

Tridentine Community News

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Tridentine Travelogue: Old St. Mary's, Washington, DC

Not to be confused with Detroit's, or for that matter Cincinnati's, Old St. Mary's, the church of St. Mary, Mother of God in the Chinatown neighborhood of Washington, DC has one of the more interesting congregations among Tridentine communities in North



America. Despite having had three pastors over the last three years, Old St. Mary's has flourished, often with standing-room only Masses.

St. Mary's is one of six churches in the DC area offering indult Masses. Theirs are held on Sundays, Holy Days, and First Saturdays. The present 1890 building is in pristine condition. In the accompanying photo, Cardinal William Baum is seated in the sanctuary and attended, but did not celebrate the Mass.

Stories abound about the interesting coffee hours following Old St. Mary's Tridentine Mass. Robert Bork and Supreme Court Justices Antonin Scalia, Clarence Thomas are regular attendees.



During a memorable visit several years ago while Pat Buchanan was running for President, Mr. Buchanan attended Mass at Old St. Mary's surrounded by Secret Service agents. After Mass, reporters were waiting outside the church for a photo opportunity. Secret Service agents positioned themselves all around Mr. Buchanan, who was standing at the foot of the steps in front of the church. The agents scanned the crowd forming in front of the church. But there was not a single agent remaining inside the church. Not a single person protecting Buchanan from someone who could have opened the center front door of the church from the inside, and done the unthinkable to the Presidential candidate standing just a

few feet in front of it. Certainly a vivid lesson that even an elite police force is not infallible.

Recently, PBS filmed one of the Tridentine Masses at Old St. Mary's for a piece they are preparing should the Motu Proprio be released. By virtue of its location, Old St. Mary's does have a visible, central role in the U.S. Latin Mass scene.

Despite a congregation of up to 400 people, Old St. Mary's only has a sung Mass once per month. Musical talent is not easy to find or cultivate. We should consider ourselves blessed to have a Missa Cantata each and every Sunday here.

Other Beltway Area Masses

The Archdiocese of Washington also permits the Tridentine Mass at the much smaller St. Francis de Sales Church in Benedict, Maryland and Our Lady Queen of Poland in Silver Spring, Maryland.

In 2006, after long being a holdout, the Diocese of Arlington, Virginia authorized two indult Mass sites, at St. Lawrence Church in Alexandria, Virginia and St. John the Baptist Church in Front Royal, Virginia. Both of these churches are more modern than Old St. Mary's but have been retrofitted to accommodate the Traditional Mass. As with their DC sibling, sung Masses are the exception; most Masses will be low Masses.



We must also mention Historic St. Alphonsus Church in Baltimore. An extraordinarily ornate church in a downtown neighborhood past its prime, St. Alphonsus



relies on its Tridentine congregation in conjunction with its Lithuanian parishioners to keep the church viable. The approximately 175 Tridentine attendees are the largest group in the parish. Continuing the DC area theme, St. Alphonsus offers Low Masses and Missa Cantatas on alternating Sundays.

St. Alphonsus is also the home of one of the real characters of the Tridentine Mass scene, Walter Zajac. During a pilgrimage to Rome several years ago, this writer had the privilege of being subjected to a week's worth of Tridentine stand up comedy from this talented man. In the style of Yakov Smirnov, Walt is an unending source of quips that put even the most absurd and grim church politics in perspective.

Questions? Comments? Ideas for a future column? Please e-mail tridnews@stjosaphatchurch.org with your thoughts.