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Saint Benedict Center

To Our Readers:

In the many encouraging letters we have received since the **HOUSETOPS** reappeared, the most universal comment about the magazine is that it is "truly Catholic." To us there can be no greater praise than this. For there can be no higher standard to strive after in any endeavor than to be "truly Catholic." And we solemnly promise ever to be guided by that standard.

It is a Catholic principle, for example, that the only real hope for remedying the world's evils, as Saint Pius X said in these modern times, is through a wholesome return to Christ and the infallible teachings of His Spouse, the Church. That is the theme which weaves together each of the articles prepared for the present issue of the **HOUSETOPS**.

To help "restore all things in Christ" in the spirit of Saint Pius, therefore, we urge our good friends and readers to order extra copies of this issue (for the suggested donation of one dollar apiece) and send them to your local priests and bishops.

Faithfully, in the Immaculate Heart of Mary,

Brother Francis, M. I. C. M.

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pope saint pius x

Father Antonio Costantini was a devoted pastor to his flock. He was not so old a priest, but his health was badly failing, causing his parish work in Tombolo, Italy, to suffer neglect. In the fall of 1858, a newly ordained priest on his first assignment came to assist the ailing pastor, and Don Antonio was soon to say of him: "They have

sent me a young man as curate, with orders to form him in the duties of parish priest. I assure you it is likely to be the other way about. He is so zealous, so full of common sense and other precious gifts that I could find much to learn from him. Some day he will wear the miter—of that I am certain—and afterwards? Who knows?"

Don Antonio's keen intuition proved to be prophetic. The curate was Giuseppe Melchiorre Sarto, who successively came to wear the bishop's miter, the red hat of cardinal-patriarch, the papal tiara, then finally—and for all eternity—the crown of sainthood. Don Giuseppe, the country curate, the model priest and prelate, the beloved "Children's Saint," is venerated in all the Catholic world today as Saint Pius X.

He was born at Riese, a village on the Venetian plains of northernmost Italy, on July 2, 1835.* In him God once again exemplified His tender love for the poor, from whose numbers have come so many shining saints. For Giuseppe Sarto (literally translated as "Joseph Taylor") was the eldest of eight children, whose parents raised this large family by the most meager of means. The father, a municipal messenger and janitor, earned the equivalent of fifty cents a day, and this income was only barely supplemented by his wife's scant earnings as a seamstress. But they taught their children to relish humble poverty as they themselves did. It was a lesson that Giuseppe, nicknamed "Beppi," cherished and earnestly put into practice all his holy life, even after his elevation to the highest dignity on earth. Typically he was to record these sentiments in his last will and testament: "I was born poor, I have lived in poverty, and I wish to die poor."

Little Beppi, it is true, was remarkably intelligent. But at the same time he was a red-blooded, two-fisted lad who not infrequently excited the minor wrath of his teacher with his distracting mischief. An old farmer from Riese remembered, after the "little rascal" became a cardinal, that "many a cherry of mine found its way down his throat!" A mischievous boy, yes, but one who intensely loved the holy Faith painstakingly nurtured in him by his mother. Even in his youth Beppi made it a daily practice to read a chapter of Holy Scripture on his knees. As a child he also regularly visited a nearby shrine of the Madonna delle Cendrole and poured out his joys and sorrows at the feet of the Mother of God. No doubt it was here that

*After the shelling of Riese in World War I, the birthplace of Saint Pius was the only house found still standing.

he first confided to Her his desire for the sacerdotal life. The earliest steps toward that vocation were taken by his becoming an altar boy, a duty which he performed with devotion and efficiency, but at the same time with a sense of anxiety. For so many years did he faithfully serve at the altar of God so near to the Most Adorable Jesus in the Eucharist, and yet he could not receive Our Lord sacramentally before his First Holy Communion at the age of twelve. This tender memory, too, he carried through life on the way to Peter's Throne.

Anything tending to the knowledge of God and the Faith enticed the growing saint. It was this appetite for pious wisdom that prompted him to beg instruction in Latin from two parish priests, who, realizing the boy's exceptional aptitude and seeing prominent qualities of spiritual greatness in their ambitious student, helped him enroll at the junior seminary at Castelfranco. Day after day, whatever the weather, young Beppi eagerly trod the four miles each way to school almost always barefoot, with his shoes slung across his shoulder, to save the leather and to fortify the soul. A companion recollected about this virtuous classmate: "He was goodness itself, an angel of purity, and a lover of studies." Yet he never used academics as an excuse to pass off other responsibilities, for he returned home faithfully every day to put in long hours of work for the household.

Giuseppe completed his studies at Castelfranco after four years, scoring highest marks in the final examinations in all subjects. But now a serious problem had to be faced, since it was expected of the oldest Sarto son that he presently should begin to help support the family as a wage earner. His heart, of course, was set on serving in the priestly ministry of Christ—an ambition which seemed beyond hope at this point, considering the critical financial obstacles that stood in the way. But Beppi characteristically placed his whole trust in the Blessed Mother and prayed fervently for what would require nothing less than a minor miracle to enable his entering the seminary. The miracle came. The future pope was granted a free scholarship—a rare and very selective blessing in those days—to the Tours Campion College of the Seminary of Padua.

A Priest according to the Order of Melchisedech

It was 1850 when Giuseppe Sarto at the age of fifteen entered the seminary, brimming with joy and wondrous anticipation of the career he was beginning. Beppi's parish priest, Don Tito Fusarini,

who had helped to make the boy's dream a reality, said of his spiritual charge on that occasion, "He has the noblest heart in this land." His joy, however, was soon interrupted by a tragedy that once again threatened his sacerdotal vocation. The seminarian had heard no word of it at Padua, yet mystically he knew that his father suddenly had fallen gravely ill, when he tearfully approached the Director requesting leave to return home. After only four days of illness—on the same day his last child was born—the senior Sarto passed away, leaving his wife and family more impoverished than ever. It was apparent that Beppi would now have to go to work.

But that courageous and saintly mother, Margherita Sarto, well knew it was as much the will of Divine Providence that Beppi should become a priest as it was that her beloved husband should be taken away at this most difficult time. Further trusting to the same Providence for the means to support the family, therefore, she insisted that her son promptly return to the seminary. Obediently, though painfully, he did so, all the more strengthened by this experience, and he grew mightily in wisdom and sanctity.

Again he surpassed all others in the various studies throughout his years in the seminary. Remarking on that period in Beppi's life, his superior at Padua stated: "In all the eight years he has passed at the Seminary, Sarto left nothing to be desired. He was a constant example of sincerity, piety and conduct. I often pray that God will multiply men of his stamp in our Seminaries." In September of 1857, he received subdeaconate orders; five months later, those of deacon. Then on September 18, 1858, at the age of twenty-three, Giuseppe Melchiorre Sarto was, by a special papal dispensation, ordained to the eternal order of the priesthood eight months short of the minimum age required by canon law. The following day—significantly on the Feast of the Mother of Sorrows—he celebrated his first Mass.

It was many years later when His Holiness Pope Pius X paternally counseled his bishops, saying: "A holy priest makes a holy people, and a priest who is not holy is not only useless, he is harmful to the world." However, Giuseppe Sarto clearly possessed that wisdom in its fullness when, a month after ordination, he set off to serve as curate in the parish of Tombolo. The lively farming village had a reputation for sinfulness, and its ailing pastor, Don Antonio Costantini, was in no condition to reform the evils by himself. Don Beppi was an ideal choice to assist in that task. Shortly after his arrival, he wrote to his mother, "I shall like it here because the people are mostly poor, and I always lived among the poor, and I

am poor myself. I will understand them, and they will understand me." Indeed, understanding and practicing poverty made him well fitted to give Tombolo the kind of "holy priest" he would later prescribe from the papal chair.

Swearing was almost a culture among the illiterate townsfolk. So Father Sarto presented a shrewd bargain: "Stop swearing" in return for his teaching them to read and write. The crude habit quickly stopped and the young cleric happily found himself busy conducting a night school. But more than this, his exemplary devotion to the parishioners soon brought heavy demands on his time—especially in the confessional—since many were now encouraged freely to seek spiritual assistance and to return to the sacraments. Giuseppe was, in effect, the only priest on duty; and yet he did the work not merely of two clerics, but rather of ten, thus earning the nickname "Perpetual Motion." Then too, though quite poor himself, no one who came to Don Beppi seeking charity was ever refused. Often his sister, who kept house for him, would scold the curate for giving in such excess that he deprived himself, to which he would answer: "Rosa, we are not born to eat, but to work and labor." And that he did unsparingly. He allowed himself only four hours to sleep; the rest of the day was given to work and prayer.

Tombolo loved its young curate for his immeasurable generosity and devotion. But his power in the pulpit was equally as captivating. Don Sarto disdained two types of sermons: the slovenly, improvised, hit-or-miss kind on one hand; and on the other, the kind rendered by pompous orators with a consuming ambition some day to hear their thundering verbiage issued from beneath a miter and booming off the walls of a famous cathedral. Giuseppe's singular ambition at all times was to win souls for Christ. Hence he took great pains in preparing his sermons, which, while delivered with unaffected eloquence, were always clear, comprehensible, and compelling in doctrine. It was primarily his reputation as a preacher that led to his appointment as pastor of the parish of Salzano.

The people of Salzano were just as poor as those of Tombolo, and in most respects just as needy of a holy priest's care. Only here there were twice as many parishioners. Father Sarto, therefore, determined that commensurately he must double his labors—however this was to be possible. Comments to the effect that he was trying to do too much were dismissed with this stock reply: "The priest is a man obliged to work hard; 'priest' and 'hard work' are synonyms."

Every need of his flock was seen to with as much love and care