



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO PILGRIMS FROM THE DIOCESES OF CESENA-SARSINA, TIVOLI, SAVONA-NOLI AND
IMOLA
TO MARK THE BICENTENARY OF THE DEATH OF THE SERVANT OF GOD POPE PIUS VII**

*Paul VI Audience Hall
Saturday, 20 April 2024*

[[Multimedia](#)]

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

I greet the Cardinal, the bishops present, the abbots, monks and all of you, friends of the dioceses of Cesena-Sarsina, Savona, Imola and Tivoli... I have been to Cesena.

Pope Chiaramonti was and is for all of us a great example of a good shepherd who gives his life for his flock (cf. *Jn* 10:11). He was a man of notable culture and piety, he was pious, a monk, an abbot, a bishop and Pope; in all these roles he always maintained intact, even at the cost of great sacrifices, his devotion to God and to the Church. As in the dramatic moment of his arrest when, to those who offered him a way of escape from imprisonment in exchange for compromises regarding his pastoral responsibilities, he answered: “*Non debemus, non possumus, non volumus*” – beautiful, isn’t it? “We must not, we cannot, we will not”, confirming, at the price of his personal freedom, what he had promised to do, with God’s help, on the day of his election (cf. Pious VII, Allocution *Ad supremum*, 6).

I would like to emphasize, thinking of his life, three key values to which he bore witness, essential also for our personal and community journeys: *communion* - but not Communion, the sacrament, communion in the Church -, *witness*, and *mercy*.

Firstly: *communion*. Pope Pious VII was a convinced supporter and defender of it in times of

ferocious battles and divisions. The disorder caused by the French revolution and the Napoleonic invasions had produced and continued to foment painful rifts, both within God's people and in their relations with the world around them: bleeding wounds, both moral and physical. Even the Pope seemed to be overwhelmed by them. And yet, with his calm and tenacious perseverance in defending unity, Pius VII was able to transform the arrogance of those who wanted to isolate and distance him, publicly stripping him of all dignity, to transform these things into opportunities to relaunch a message of dedication and love for the Church, to which the people of God responded with enthusiasm. The community that emerged was materially poorer, but morally stronger, more cohesive and more credible. And his example spurs us to be, in our time, even at the cost of renunciations, builders of unity in the universal Church, in the local Church, in parishes and in families: to build communion, to favour reconciliation, to promote peace, faithful to truth in charity! Something that helps communion a great deal is knowing how to speak well – what does that mean? I will say the opposite: speaking badly of people, gossip, destroys communion. I do not know if there is gossip in your dioceses – I don't think so, because you all have the face of very good people – but should there be any gossip, there is a very good remedy: biting your tongue. When you feel like speaking badly of or “flaying” another person, bite your tongue and you will do good work for the community, for unity in the community.

And all this regarding communion, pursuing the unity of the Church, brings us to the second point: *witness*. He was a mild-tempered man; Pope Chiaramonti was a courageous proclaimer of the Gospel, with the word and with his life. He said to the Cardinal electors at the beginning of his pontificate: “The Church... needs our good examples; ... so that everyone may understand that it is not in splendour... but rather in contempt for riches, in humility, in modesty, in patience, in charity and finally in every priestly duty that the image of Our Creator is portrayed, and the authentic dimension of the Church is preserved” (*ivi.*, 8-9). What he said is beautiful... And he realized this ideal of Christian prophecy in practice (cf. Saint Leo the Great, Sermon 21:3), living it and promoting it with dignity in good times and bad, both on a personal and ecclesial level, even when this led him to conflict with the powerful of his time.

And finally, we come to the last aspect: *mercy*. Despite the major obstacles placed in his way by the Napoleonic era, Pope Pious VII substantiated his concern for those in need, distinguishing himself with some far-reaching social reforms and initiatives, innovative in his time, such as the revision of the relations of “vassalage”, with the consequent emancipation of poor peasants, the abolition of many noble privileges, the abuses of taxation, the use of torture (cf. Pious VII, *Motu proprio Quando per ammirabile disposizione*, 6 July 1816), and the establishment of a chair in surgery and *La Sapienza* University for the improvement of medical care and the advancement of research.

He was a very intelligent man, very pious and astute. He knew how to face his imprisonment with cunning. At times he sent messages in his undergarments, and in this way, he managed to lead the Church, through messages in his undergarments. And it is a good thing: he was a man who

was intelligent, astute, and who wanted to carry out the task of governing that the Lord had given him; this is good.

He was a man who went on to show this, in a different context, towards his persecutors: although he denounced their errors and abuses in no uncertain terms, he tried to keep a channel of dialogue open with them and above all always offered his forgiveness, even going so far as to grant hospitality in the states of the Church, after the Restoration, to the very relatives of Napoleon, who had had him imprisoned a few years earlier, and asking for him, now defeated, to be treated mildly in prison. A great, great man!

Dear brothers and sisters, there are many values recalled to us by the memory of the Servant of God Pius VII: love for truth, unity, dialogue, attention to the least, forgiveness, the tenacious search for peace, and that evangelical astuteness that the Lord recommends to us. It will be good for us to meditate on them, to make them our own and to bear witness to them, so that the style of meekness and readiness to sacrifice may grow in us and in our communities; but this does not mean we are stupid, no, no, that is not meekness, no... Meekness, but cunning as the Lord recommends. Simple as the dove but cunning as the snake.

Thank you for coming, and I accompany you with my prayer. I bless all of you and your families from my heart. And please, do not forget to pray for me.

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