Vatican

Vatican News

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Traditionalist Catholics celebrated news Monday that the Vatican under Pope Leo XIV had given them permission to celebrate the old Latin Mass in St. Peter's Basilica during their upcoming pilgrimage.

U.S. Cardinal Raymond Burke, a figurehead of the conservative and traditionalist wing of the church, will celebrate the Mass on Oct. 25, the pilgrimage organizers said.

The development was significant, given Pope Francis had alienated many traditionalists and conservatives with his yearslong crackdown on the ancient liturgy. His reform greatly restricted its celebration globally and at the Vatican, and fueled conservative opposition to his pontificate.

Burke, who became a high-profile critic of Francis, has met at least twice with Leo in formal audiences, most recently on Aug. 22. Burke was believed to be a key behind-the-scenes player rallying conservative votes in the May conclave that elected the former Cardinal Robert Prevost pope.

Leo has said his aim is unity and reconciliation in the church, and many conservatives and traditionalists have urged him to heal the liturgical divisions that spread over the Latin Mass, especially in the United States, during Francis' 12-year papacy.

Una Voce International, a federation of groups that promote the Latin Mass, is organizing the pilgrimage to Rome. In a statement, it said the green light for Burke to celebrate the Mass in the heart of the Vatican "is the first concrete indication of the attitude of Pope Leo XIV to the Traditional Mass."

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"We are all delighted by this development, which shows Pope Leo's true pastoral heart," Joseph Shaw, president of the federation, said in an email. "More remains to be settled about the place of the traditional Mass in the church, but this is a clear indication that, as we have always desired, we can be united with the pope in our love of the ancient liturgy."

Francis outraged much of the conservative and traditionalist wing of the church in 2021 when he reimposed restrictions on celebrating the old Mass that his conservative predecessor, Pope Benedict XVI, had relaxed. Even though only a small percentage of Catholics celebrate the old rite, Francis said he had to act because its spread was dividing parishes.

Francis said he was responding to "the wishes expressed" by bishops around the world who had responded to a Vatican survey. But in recent months, parts of the survey were posted online and suggest the majority of bishops who responded had a generally favorable view of Benedict's reform. They warned that suppressing or weakening it would "do more harm than good" and lead traditionalist Catholics to leave the church and join schismatic groups.

In the year immediately after Francis' crackdown, the annual Latin Mass pilgrims were allowed to celebrate their old liturgy in St. Peter's Basilica as they had done before. But they were prevented from celebrating the Mass in 2023 and 2024, though they were allowed to celebrate prayers there.