

Pope Benedict's funeral today will make history

VATICAN CITY — For the first time in its modern history, the Catholic Church buried a retired pontiff, following a stripped-down and solemn ceremony Thursday that included a final, indelible gesture: Pope Francis bowing his head and placing his hand on the coffin of Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI before it was carried away.

The requiem Mass, conducted as a heavy fog lifted, used a mix of ancient rituals and new precedents to pay tribute to a figure who transformed the papacy with his decision 10 years ago to abdicate.

The ceremony lacked the noise, the color, the grief and even the bursts of joy that marked the last papal funeral, of John Paul II, in 2005. Benedict's drew 50,000 people — one-sixth of that crowd. It took 90 minutes, half as long. It showed the profound difference between what it means to die as a beloved sitting pope vs. as a retired and controversial one.

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