

August 21, 2026

I offer this essay as a little gift on the Feast of St. Pius X
to my beloved parishioners of St. Pius X Parish, New Orleans.
-Fr. Jonathan Hemelt, J.C.L.

“To renew all things in Christ.” This familiar phrase around our parish and school is the motto of Pope St. Pius X. But even though this expression is so familiar to us, we may not often consider the significance that these words held for our saintly patron and the deep meaning they can have for us, too.

Pope St. Pius X was elected Bishop of Rome on August 4, 1903. He chose as his papal motto: “to renew all things in Christ.” This phrase is taken from St. Paul’s Letter to the Ephesians: “In [Jesus Christ] we have redemption by his blood, the forgiveness of transgressions, in accord with the riches of his grace that he lavished upon us. In all wisdom and insight, he has made known to us the mystery of his will in accord with his favor that he set forth in him as a plan for the fullness of times, to sum up all things in Christ, in heaven and on earth.” (Eph. 1:7-10 from the *New American Bible Revised Edition*)

Pope St. Pius X did not leave it a mystery why he chose this phrase as his papal motto. In his first encyclical letter, “*E Supremi*” – “On the Restoration of All Things in Christ,” the Holy Father shared the dread that accompanied his being elected to the See of St. Peter.¹ He regarded himself as “altogether unworthy through [his] littleness of the honor of the Pontificate.”² He knew his unworthiness, but he trusted in the Providence of Almighty God.

St. Pius X also recognized the “disastrous state of human society” in his own day.³ He could see that society had been turning away from God, and that, through this apostasy, society was being dragged to destruction. His response to this spiritual crisis was to work for restoration or renewal. “...relying on the power of God, We proclaim that We have no other program in the Supreme Pontificate but that ‘of restoring all things in Christ’ (*Ephes.* 1:10), so that ‘Christ may be all and in all’ (*Coloss.* 3:2).”⁴ He reminded the bishops of the world in this letter that the only way to call people back to God was by means of Jesus Christ.

All through the Sacred Scriptures we see the hand of God seeking to bring renewal to His sons and daughters. The Prophet Ezekiel proclaimed God’s Word to the people that the Lord would sprinkle clean water upon His people. The Lord promised to give us a new heart and a new spirit. He would take away our hearts of stone and give us hearts of flesh.⁵ In the Gospels,

¹ Pope St. Pius X, “*E Supremi* – On the Restoration of All Things in Christ,” 4 October 1903, https://www.vatican.va/content/pius-x/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-x_enc_04101903_e-supremi.html.

² Ibid., 2.

³ Ibid., 3.

⁴ Ibid., 4.

⁵ Ezekiel 36:25-27.

Jesus brings to fruition this promise of renewal. He tells Nicodemus that to enter into His Kingdom, we must be born from above, of water and Spirit.⁶ To the Samaritan woman at the well, Jesus promised living water so that whoever drinks the water He gives will never be thirsty again. “The water I shall give will become a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”⁷ Fifty days after the Resurrection, on the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came down upon the Apostles and disciples who were gathered with Mary, the Mother of God, in the Upper Room. In this moment, the Holy Spirit filled the infant Church with strength and courage to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ to the world, to bring the fire of God’s truth to all the nations.⁸ Finally, at the end of the Book of Revelation, as a capstone to all the renewal offered by the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, St. John receives a vision of God Himself seated on His heavenly throne and declaring: “Behold, I make all things new.”⁹

“To renew all things in Christ” is to participate in God’s plan laid forth in all of Scriptures and in the working of His grace through the Church. This renewal leads people back to accepting and following the will of Jesus Christ for their lives. In every part of our lives, Jesus Christ must be Lord. In our life of prayer and worship, Jesus Christ must be Lord. In our families, Jesus Christ must be Lord. In our friendships and hobbies, Jesus Christ must be Lord. In our work and our school and our playground and our neighborhood, Jesus Christ must be Lord. This is what it means “to renew ALL things in Christ.” And when Jesus Christ is truly the Lord of our life, we will find renewal and restoration.

When this renewal has taken root in our minds and our hearts, then we become the new creation that God intends us to be. When we have been renewed in Christ, our life becomes centered on prayer, where Christ welcomes us into deeper communion with the Most Holy Trinity. In prayer, we offer thanks to the Lord for His many gifts; we reach out in supplication to make known to the Lord the needs and desires of our hearts; and we listen in quiet, waiting to hear the voice of the Lord.

When we have been renewed in Christ, we begin to imitate the Merciful Heart of Jesus. We become more willing to open our hearts to God’s never-ending mercy, especially in the sacrament of reconciliation. We grow in our desire to offer mercy and forgiveness to those who have offended us. We seek out those who need our acts of mercy: the poor, the hungry, the sick, the dying, and those who are struggling because of a lack of faith or hope.

When we have been renewed in Christ, we proclaim the goodness of God that has transformed our lives. We begin to share with others the gifts that God has given us for the sake of building up His Kingdom. We become living witnesses, testifying to others the way that they can find the Lord Jesus and be found by Him.

⁶ John 3:1-17.

⁷ John 4:7-15.

⁸ Acts of the Apostles 2:1-13.

⁹ Revelation 21:5.

Of course, this renewal doesn't mean that Jesus takes away every suffering or hardship from our lives. But renewing all things in Christ strengthens us to carry our crosses with Him. And through the crosses and suffering of this life, we can find the resurrection. Uniting ourselves with Jesus in His suffering and death will always lead us to new life in Him.

For St. Pius X, this mission "to renew all things in Christ" wasn't merely theoretical. He used his time as pope to bring about true renewal in the Church.¹⁰ He reorganized the Roman Curia that helps govern the Universal Church. He began the process of codifying the law of the Church for the first time. (This Code of Canon Law was completed in 1917 under his successor, Benedict XV.) He revised the studies and formation of seminarians preparing for priesthood, and he established regional seminaries to better prepare them. He also continued the work he had begun even as a parish priest – to create a simple catechism to help lay Catholics to learn the faith in an increasingly hostile world. As pope, this work became known as the Pius X Catechism; and it is still available in print today. He also required every parish across the world to have a CCD (Confraternity of Christian Doctrine) program to hand on the faith to children. This is the forerunner to our own Parish School of Religion.

The Liturgy was supremely important to Pope St. Pius X; and he instituted a reform of Sacred Music to deepen the prayer and participation of the people. He reminded all the faithful that our active participation in the Sacraments and Prayer of the Church is the source of our Christian spirit. For this reason, he encouraged the faithful to receive the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ in Holy Communion frequently, even daily. And he lowered the age of First Holy Communion to the age of reason (age 7), when a child can discern and begin to understand the mystery of the Eucharist.

At the end of his life, Pope St. Pius X suffered greatly as the Great War (World War I) loomed on the horizon. He appealed to the nations of the world to work for peace through Jesus Christ. He died on the 20th of August in 1914.

Pope St. Pius X offered his life in service of the Church and the world, calling everyone "to renew all things in Christ." His plea remains as prescient as ever for a world that continues to wander in the darkness of Godlessness. As Catholics and members of this parish named for St. Pius X, let us strive to take up the words of his papal motto. May all of us welcome the renewal that Jesus offers so that our lives, our families, our community, and our world can receive the Lord's promise of a new heart and a new Spirit.

¹⁰ Cf. Pope Benedict XVI, General Audience, 18 August 2010, https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2010/documents/hf_ben-xvi_aud_20100818.html.