learn the calendar. That is a small and very Catholic competence.

Forgetting the change is understandable. Most of us are not thinking about Pentecost when a phone buzzes at twelve. The remedy is not embarrassment. It is a card by the kettle, or a line in the parish newsletter, or a parent who teaches a child the shorter prayer in an afternoon. Easter is allowed to be easy.

If you say the Angelus by mistake on Easter Monday, God is not offended. Say the Regina Caeli tomorrow. The point of the change is joy, not a test. The tower, and the person, are simply being asked to notice that the story has moved.

A Short Prayer

Queen of Heaven, keep us from saying a winter prayer on a resurrection morning. Amen.

Chapter 9

When the Tower Goes Silent

†

Many towers now stand like unused instruments. Electronic chimes replace bronze, or nothing replaces anything. Neighbours complain about noise. A parish council, tired of complaints, shortens the ringing to Sundays. Then to weddings. Then to nothing. The silence arrives as courtesy and stays as amnesia.

There is a real question of charity here. A night-shift worker, a sick child, a person whose nerves cannot bear a sudden bronze voice: these are not enemies of the Incarnation. A parish that loves its neighbours will think about volume and hour. Six in the morning in a dense street is not the same as six in a village where the animals already know the time. Charity can change the volume. It should not be used as an excuse for forgetting the prayer.

What should not happen is the quiet disappearance of the custom without anyone saying what has been lost. A bell is one of the last truly public Catholic acts. It does not ask permission of a feed. It does not target an audience. It falls on the just and the unjust, the believer and the man who only looks up and thinks, that will be noon then. Mission used to sound like that. A parish can lose the sound and still keep the faith. It should at least know what it has put down.

If your tower cannot ring, you can still keep the hour. A phone alarm labelled Angelus is inelegant and perfectly Catholic. The first Christians had no bells at all. They had hours. The bronze was only ever a servant of the hour. When the servant is dismissed, the hour may remain, if someone will guard it.

Reflection

Silence in a tower is not always a defeat. Sometimes it is kindness to a neighbour who is ill, or to a street that cannot bear six o'clock bronze. The Church has never taught that a bell is a sacrament. She has taught that prayer belongs in the day. If the bell must be quieter, the hour can still be kept by people who know why it used to ring.

The danger is the silence that nobody decided. A custom can vanish between meetings. First the early ringing goes, then the noon, then the memory of what the noon was for. A parish council that talks about the loss has already done something Catholic. It has refused to let courtesy become forgetfulness without a conversation.

A phone alarm is a humble heir of the tower. It will not reach the street. It will reach you. That is enough to begin. The first Christians kept hours without bronze, and the monks kept hours in rooms the village never heard. The Angelus can survive in a pocket if the person carrying the pocket still wants the news of Nazareth.

If you are the person who sets the alarm, you have not solved the parish's question. You have kept your own hour. That is the right size of beginning. Towers are repaired by people who have not yet forgotten what the tower was for.

A Short Prayer

Lord, if our bells are silent, do not let our hours be silent too. Amen.

Chapter 10

Living Between the Rings

†

The Angelus is not a hobby for people who like old sounds. It is a way of refusing to let a day be only a day. Three times, if you can, you remember that history turned on a girl's answer in a town most of her century ignored. Then you pick the tool up again. The picking up is part of the prayer. Christianity does not stay in the pause. It walks back into the furrow.

You do not need a tower. You need a moment you will not negotiate away. Some people keep a small card by the kettle. Some pray it walking between meetings. Popes have said it from a window over St Peter's Square, so that a city could answer in a dozen languages at once. John Paul II turned that Sunday noon into a short word for the world. The custom stretched. The words at the centre did not.

If these pages have done their work, the next time you hear a church bell at twelve you will not only think of the time. You will think of Nazareth, of a tired field in France, of a siege on the Danube, and of a girl who did not know she was about to give the world its Saviour. Then you will bow, or you will not. Either way you will have been told the news again.

That is all a bell can do. The rest is the same work Mary did. Someone has to say yes in a particular hour, with the day still unfinished around them.

Reflection

The pause is not an escape from work. It is the blessing of the work, or at least the refusal to let the work become the only world. Mary returned to an ordinary house after the angel left. The peasants in Millet's field picked up the fork again. A Catholic day is allowed to be mostly work, provided the work is not allowed to be godless by sheer inattention.

The papal window is a large version of a small custom, not a different one. A pope speaking at noon, and a nurse saying three Hail Marys between patients, are answering the same sentences. The size of the gathering is not what makes it the Angelus. The three couplets and the Hail Marys are. Everything else is company.

You may bow, or you may not. This book is not here to judge that. It is here to explain the bell. Once you know what the bell was for, the choice is yours in a way it was not when the sound was only twelve o'clock. Knowledge is not yet prayer. It is the door into prayer.

And the yes, when it comes, will be as local as Mary's. A particular kitchen. A particular ward. A particular unfinished day. That is where the Angelus has always belonged. The tower only ever existed to find those rooms.

A Short Prayer

Angel of the Lord, declare it once more. Mary, lend us your answer. Word made flesh, dwell here until evening. Amen.

A Last Word

†

The bell stops the day so that the day does not stop being about Him.

Keep the book if it helps. Give it to a sacristan who still climbs a stair at noon, or to a neighbour who only knows the sound as twelve o'clock.

May the towers that can still speak, speak. May the hours that have lost their bronze keep their prayer. May none of us walk past the news of Nazareth as if it were only weather.

Sources and Further Reading

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The words of the Angelus follow Luke 1:26–38 and John 1:14, with the Hail Mary between the couplets and a concluding collect. The Regina Caeli replaces the Angelus during Eastertide, from Easter Sunday until Pentecost. The bow or genuflection at "the Word was made flesh" is a custom of the prayer. It is not another Incarnation. At Mass the same Lord becomes sacramentally present under the appearances of bread and wine. The texts are those given in the Church's manual of indulgences.

The evening three Hail Marys are the oldest layer. Pope John XXII encouraged them with an indulgence in the early fourteenth century; the Catholic Encyclopedia summarises the usual evidence, including his grants of 1318 and 1327. The morning ringing spread later, especially through Franciscan houses and later episcopal and royal encouragement. It should not be described as the monastic Hours simply walking out of the cloister.

The noon bell has a separate origin. In 1456 Pope Callixtus III ordered noon bells and prayers during the Ottoman advance, commonly connected with his bull of 29 June. Belgrade was relieved on 22 July 1456. John Hunyadi died on 11 August 1456. St John of Capistrano died on 23 October 1456. The later joining of that noon hour to the Hail Marys of the Angelus should not be collapsed into the one decree.

Jean-François Millet's The Angelus, painted in 1857–1859, is in the Musée d'Orsay. His recollection that it came from the Angelus of his childhood, and from his grandmother stopping the household, is recorded by Alfred Sensier. The Sunday Angelus from the window of the Apostolic Palace is a modern papal custom, made especially familiar by St John Paul II.

Keeping the Bell Ringing

†

A bell may ring for only a few seconds. Keeping it ringing takes a tower, a rope, someone who remembers the hour, and someone who still knows why the hour matters. A Little Treasure is more like that than it looks. The pages are short. The checking is not.

These books remain free to read. No one who has only just learned why the noon bell rings should have to pay before they are allowed to stop and say the prayer. A gift is not payment for these pages. They are already yours.

What the gift pays for is the work behind a short book: reading Luke again, checking what John XXII actually encouraged, separating the siege of Belgrade from the later Angelus, looking twice at a sentence about the Eucharist so that it does not say more than the faith says, then writing, cutting, and taking out a clever line that was only clever. A short book can take a long time to become quiet enough to trust.

If this one has helped you, and if you are able to support the work through the Silent Homilies website, I would be truly grateful. It gives me the time and the books to keep the next bell accurate.

If you cannot give, nothing is owed. Perhaps simply set the Angelus on your phone tomorrow. If one forgotten bell begins ringing again in one person's day, this little book has already done something worthwhile. www.silenthomilies.com

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