

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Pius X

Life, prayer, novena and pilgrimage

Feast day: August 21

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IN BRIEF

Saint Pius X

Pope from 1903 to 1914, former country priest, apostle of frequent Communion and of First Communion for children.

Feast day	August 21
Born	June 2, 1835, Riese, Veneto, Italy
Died	August 20, 1914, Vatican City
Canonized	May 29, 1954, by Pope Pius XII
Era	20th century
Patron saint of	first communicants

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Tomb of Saint Pius X in Saint Peter's Basilica in Rome

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Pius X

Saint Pius X, born Giuseppe Sarto in a village of the Veneto region of Italy, is the only pope of the twentieth century to have climbed every step of the ministry one by one: curate, parish priest, canon, bishop, patriarch and finally pope from 1903 to 1914. The son of a poor family, he kept the manners of a country priest on the throne of Peter. He opened wide the access to the Eucharist, allowed children to receive Communion from the age of reason, reformed sacred music and launched the codification of canon law. He died on August 20, 1914, at the start of the First World War, and is celebrated on August 21.

Who was Saint Pius X?

Giuseppe Melchiorre Sarto was born on June 2, 1835, in Riese, near Treviso, then part of the Kingdom of Lombardy-Venetia under Austrian rule. His father, Giovanni Battista, was a municipal messenger; his mother, Margherita Sanson, was a seamstress. The couple had ten children.

Noticed by the village priest, young "Bepi" walked several miles each day to attend school in Castelfranco, and then won a scholarship to the seminary of Padua. All his life he remained attached to his humble origins and to his family, whom he never made rich.



The birthplace of Saint Pius X in Riese, now called Riese Pio X.

Key dates in the life of Saint Pius X

- **June 2, 1835**: Born in Riese.
- **1850-1858**: Studies at the seminary of Padua.
- **September 18, 1858**: Ordained a priest in Castelfranco Veneto.
- **1858-1867**: Curate in Tombolo.
- **1867-1875**: Parish priest of Salzano.
- **1875**: Canon of Treviso and spiritual director of the seminary.
- **1884**: Bishop of Mantua.
- **1893**: Cardinal and Patriarch of Venice.
- **August 4, 1903**: Elected pope, he takes the name Pius X.
- **November 22, 1903**: Motu proprio on sacred music.
- **December 20, 1905**: Decree encouraging frequent Communion.

- **1907**: Encyclical *Pascendi* against Modernism.
- **August 8, 1910**: Decree *Quam Singulari* on the Communion of children.
- **August 20, 1914**: Dies in the Vatican.
- **June 3, 1951**: Beatified by Pius XII.
- **May 29, 1954**: Canonized by Pius XII.

A pastor above all

For seventeen years, Father Sarto was a parish priest. In Tombolo and then in Salzano, he preached simply, taught the catechism himself to children and adults, opened a night school and visited the sick. During a cholera epidemic in Salzano, he gave himself without counting the cost to the families affected. It is said that he readily gave away whatever he had, to the point of leaving his house without provisions.

As Bishop of Mantua, a diocese then in difficulty, he revived the seminary, visited every parish and held a synod. As Patriarch of Venice, he kept the same style: close to workers and gondoliers, attentive to the poor, careful about the liturgy. When he left for the conclave of 1903, he had bought a return ticket to Venice.

A pope elected against all expectations

The conclave of August 1903 at first seemed to be heading toward Cardinal Rampolla, Secretary of State to Leo XIII. But the Emperor of Austria had a veto pronounced against him, the last in history. The votes gradually shifted to the Patriarch of Venice, who begged to be forgotten before finally accepting. He chose the name Pius in memory of the popes who had suffered for the Church. One of his first decisions was to abolish any right of veto by the powers in papal elections.

In his first encyclical, *E Supremi* (October 4, 1903), he gave his motto, borrowed from Saint Paul: "To restore all things in Christ." His pontificate would be marked by deep pastoral reforms, but also by hard struggles.

The Eucharist offered to the little ones

The great work of Pius X concerns Holy Communion. For centuries, many of the faithful received Communion only rarely, for fear of being unworthy, and children often waited until the age of twelve or fourteen. In 1905, the pope encouraged frequent and even daily Communion for all who are in a state of grace and have a right intention. In 1910, the decree *Quam Singulari* set the age of First Communion at about seven, "the age of reason." Millions of children have benefited from it. This is why he is sometimes called the "Pope of the Eucharist."

In the same spirit, he wanted clear and accessible teaching of the faith: a catechism bearing his name was published for the Diocese of Rome. He reformed the breviary, encouraged Gregorian chant and the participation of the faithful in the liturgy, and set in motion a Code of Canon Law, which his successor promulgated in 1917.

The struggles of his pontificate

Pius X confronted the French law of 1905 separating Church and State, which he condemned in 1906 in the encyclical *Vehementer Nos*, refusing the religious associations the law required. On the doctrinal level, he condemned Modernism in 1907, a current that tended to reduce dogma to religious experience. These measures, and the climate of suspicion that sometimes accompanied them, have drawn criticism from historians. In canonizing him, the Church honored the personal holiness of the man and the pastor.

In the summer of 1914, war broke out in Europe. The elderly pope, who had long dreaded it, was deeply affected. He died on August 20, 1914. His will begins with words that have remained famous: he was born poor, had lived poor and wished to die poor.

Why is Saint Pius X the patron saint of first communicants?

Before Pius X, children in many countries waited until their teenage years to receive Communion. By lowering the age of First Communion to about seven, he changed the life of the Church for generations of children. That is why parents, catechists and children preparing for First Communion turn to him, and why many parishes and Catholic schools in the English-speaking world bear his name. He is also invoked for catechists and parish priests.

To pray with him, read the prayer to Saint Pius X or follow the novena to Saint Pius X, from August 12 to 20, ending on the eve of his feast.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Pius X in art

- **The papal white cassock and zucchetto**, with a pectoral cross.
- **The chalice and Host**, or children receiving Communion from his hands.
- **His coat of arms**, which bears his motto "Instaurare omnia in Christo."

Where to pray to Saint Pius X

- **Rome**: his tomb in Saint Peter's Basilica, in the Chapel of the Presentation.
- **Riese Pio X** (Veneto): the house where he was born, the parish church and the small Marian shrine of the Cendrole, where he loved to pray as a child.
- **Salzano** and **Tombolo**: the parishes where he served as parish priest and curate.
- **Venice**: Saint Mark's Basilica, seat of the patriarchs.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Pius X: "To Restore All Things in Christ"

Saint Pius X left no famous prayer composed by his own hand, but he did leave a motto that sums up his whole pontificate: "To restore all things in Christ." This page presents that motto in its context, followed by an original prayer to Saint Pius X by Saintspedia, for children, for families and for love of the Eucharist.

"To restore all things in Christ"

On October 4, 1903, two months after his election, Pius X published his first encyclical, *E Supremi Apostolatus*. In it he explained the program he set for himself by taking up a phrase of Saint Paul to the Ephesians (1:10):

> *"Instaurare omnia in Christo": to restore all things in Christ.*

Source: Pius X, encyclical *E Supremi Apostolatus*, October 4, 1903, quoting the Letter to the Ephesians 1:10. The text of the encyclical is available on vatican.va. This motto also appears on his papal coat of arms.

For Pius X, this was not a political slogan: it was the desire that all of life, personal, family and social, be renewed by the presence of Christ, first of all through prayer, catechesis and the sacraments.

Prayer to Saint Pius X

Saint Pius X, you who were a poor child in Riese, a country priest, a bishop and a pope, without ever forgetting the little ones, pray for me.

You who wanted children to be able to receive Jesus from the age of reason, I entrust to you those preparing for their First Communion, their parents and their catechists. Give them the simple joy of meeting the Lord.

You who invited all the faithful to approach the Eucharist often, rekindle in me a hunger for the Bread of Life. May I not live the Mass out of habit, but as an encounter.

You who remained poor in the midst of honors, teach me simplicity of life and quiet charity. I also entrust to you my intention: (name it in silence).

Obtain for me the grace to let Christ renew everything in my life, my family and my work. Amen.

This prayer is an original text by Saintspedia, free to use for personal and community prayer.

When to pray this prayer

Saint Pius X is celebrated on August 21, the day after the anniversary of his death. You can also pray to him as a First Communion approaches, at the start of a new year of religious education, or for a priest you know. Families may pray it together with a child who is preparing to receive Jesus for the first time. For a longer time of prayer, follow the novena to Saint Pius X, and read the life of Saint Pius X.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Pius X

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia. It follows the stages of the life of Saint Pius X, from Riese to the Vatican, and invites you to rediscover the Eucharist. It is not an official liturgical text or a text written by the saint. To finish it on the eve of his feast, begin on August 12: it ends on August 20, the anniversary of his death, the day before his feast on August 21. You can also pray it at any time of year, especially before a child's First Communion.

How to pray this novena

Each day, entrust your intention to God, read the meditation, say the prayer of the day, then an Our Father and a Hail Mary. If you can, attend a weekday Mass during these nine days: it is the best way to pray with Pius X. If you miss a day, simply pick up where you left off.



Saint Pius X, in a church statue or window.

Day 1: Riese, the faith of a poor family

Giuseppe Sarto grew up in a modest home, with a mother who was a seamstress and a father who worked for the town. There he learned prayer and work. Faith is passed on first of all in the ordinary life of a family.

Prayer: Lord, bless my family and all families who are struggling. Make our homes places where people learn to pray to you.

Today: Spend a moment praying as a family, or for your family if you live alone.

Day 2: The road to school, the gift of effort

As a boy, he walked every day to Castelfranco to study. The future pope owed much to this perseverance and to those who helped him continue his education.

Prayer: Lord, give me constancy in effort, and gratitude toward those who made it possible for me to learn.

Today: Help a child or young person with their studies, or support an educational charity.

Day 3: Salzano, a priest at the service of all

As parish priest of Salzano, Father Sarto taught catechism, visited the sick and supported families during the cholera epidemic. A shepherd is recognized by his presence beside those who suffer.

Prayer: Lord, I pray for the priests of my parish. Give them strength, joy and closeness to everyone.

Today: Thank a priest, or offer him some concrete help.

Day 4: The catechism, knowing in order to love

Pius X attached great importance to teaching the faith. He believed that many people drift away from God because they do not know him. We can only truly love what we know.

Prayer: Holy Spirit, give me the desire to deepen my faith, and bless all catechists.

Today: Reread one article of the Creed and take time to meditate on it.

Day 5: The conclave, accepting the call

In 1903, the Patriarch of Venice begged the cardinals not to elect him. In the end he accepted, out of obedience. Sometimes God asks of us what we had not chosen.

Prayer: Lord, make me open to your will, even when it overturns my plans.

Today: Accept with good grace a task you would rather have avoided.

Day 6: Frequent Communion, our daily bread

Pius X encouraged the faithful to receive Communion often, and even every day. The Eucharist is not a reward reserved for the perfect, but food for those who are on the way.

Prayer: Jesus, Bread of Life, give me a hunger for you. May I approach you with trust and humility.

Today: Attend a weekday Mass, or make a visit to the Blessed Sacrament.



Praying with Saint Pius X.

Day 7: Let the little children come to me

In 1910, Pius X allowed children to receive Communion from the age of reason. He trusted the simple faith of little ones, whom Jesus holds up as an example.

Prayer: Lord, I entrust to you the children preparing for their First Communion. Keep them in your friendship all their lives.

Today: Pray by name for a child you know.

Day 8: The song of the Church, praying with beauty

Pius X wanted the liturgy to be beautiful and the faithful to take part in it, especially through song. Beauty helps us pray.

Prayer: Lord, may my prayer rise to you like a song. Teach me to take part in the liturgy with all my heart.

Today: Sing or listen to a Gregorian chant, for example the *Salve Regina*.

Day 9: 1914, dying poor in the peace of God

The elderly pope died as the war was beginning. He left a will in which he said he was born poor, had lived poor and wished to die poor. His riches lay elsewhere.

Prayer: Lord, at the end of this novena, I place my intention in your hands. Through the intercession of Saint Pius X, give peace to the world and to my heart. Amen.

Today: Make a donation to an organization that helps the victims of war.

Closing prayer

Saint Pius X, at the end of these nine days, I entrust to you the intention I have placed before you. Pray for children, for families, for priests and for peace. Obtain for me a love for the Eucharist and the grace to let Christ restore all things in my life. Amen.

After the novena

On August 21, if you can, attend Mass and receive Communion in thanksgiving. Keep one of the acts of these nine days as a habit: a weekday Mass, a visit to the Blessed Sacrament or a regular prayer for the children of your parish. For Pius X, the Eucharist was food for everyone on the way to God, for the little ones as much as for the great.

To go further, read the life of Saint Pius X and pray the prayer to Saint Pius X.

PILGRIMAGE

Tomb of Saint Pius X in Saint Peter's Basilica in Rome

The body of Saint Pius X rests in Saint Peter's Basilica in Rome, in the Chapel of the Presentation, on the left side of the nave. It is the main place to come and pray to him. His native village of Riese, in the Veneto, now called Riese Pio X, keeps the house where he was born.

From the tomb in the Grottoes to the basilica

At his death on August 20, 1914, Pius X was buried in the Vatican Grottoes, beneath the basilica, following the tradition of the popes. After his beatification by Pius XII in 1951, his body was placed in the basilica itself, in a glass urn beneath the altar of the Chapel of the Presentation of Mary in the Temple. It is displayed there, dressed in pontifical vestments, his face covered with a mask. He was canonized on May 29, 1954.



Tomb of Saint Pius X in Saint Peter's Basilica in Rome.

The Chapel of the Presentation

The chapel is in the left aisle of the basilica, as you walk toward the choir. Above the altar, a mosaic depicts the Presentation of the Virgin Mary in the Temple. The setting, quieter than the central nave, lends itself to prayer despite the crowds of visitors. Not far away is also the monument to Saint John XXIII, another Patriarch of Venice who became pope, whose body rests in the right nave.

Praying at the tomb of Saint Pius X

Before your visit, you can reread the life of Saint Pius X. On site, a time of silence before the urn lets you entrust children preparing for their First Communion, catechists, or parish priests. The prayer to Saint Pius X can

accompany this moment, and the Chapel of the Blessed Sacrament, in the right aisle, lets you extend your visit with adoration, faithful to the spirit of the "Pope of the Eucharist." These suggestions are offered by Saintspedia.

Other places of Saint Pius X

- **Riese Pio X** (province of Treviso): the birthplace of Giuseppe Sarto, the parish church where he was baptized, and the Marian shrine of Le Cendrole, at the edge of the village.
- **Tombolo**: the parish where he was a curate from 1858 to 1867.
- **Salzano**: the parish where he was pastor from 1867 to 1875.
- **Mantua**: the cathedral of the diocese of which he was bishop.
- **Venice**: Saint Mark's Basilica, seat of the patriarchate he held from 1893 to 1903.

Practical information

Admission to Saint Peter's Basilica is free, but subject to a security check that can involve a long wait. Modest dress is required, with shoulders and knees covered. Opening hours and Mass times vary with the seasons and papal celebrations: check the basilica's official website before you come. For Riese, about thirty-five miles from Venice, a car is the simplest way; ask the parish about visiting the birthplace.

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