

Pope St. Pius X

Today, the Church honors Pope Pius X. Born Giuseppe Melchiorre Sarto on June 2, 1835, the future pope was born in a farming village near Venice. He was the second of ten children of a poor family. His father was a mailman and his mother was a dressmaker. It's said that Giuseppe walked 6 kilometers (3.7 miles) to school each day. He once said of his of humble origin, "I was born poor. I lived poor. I will die poor."

Giuseppe felt a call to the priesthood at the age of 11. He studied at the seminary in Padua, Italy, and was known as an exceptional student (first in his class). He was ordained on September 18, 1858, as a priest. He first served as an assistant priest in Tombolo, a farming village, for nine years.

In 1867, Fr. Giuseppe served as pastor of Salzano and remained there for nine years. There, he restored the parish by helping poor farmers and supported the local hospital when a cholera epidemic affected his parishioners. In 1875, he was made canon of the Cathedral and Chancellor of the Diocese of Treviso (north of Venice). He also held the office of rector of the Treviso seminary.

In 1884 Fr. Giuseppe was nominated to be a bishop and eventually created as a cardinal by Pope Leo XIII on June 12, 1893. Three days later he became the Patriarch of Venice. After Pope Leo XIII died on July 20, 1903, Cardinal Sarto was elected on August 4, 1903, and took the name Pope Pius X. He was elected after a four-day conclave during which he won 55 out of 60 votes.

It's said that he was embarrassed by some of the pomp of the papal court. "Look at how they dress me up," he said to an old friend. For Pope Pius X, it was a penance to be forced to accept all the practices of the papal court. He felt led around like the soldiers did for Jesus.

Pope Pius X's motto was to "Restore All Things in Christ." He is sometimes known as the Pope of the Blessed Sacrament as he issued a decree that Holy Communion be received at age 7 instead of 12 or 14. He also advocated receiving Holy Communion frequently, even daily. He once said, "Holy Communion is the shortest and safest way to Heaven."

Pope Pius X reformed the liturgy, promoted clear and simple homilies, and brought Gregorian chant back to Masses. He also battled against the heresy and evils of modernism. He encouraged bible study, and brought about the codification of Canon Law.

This humble pope was known for living a very simple life. On the eleventh anniversary of his election as pope, Europe was plunged into World War I. Pius had seen the war coming, but it essentially killed him. He had said, "This is the last affliction the Lord will visit upon me. I would gladly give my life to save the poor children from this ghastly scourge."

Pius X died on August 20, 1914 of a heart attack and is buried in a simple tomb in St. Peter's Basilica. The Italian press wrote, "Saint is dead." His tombstone is engraved with the words; "Pope Pius X, poor and yet rich, gentle and humble of heart, unconquerable champion of the Catholic Faith, whose constant endeavor it was to renew all things in Christ..." He was beatified in 1951 and canonized in 1954 by Pope Pius XII.

In a private audience with a missionary, Pope Pius X said that St. Thérèse of Lisieux was the "greatest saint of modern times." Today, we thank God for the gift of this poor, humble, and tireless servant of Christ.

~St. Pius X, pray for us!