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Abp. Burke celebrates Tridentine Mass in St. Peter's

by Cindy Wooden by Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY -- The Gregorian chant of the Tridentine Mass filled the Blessed Sacrament Chapel of St. Peter's Basilica Oct. 18 as U.S. Archbishop Raymond L. Burke, head of the Vatican's highest court, celebrated a pontifical high Mass.

tThe Mass marked the liturgical close of a conference in Rome on Pope Benedict XVI's 2007 apostolic letter, "Summorum Pontificum," which expanded permission for the celebration of the Mass using the 1962 Roman Missal, commonly known as the Tridentine rite.

Cardinal Angelo Comastri, archpriest of St. Peter's Basilica, said in a statement Oct. 19, "The Mass represented an extraordinary event, an event authorized on the occasion of the conference."

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tThe cardinal declined further comment, but another Vatican official said the Mass probably was the first pontifical high Mass using the 1962 rite to be celebrated in St. Peter's Basilica in almost 40 years.

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tThe same official noted that since the publication of "Summorum Pontificum," any priest in good standing has been able to use the 1962 rite to celebrate Mass at one of the side altars or in one of chapels of the basilica. He said there are priests who do so each morning.

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tUnlike a low Mass, a high Mass is sung. Calling a Mass "pontifical" means it is celebrated by a bishop, who is assisted by a deacon and subdeacon. The main text of the liturgy is the same, although the vestments, furnishings and movements are more complex at a pontifical high Mass.

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tEven before "Summorum Pontificum" was published, the Vatican had given limited permission for the celebration of the old Mass in the basilica.

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tIn 2003 the Vatican Secretariat of State published norms for the celebration of Masses in the basilica using the 1962 Missal. The norms set several conditions:

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- The Mass could not be celebrated in the main body of the basilica; a suggested site was the Hungarian Chapel in the grotto below the main church.
 - The public could not be invited and no photographs were to be taken.
 - The priest celebrating the Mass must first receive permission from the Pontifical Commission "Ecclesia Dei," which is responsible for the pastoral care of Catholics attached to the old liturgy.

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tIn his 2007 letter, the pope said the Mass from the Roman Missal in use since 1970 remains the ordinary form of the Mass.

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tThe day before Archbishop Burke celebrated the Mass in St. Peter's Basilica, the Vatican announced that Pope Benedict had named him to be a member of the Congregation for Bishops, the Vatican office that oversees the nomination of bishops and the creation and governance of dioceses.

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