

Feast of Pope St. Pius X

Reflection by
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A well-known and commonly sung Shaker Hymn says, “ ‘Tis the gift to be simple, ‘tis the gift to be free, ‘tis the gift to come down where you ought to be, and when we find ourselves in the place just right ‘Twill be in the valley of love and delight.”

These words beautifully describe the life of Pope St. Pius X whose Feast Day is celebrated on August 21st. Giuseppe (Joseph) Sarto was the second of ten children born to poor but devout parents, who throughout his life, devoted himself to the service of Christ and the Church.

In 1903, much to the surprise of everyone, the obscure cardinal of Venice, who had neither diplomatic experience nor any great intellectual writings to his name, was elected to the Chair of Peter and took the name Pius X. However, here was man of generous heart and empathetic spirit to the poor and disenfranchised who, none the less, was a staunch defender of the rights of the Church against the political interference of secular governments, and a man who fearlessly countered teachings contrary to the Faith. His purpose was to “renew all things in Christ”. In his mind the most effective way of doing this was to urge frequent, even daily when possible, reception of Holy Communion, for which he is most popularly known.

St. Pius X is the one who decreed that children should receive Holy Communion upon reaching the age of reason, which was set at 7 years old, and that Holy Communion should be made more readily available to the infirm. He encouraged popular reading of the Bible, established the Pontifical Biblical Institute, and promoted congregational singing and renewal of the chants of the Mass. Pius was a humble man and as Pope was embarrassed by all the pomp and ceremony which surrounded his office. Remarkably, St. Pius X was also known during his lifetime as a man of miracles, attested to by several people who attributed being cured of their maladies to his loving intercession. He also showed us what true humility is when he not only forgave a writer who had slandered him in the press, but sent money to the writer to help him when he found himself in financial difficulty after he had gone bankrupt. “So unfortunate a man needs prayers more than money”, Pope Pius said.

Pope Pius X died, really, of a broken heart at the outbreak of the First World War in 1914, which he had prayed the human family would avoid. Canonized in 1954, St. Pius X showed the world what a true, humble servant of the Lord is called to be; a fitting successor to that simple, humble fisherman from Galilee, as well as a good example of what his current successor as Bishop of Rome, Pope Francis, shows us today.

Truly, “ ‘Tis the gift to be simple...”.

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