

Ginesta Fassina Favero

# The wonderful story of a young boy from Riese



*Drawings by Maria Saccardo*

THE GIUSEPPE SARTO FOUNDATION  
THE TOWN OF RIESE PIO X

*Ginesta Fassina Favero*

The wonderful story  
of  
a young boy from Riese

30<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY OF FOUNDING OF THE  
POPE PIUS X COMMITTEE

*Drawings by Maria Saccardo*  
*English translation by Sylvia Zamin*

In the first decade of the 1800's, in Riese, a small town in the countryside of Treviso, farming was the main way of life. In this town lived a young couple: Giambattista Sarto (a municipal Cursor who owned only a small piece of land, the house in which he lived and a cow) and his wife, Margherita Sanson, a seamstress who, like most women at that time, was illiterate, meaning that she could neither read nor write.

It was to this family, in these humble but not poor conditions, that a son was born on June 2, 1835. He was Giuseppe Sarto, and was the future Saint Pius the Tenth.

On June 3, the day after his birth, the child's parents brought him to the baptismal font, where he was given the names of his grandparents: Giuseppe and Melchiorre.

Giuseppe grew up with eight brothers and sisters, born after him to gladden the Sarto's small house, and like all children at that time, he divided his time between the church, his home and helping his father in the working of the land and in delivering some letters to the people of the town.



From the ages of seven to nine, Giuseppe attended the town's school, where the teacher, Francesco Gecherle, taught the basics of reading, writing and mathematics. In the meantime, the pastor of the parish church in Riese, Father Tito Fusarini and the chaplain, Father Pietro Iacuzzi, seeing the kindness and intelligence of the young boy, helped with his cultural studies so that he could attend the junior school in the town of Castelfranco.

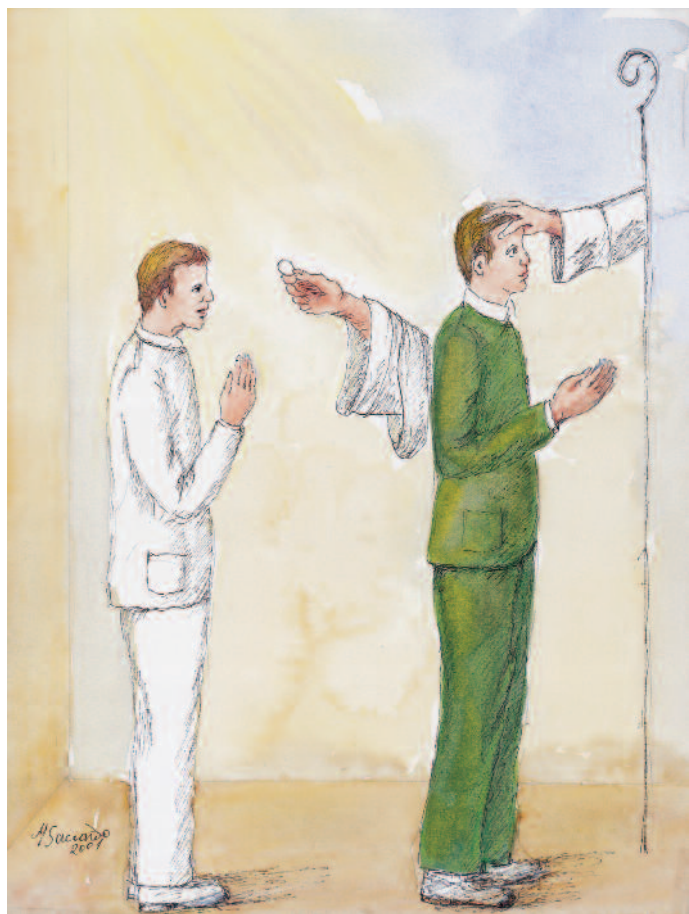
The junior school was seven kilometres from Riese, and the young student journeyed this distance on foot for three years, with a cloth school-bag, made by his mother, across his shoulder and travelling barefoot in good weather, to avoid wearing out his shoes. Only in his last year of school did Giuseppe's father, having decided that Giuseppe's brother would attend the same school, buy them a donkey and a small wagon.



Even though he was studying in Castelfranco, Giuseppe, or “Bepi”, as he was called, continued to attend the church in Riese often, and to learn about the Christian faith.

At the age of 10, on September 1, 1845, he received the sacrament of confirmation from Bishop G. Battista Canova in the neighbouring town of Asolo and, on April 6, 1846, he was allowed to receive his first Holy Communion in the parish church of his hometown.







Near Riese was a sanctuary dedicated to Our Lady of the Assumption; it is still there today.

Bepi's mother Margherita had brought her son there since he was very small to pray the Heavenly Mother and there he would still often go, by himself or with his friends, in those moments he was free from studying. On the way back from the sanctuary, he would climb one of the trees on the side of the small country road, and would teach his friends about the truths of the faith, or he would sing praises to Mary. One day, on his return from one of these visits to the sanctuary, Bepi moved towards to his mother and, with his eyes sparkling with joy, said to her, «*I want to become a priest. I have understood this to be my path today, while I was praying by the altar of Our Lady*».

To become a priest! It was a problem. How could his father pay for room and board at the seminary, with that nest of children he had to support?

Bepi did not get discouraged. He prayed a lot and God came to his rescue. At that time, Cardinal Iacopo Monico was the Patriarch of Venice and he had also been born in Riese.



This Cardinal found Bepi a place to study for free, at the seminary of Padua, where he started his studies on November 13, 1850.

Everything was going well. The Superiors liked Bepi very much and considered him an ideal student. But on May 4, 1852, death knocked at the door of the little house in Riese, and took Bepi's father.

Bepi returned to his family for the funeral. The worries of his mother Margherita were great. She would be alone now, without even her husband's small earnings, with children to support. Some relatives dared to say that it would be better for Bepi to leave the Seminary and take the place of his father in the home; that in this way, he would be of help to the family.

*«But I want to become a priest»,* he said tearfully.

*«And a priest you will become. God's goodness will help us»,* his mother answered. And so, Bepi went back to the Seminary.

The good woman, with the help of her daughters, worked day and night as seamstress, and the women of the town paid her, usually by trading things or doing work for her in return, rather than paying her



money. For herself and the children, they were years of difficulty and sacrifice, but on September 18, 1858, they had the joy of seeing their dear Bepi ordained a priest, in the Cathedral of Castelfranco Veneto, by Bishop Farina.

The very next day, the new priest celebrated his first Holy Mass in the parish Church of Riese. All the townspeople were celebrating, and for the special occasion, a new tabernacle was introduced and dedicated to the Immaculate Virgin.

«*Now you are Father Bepi*», said Giuseppe's mother and to show respect for the dignity given to her son, she asked that his sisters would replace the informal word "tu" (you), in speaking to him, as they always had, with the more respectful word "voi".

Soon after, the Bishop appointed Father Giuseppe to be the chaplain of the town of Tombolo, where Father Costantini was pastor. Father Antonio Costantini was a great priest, but he was very sick. Father Giuseppe helped him with the love of a son and with the respect due to a Superior. The people of Tombolo, besides farming the land and working in the markets, had the terrible habit of swearing. The



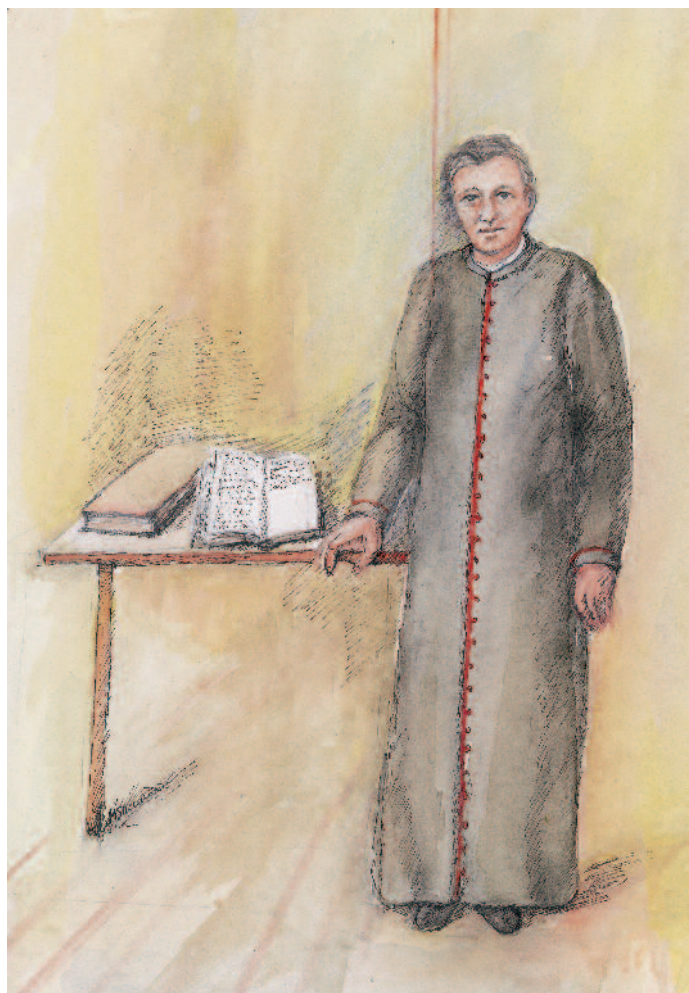




good Chaplain Giuseppe thought about how to rid them of this bad habit. Many of them did not know how to read or write or do arithmetic. So, he started a night school that everyone was allowed to attend. To repay him, all they had to do was stop swearing. He devoted himself entirely to the good of the people. He would get up early in the morning, celebrate Mass and listen to confessions. Then he would go about helping those in need, and even though he was earned very little himself, he would give generously to the poor. It was no wonder that he was so well liked by the people of Tombolo.

At the beginning of his ninth year of living among them, though, he had to leave them, because he was named to be the Pastor in a city called Salzano. We will notice again later that the number 9 seemed to be important in Father Giuseppe's life as a priest.

While the people of Tombolo were very saddened by the departure of the chaplain, the people of Salzano were not very happy with their new Pastor. They were used to having professors, Monsignors and other skilful pastors, and this thirty-two year old former chaplain, who joined them quietly on a Saturday night, July 13, 1867, did not at first meet their approval.



But the facts that followed changed the impressions they first had. Father Giuseppe proved very soon to be a very good Pastor. Tirelessly, he heard confessions, preached, helped those who were dying. The grain, the wood, and often his very own dinner were given to the poor. For the good of the people, he cooperated with the City Officials: He became the president of the Congregation of Charity, director of the city schools and superintendent of studies and here too, as in Tombolo, he contributed in an successful way to fight illiteracy. To make it easier to learn the truths of our religion, he wrote the “Catechism of Salzano”. It filled two notebooks, hand written, and was packed with questions and answers.

In 1873, the widespread cholera illness that broke out in the Veneto Region, also came to Salzano. Father Giuseppe ran about day and night to the areas where the danger was greatest, to comfort the sick, to bring them the sacraments and to give out supplies to help.

One day, as he went to bring back the body of a person who had died, Father Bepi realized that there were only three people to carry the casket, although four were needed. This did not bother him. He blessed the body, prayed, and even in his special robes,

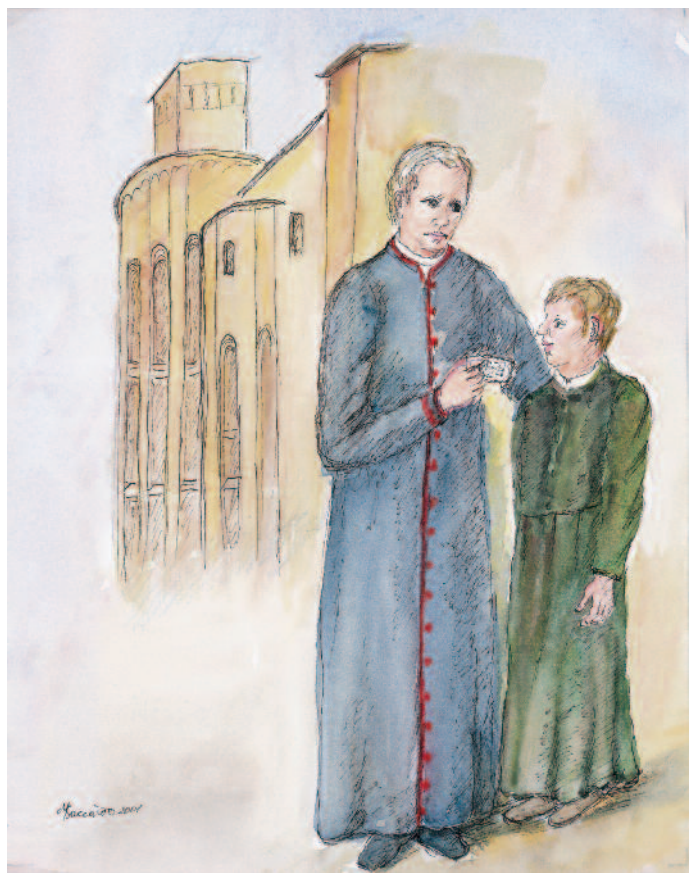


he took the place of the fourth man as if it were the most natural thing in the world to do.

After the widespread illness had passed, someone said: *«If we did not have the Pastor on those terrible days, we would have died of fear and pain».*

It had been nine years since Father Giuseppe became the Parish Priest of Salzano and, as said before, the number 9 always seemed to mark a change in his life. And now it came time to leave Salzano. On November 27, 1875, the Bishop called on him to transfer to the Curate, in Treviso, where he would have three jobs at the same time: he became the Canon of the Cathedral, the Chancellor of the Bishop's Curate and the Spiritual Director of the young men studying in the Seminary of the Diocese. These were three important responsibilities that required commitment and sacrifice. Often, to be able to do everything he needed to do, he would give up his daily walk and would stay up at night. Many times, the housekeeper, entering his room in the morning to make his bed, would find it hadn't been slept in.

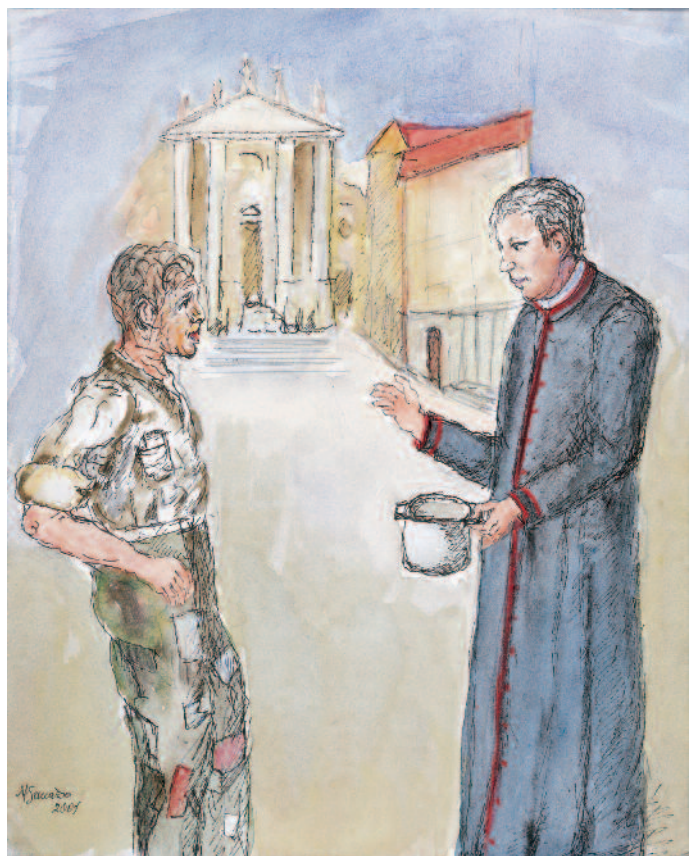
Still, he was able to teach important classes in preaching within the nearby towns and cities, since he wanted to be obedient to the call of Jesus to *«go and*





*preach the Gospel to all people*», but also to earn something to help the poor in Treviso. One day a seminarian went to him in tears: his family had to quickly pay a debt they owed, or they would be turned out of their home. «*How much do you need?*» asked Giuseppe, who was now called Monsignor Sarto. «*One hundred and fifty thousand lire*», answered the young man, and back then, it was a large amount. Monsignor Sarto did not have it, so he borrowed it, and he gave it to the young man.

Working in this way for the Kingdom of God, Monsignor Sarto remained in Treviso, also for nine years. In November of 1884, the Bishop of Treviso, Monsignor Apolloni, called Monsignor Sarto into his office and said, «*Kneel before this Cross, because I have to tell you something important. During the Consistory held on November the 10th, the Holy Father has chosen you to become the Bishop of Mantua*». Monsignor Sarto, in all his humility, felt unworthy. He cried, he prayed and he even wrote to the Holy Father asking to be excused from this assignment, but in the end he had to give in. On the 16th of that month, in Rome, he was consecrated Bishop and on April 19, 1885, he made his solemn entry in the Cathedral of Mantua. He immediately

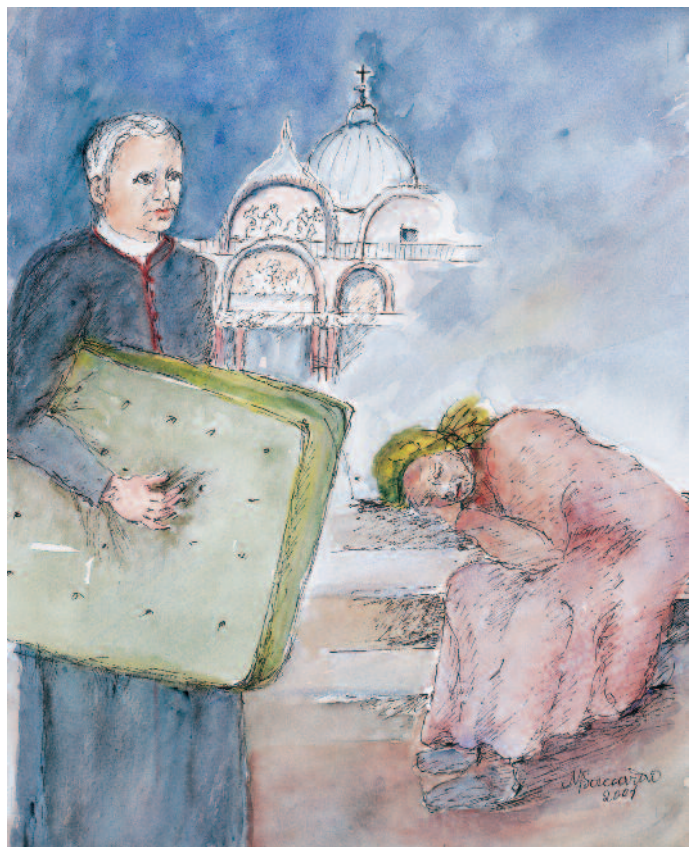


took an interest on the Seminary that had been closed from 1870 to 1880. He also took an interest in Sacred Music and held two pastoral visits.

Even though he was now Bishop Sarto, he still acted as a Chaplain and a Parish Priest would: he preached often, heard confessions, and he himself would look after the most important affairs of the Curia and nearly all of the correspondence. And he continued, as always, to help the poor. One day, a man came to him to ask for “something” for his wife who was sick, and Bishop Sarto, to be able to give him a meal of meat as quickly as he could, gave the man the pot and everything.

In spite of his goodness, there was a terrible man who boldly wrote mean words against Bishop Sarto in the newspaper. The Bishop, when he came to know the man’s name, not only forgave him, but said: *«I believe that the poor man is more in need of prayers than punishments»*.

A short time later, that same man had a serious change in his fortune, and he fell into poverty. Bishop Sarto helped him, but he never wanted the man to know that he was the one who lent him helping hand in his time of need.



In time, Giuseppe's ninth year as Bishop of Mantua approached, and those who knew "the story of the number nine" began to have doubts and worries.

The constant talk about the virtues of Bishop Sarto was finally heard in Rome and by Pope Leo XIII. On June 12, 1892, he made Giuseppe a Cardinal and, during the following Consistory, appointed him the Patriarch of Venice. For political reasons, though, Cardinal Sarto could not enter into his new Diocese right away, so he continued to be Bishop of Mantua with the same tirelessness as before. In the month of October, he went to Riese to visit his mother. Because she was sick, she could not go to the Holy Mass celebrated by her son, so he wore his cardinal's robes at home so that she could see them. The good woman looked at him in amazement and said: *«Bepi, you are all red».*

And he, deeply touched replied:  
*«And you, Mother, are all white».*

Finally, on November 24, 1894, after all the political reasons were sorted out, Cardinal Sarto was able to make his joyful entrance into Venice. Here too, he worked with eagerness for the good of the people, whom he loved so much. He was very attentive to







the needs of the poor, taking every chance he could to do good. The story is told that one night, dressed as a simple priest, he was seen taking his own mattress to a poor woman who had made her bed from a pile of rags.

But two important events during Cardinal Sarto's stay in Venice also deserve to be remembered. The first had to do with his climbing to the top of Mount Grappa on a white donkey, on August 4, 1901, to dedicate a special Chapel and to bless a statue of Mary. The second event was the fall of the Bell Tower of the Church of Saint Mark, on July 14, 1902, luckily without anyone getting hurt, and his blessing of the first stone placed to build the new tower there, which still stands today.

On July 20, 1903, Pope Leo XIII died, and Cardinal Sarto had to leave for the Conclave, a meeting of the Cardinals in Rome at which they elect a new Pope. As it happened, he had finished nearly nine years of service in Venice.

At that Conclave, at the age of 68 years, Cardinal Sarto was elected Pope. It was August 4, 1903. After begging the other Cardinals to choose another more

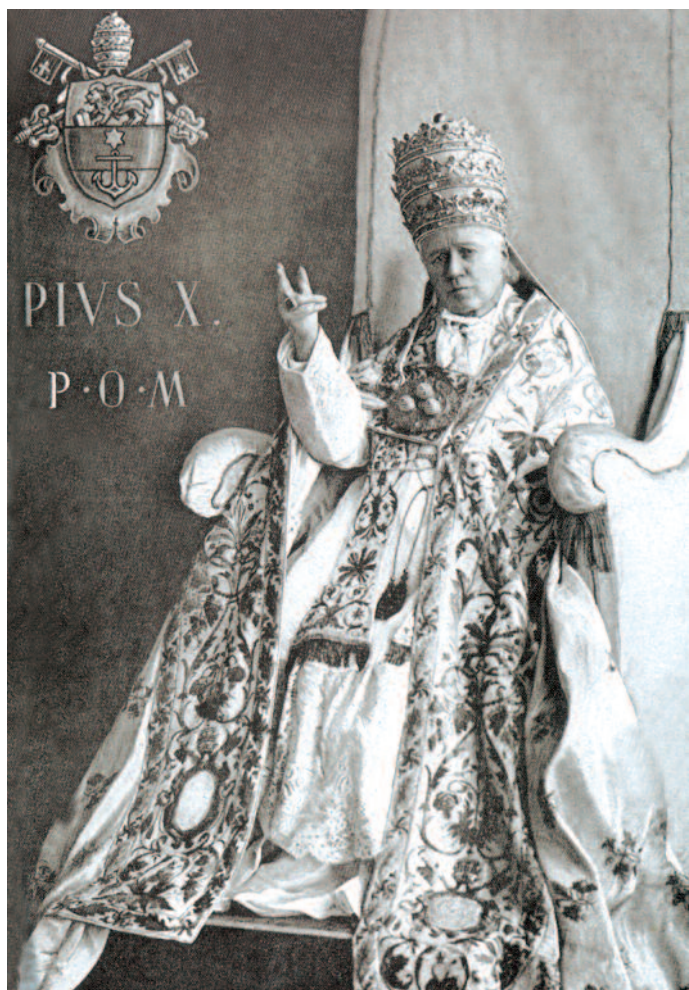


worthy person, he said: «*I accept the Cross*», and chose to be called Pope Pius, after the popes who had suffered the most.

To «*have Christ as the centre all things*» was his main goal as Pope. He worked hard to have this happen. On Sundays, he would gather all the young people of Rome in the courtyard of Saint Damaso Church and he would teach them the catechism. Soon, “The Catechism of Pope Pius X” became known in all of Italy as “the Only Book”.

He wanted Christians to receive Holy Communion more often. “The Holy Eucharist is the centre and the soul of the Christian life and of the Church”, he said. On December 20, 1905, he wrote an announcement about “frequent communion”, in which he heartily invited the faithful of every order and every condition to come to the Eucharistic Banquet often – even every day. On August 8, 1910, he issued an announcement that would let all children to come near to Jesus without waiting until the age of 12 or 13 years for First Communion, as had been the custom then. For this, Pope Pius was known as “The Pope of the Eucharist”.

Pope Pius wrote many Encyclical Letters, as he had



done many good things for the poor.

*“To be a Pope has a great advantage, and it is that I can help the poor without being forced into debt”*, he would say. Pope Pius remained in the Vatican for eleven years.

But when the threat of the First World War was certain in the skies of Europe, his heart couldn't bear the news.

The thought that his children would kill one another caused him a lot of pain, and on August 20, 1914, Pope Pius died.

On the following day, his will was opened, and it began like this: *“Born poor, lived poor, I wish to die poor”*. And with this, he was telling his wish to be buried in the caves of the Vatican.

The people of Rome, Italy, and indeed the whole world said, *“A saint is dead!”* when they heard the sad news.

Many graces, and even miracles were obtained with his help.

The Church beatified Pope Pius X on June 3, 1951, and on May 29, 1954, he was counted among the Saints.

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<i>Friday</i>	9.00 - 12.00	14.30 - 19.00
<i>Saturday</i>	9.00 - 12.00	14.30 - 19.00
<i>Sunday</i>	9.00 - 12.00	14.30 - 19.00

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*Riese Pio X*  
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