

# Meditations: August 21, Memorial of St. Pius X, Pope

Some reflections that can assist our prayer on the feast of Pope St. Pius X.

- St. Pius X: love for the Eucharist and for doctrine
- Affection for the Pope, a gift from God
- *Il dolce Cristo in terra*

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TODAY WE CELEBRATE the feast of St. Pius X, to whom the faithful of Opus Dei entrust the Work's relations with the Holy See. St. Josemaría appointed him Intercessor in 1953. Before then, he had a personal devotion to this holy pontiff, whom he especially admired for his Eucharistic piety, his love for the Church, and his desire that the Kingdom of Christ be established everywhere, as the motto of his pontificate stated: *Instaurare omnia in Cristo*, “to restore all things in Christ.”

Giuseppe Melchiorre Sarto was born in 1835 in Riese, a town in northern Italy. He was the second son in a family of ten children of modest social standing. At the age of fifteen, he received a scholarship to enter the seminary in Padua. He was ordained a priest in 1858 and carried out various pastoral positions with great zeal for souls. In 1884, he was

appointed Bishop of Mantua and received episcopal consecration in the Basilica of Sant'Apollinare in Rome. In 1893, he was named Patriarch of Venice and a cardinal. In 1903, he was elected Pope. His pontificate lasted eleven years, until his death in August 1914. From that moment on, a great popular devotion to him grew throughout the Church, with many people coming to pray at his tomb in St. Peter's Basilica. He was canonized in 1954.

St. Pius X oversaw various liturgical and canonical reforms in the Church. His greatest effort was to place the Eucharist at the center of Christian life, encouraging its daily reception and lowering the age for children's First Communion to about seven, the age when they begin to reason. He also did all he could to encourage the clear teaching of the Church's doctrine. Already in his years as a parish priest, he prepared a

catechism for the use of the people. And as Roman Pontiff, he wrote a text for the diocese of Rome that was soon distributed throughout the world. “Because of its simple, clear, precise language and effective explanations,” Benedict XVI said, “this *Pius X Catechism*, as it was called, was a reliable guide to many in learning the truths of the faith.”<sup>[1]</sup> And Pope Francis said: “Pius X has always been known as the Pope of catechesis. And not only that! A gentle and strong Pope. A humble and clear Pope. A Pope who made the whole Church understand that without the Eucharist and without the assimilation of revealed truths, personal faith weakens and dies.”<sup>[2]</sup>

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“THANK YOU, my God, for the love for the Pope that you have placed in my heart,”<sup>[3]</sup> St. Josemaría wrote in

*The Way.* Thus he expressed how his filial union with the Roman Pontiff, while also very human, nevertheless went beyond a superficial sympathy or the holding of similar ideas. Nor did he see it as simply a conviction of his intellect or a decision purely of his will, but as a gift from God, a grace placed in his heart by our Lord that enabled him to love intensely the various popes who succeeded each other in the See of Peter throughout his life. In fact, on the very morning of his death, the founder of the Work asked two of his sons to convey this message to someone very close to St. Paul VI: “For years now, I have been offering Holy Mass for the Church and for the Pope. You can assure him – because you have heard me say it many times – that I have offered my life to our Lord for the Pope, whoever he may be.”<sup>[4]</sup>

For a Catholic, being united to the person and intentions of the Pope is a question of faith, of trust in our Lord, who, when addressing a simple fisherman with obvious limitations, assured him: “You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven; and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven” (*Mt 16:18-19*). “The supreme power of the Roman Pontiff and his infallibility, when he speaks *ex cathedra*,” Saint Josemaría wrote, “are not a human invention. They are based on the explicit foundational will of Christ. How foolish it is, then, to confront the government of the Pope with that of the bishops, or to reduce the validity of the pontifical Magisterium to the consent of the faithful! Nothing is more foreign to it than a balance of

powers; human molds of thought do not help us, no matter how attractive or functional they may be. No one in the Church enjoys absolute power by himself, as man. In the Church there is no head other than Christ. And Christ constituted a Vicar of his – the Roman Pontiff – for his pilgrim Bride on earth.”<sup>[5]</sup>

Hence “love for the Roman Pontiff must be in us a beautiful passion, for in him we see Christ. If we stay close to our Lord in prayer, we will go forward with a clear vision that will permit us to perceive the action of the Holy Spirit, even in the face of events we do not understand or which produce sighs or sorrow.”<sup>[6]</sup>

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THE ROMAN PONTIFFS frequently tell us how much they count on our prayers. For example, right after his

election, Benedict XVI spoke the following words from the central balcony of the Vatican Basilica: “I take comfort in the fact that our Lord knows how to work and act even through inadequate instruments, and above all I entrust myself to your prayers.”<sup>[7]</sup> Pope Francis often stressed his need for this support: “Ask our Lord to bless me. Your prayers give me strength and help me to discern and accompany the Church, listening to the Holy Spirit.”<sup>[8]</sup> In a letter written to a cardinal in 1967, Saint Josemaría confided: “Praying is the only thing I can do. My poor service to the Church is reduced to this. But every time I consider my limitations, I feel filled with strength, because I know and feel that it is God who does everything.”<sup>[9]</sup>

Besides praying for his person and intentions, the communion we experience in the Church leads us to

strive to know and support the teachings of the Roman Pontiff, and to treat him with filial affection. If at times we fail to understand some aspect of his words or deeds, this doesn't prevent us from accepting his teachings with a spirit of faith and trust. In this sense, St. Josemaría, who had a great devotion to St. Catherine of Siena for her defense of the Pope, said: "A thousand times I would cut out my tongue with my teeth and spit it out, rather than utter the slightest negative remark about the one I love most on earth, after our Lord and Holy Mary: *il dolce Cristo in terra*, as I am fond of saying, repeating St. Catherine's words."<sup>[10]</sup> This attitude is completely opposed to undermining trust in the Pope, even when one does not share a specific personal opinion of his. In any case, we owe him at least "a religious assent of intellect and will."<sup>[11]</sup>

We can end by going to the intercession of our Lady, asking that the feast of St. Pius X may help us to have an ever stronger filial union with the Roman Pontiff: “Mary continually builds up the Church and keeps it united. It is difficult to have authentic devotion to our Lady and not feel closer to the other members of the Mystical Body and more united to its visible head, the Pope. That's why I like to repeat: *omnes cum Petro ad Iesum per Mariam!* All with Peter to Jesus through Mary!”<sup>[12]</sup>

<sup>[1]</sup> Benedict XVI, Audience, 18 August 2010.

<sup>[2]</sup> Francis, Preface to the book by Lucio Bonora: *Omaggio a Pio X. Ritratti coevi*, ed. Kappadue 2023.

<sup>[3]</sup> St. Josemaría, *The Way*, no. 573.

<sup>[4]</sup> Blessed Alvaro del Portillo, *40 Years with a Saint*, Scepter, p. 239.

<sup>[5]</sup> St. Josemaría, *In Love with the Church*, no. 13.

<sup>[6]</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 28

<sup>[7]</sup> Benedict XVI, Speech, 19 April 2005.

<sup>[8]</sup> Francis, Monthly Intention, November 2023.

<sup>[9]</sup> St. Josemaría, *Letter 15-VII-1967*.

<sup>[10]</sup> St. Josemaría, *Letter 17*, no. 53.

<sup>[11]</sup> Code of Canon Law, no. 752. Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 892.

<sup>[12]</sup> St. Josemaría, *Christ is Passing By*, no. 139.

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