# Address in St. Peter's Basilica on the Occasion of the Unveiling of the Monument to the Supreme Pontiff Pius XI

*The Supreme Pontiff provides a survey of the many achievements of his predecessor. He stresses Pius XI's dedication to learning and culture, and emphasises how he had not only been dedicated to the sacred sciences and permeated by a zeal for the training of the clergy but had also been moved by a 'love for science' and 'a solicitude towards scientists' of all nations. This had been expressed in his giving a new life to the Pontifical Academy of Sciences 'which he liked to honour with his personal intervention and his words'. Pius XI had also encouraged many other institutions of learning and research.*

While there fell the veil of the monument, which the piety of the Cardinals created by him had erected in the highest temple of Christianity in honour of the Supreme Pontiff Pius XI – a monument that Cardinal Nasalli Rocca in the name of the Cardinal's Commission has eloquently illustrated – an inexpressible and joyous feeling took hold of our spirit. This marble work will evoke in the eyes of the multitudes, who, more numerous than ever during this Holy Year, will gather in throngs beneath the vaults of this Patriarchal Basilica, the memory and almost the very living effigy of the august one who has passed on.

But only one monument can worthily represent his spirit: that of his teachings, of his examples, and of his works. That spirit, far from disintegrating with the bite of time, will appear to generation after generation as ever greater and ever more powerful.

Venerable brothers and dear children: forceful is our commotion. But how profound it is within us, and we, called by him to be a part of the Sacred College, while we venerated him as a Father and a Teacher, were far from supposing that in its inscrutable designs divine providence was preparing us to take from his hands, to be borne on our weak shoulders, the gigantic legacy that he left

behind him!

It could seem that we, having been for a good nine years the humble but assiduous and devoted collaborator of his apostolic ministry through the happy and the stormy events of his pontificate, the witness to his substantial works, the confidant of his high thoughts, should be able to throw light on the most relevant traits of our immortal predecessor. Alas! Precisely because of such intimacy, the undertaking daunts us even more because of the immediate knowledge that we had of his incomparable greatness.

Greatness; yes, greatness indeed: *Factus est… Sacerdos magnus!*1 He was always great: great because of the force and the clarity of his intellect, great because of his heart and his virtues, great because of the breadth of his thoughts and the height of his proposals, and great because of the exactness and the vigour of their practical implementation.

In Pius XI, future generations will admire the greatness of his intellect, the vastness of his knowledge, the variety and the agility of his aptitudes, the eminent superiority of the scholar, the doctor, and the pastor. This learning, this universal and yet profound culture – of which he was a model most difficult to imitate – was in his eyes a duty of the priest: 'for the lips of a priest should guard knowledge, and men should seek instruction'.2 What did he not do to promote such learning? Thus his tireless zeal for the training of the clergy, for the solidity and the perfection of their studies, whose fundamental programme he outlined in the Apostolic Constitution *Deus Scientiarum Dominus* (24 May 1931). But the esteem which his mind, open to the broadest horizons of knowledge, had for knowledge, did not confine itself to the sacred sciences; in these he venerated the word of God manifested to the world; in the profane sciences he revered the ray of light that God reflects onto the front of man created in His image and likeness.

Of them all he made himself the promoter and the patron, and his love for science flowed into his solicitude towards scientists, without personal distinction, or distinction regarding nations and civilisations – a solicitude which gave a new life to the Pontifical Academy of Sciences, which he liked to honour with his personal intervention and his words.

This is an example of his greatness in the practical implementation of his brilliant ideas. And how many others could one cite without moving beyond the field of intellectual life! Need one perhaps remember what he did to establish, refound, and organise universities, faculties, institutes and seminaries? To ensure – he himself having been a most expert librarian – the conservation of archives and libraries? To make it happen that the voice of the Vicar of Christ reached the far ends of the earth through a very modern radio station? To foster the cultivation of the arts through the new Vatican picture gallery?

Future generations will admire in Pius XI his greatness and sensitivity of heart, the purity and ardour of charity. I believe that of him one will never be able to say that science made arid or rendered lukewarm his refined sensitivity.

His love for God appears through all his words, his writings, his works, in his doctrinal teachings, as indeed in their practical application. In them one sees at every moment the bursting forth of the spark, or the lighting of the great fire, of his love. One reads anew the forceful Encyclical *Miserentissimus Redemptor* (8 May 1928), with his invitation to atonement, and the Bull *Quod Nuper* (6 January 1933), by which he called the Special Holy Year of the Redemption,

crowned at Lourdes at the feet of the Immaculate One. And what devotion towards the Virgin and Mother of God transpires in the commemoration of the Ecumenical Council of Ephesus and the liturgical feast, extended to the whole of the Church, of the divine Motherhood of Mary![3]
What can one say about his charity towards men. He felt and carried within him all their suffering, all their misery, all their worries. The economic crisis, unemployment, the armaments race all inspired his Encyclical *Nova Impendet* (2 October 1931); and a few months later the first words of *Caritate Christi Compulsi* (3 May 1932) were sufficient to reveal to the world the depths of that great heart, subsequently tormented by the civil wars in Spain and Mexico, where 'brothers have killed brothers'.
Future generations will admire in Pius XI the greatness of his views and aspirations. High Priest, he had no other ambition than have God and his Christ reign in the world. He was rightly called the Pope of Catholic Action. He was this in the fullest meaning of the word, asking for the co-operation of everybody and in all forms. He wanted to establish this kingdom of God and Christ, to strengthen it, and to propagate it in individuals, in families, in nations and between nations, and in the whole of human society.
In order to establish it in souls through personal sanctification, he strongly promoted the practice of spiritual exercises; in order to establish it and make it shine forth in priests through priests, a few years earlier he had exalted the greatness of priesthood in his priestly Jubilee,[4] published the magnificent Encyclical *Ad Catholici Sacerdotii* (20 December 1935), and inserted at the same time the fine votive mass of Jesus Christ, high and eternal Priest, into the liturgy.
In order to establish this kingdom in families, he strongly inculcated respect for the sanctity of marriage, *Casti Connubii* (31 December 1930), after, through *Divini Illius Magistri* (31 December 1929), fighting for the Christian education of young people.
Concerned to defend the rights of nations, the most wise Pontiff, just as with the Lateran Pacts he restored religious peace to Italy, so also with the almost simultaneous publication of three luminous Encyclicals did he reprove and condemn the attacks against the sovereignty of God and Christ. And turning his gaze beyond all national frontiers, the seas and oceans, while with perseverance and uprightness he worked to open the path to the return of dissidents to within the Mother Church, he provided through the Encyclical *Rerum Ecclesiae* (28 February 1926) for the development of missions amongst those without faith and for the perfect training of a native clergy.
The Father and Pastor of peoples, he multiplied his care in favour of peace between nations from the beginning of his pontificate with the programme-communicating Encyclical *Ubi Arcano Dei Consilio* (23 December 1922), in which he invoked the peace of Christ in the kingdom of Christ, until the day in which, amidst the deaf murmuring of the impending storm, his afflicted and tired voice urged the peoples of the world to be reconciled fraternally, and for the health and the peace of the world he made to God the offering of his valuable life.
Intent on founding the whole of human society on the kingdom of Christ, he made every effort and saved himself no trial in order to establish a Christian social order, confirming and completing the teachings of his predecessors with the Encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno* (15 May 1931), which will go down in history as being no less famous than *Rerum Novarum*, whose fortieth anniversary he commemorated.

Lastly, in order to make God and his Christ reign in the world and over the world, placing a crown on the work of Leo XIII, who had consecrated the world to the most holy Heart of Christ, and on the work of Pius X, who had dedicated his life to uniting all things in Christ,5 he solemnly proclaimed the kingship of Christ and instituted the feast of Christ the King, one of the most resplendent of the liturgical year.
We have done nothing else but outline the general features of the monument which Pius XI raised to himself through his life and works. They are enough, however, to allow us to see dizzy heights. We would now like to conclude our yet very inadequate picture by presenting the wonderful harmony of such sublime greatnesses.
It is that which Holy Scripture exalts in Wisdom, which *attingit … a fine usque ad finem fortiter, et disponit omnia suaviter*. Strength and goodness. The strength of Pius XI was indomitable, inflexible, both as regards the upholding of the rights of God and of the Church in the sanctity of marriage, in the education of young people; in condemning the violation of these rights in the government of peoples or nations, or in outlining the limits of rights and of mutual duties in national and international social practice; and in reproving easy compromises, timid compliances, half-measures, forms of irresolution, and easy neutralities. There still ring out in our ears his unforgettable words: the greatness and the difficulties of our times do not allow any true disciple of Christ to be content with mediocrity. The memory of an evening is still alive for us, when he called us at an unusual hour to ask for our modest advice regarding a difficult problem which was causing him worry. We expressed that advice as best we could. He then exclaimed: ‘you speak as the Secretary of State must speak. But we… we now have here’ – and he pointed to the door with his finger – ‘a great audience’. And raising his right hand he said: ‘We know what we have to say’. He rose, went and spoke like an ancient Father of the Church. His vigour, his intransigence; there where compromise would have been prevarication, he made the most brazen tremble.
And nonetheless, even then, the severity of his requests was sweetened by an impeccable loyalty without passion, by an unchanging goodness. With what honest frankness he expounded the role that falls to the state in the education of young people! What sensitive understanding and what paternal compassion he expressed for the suffering and worries often connected with the full and faithful practice of conjugal duties! One could continue indefinitely this examination of his acts; one would always reach the same conclusion.
Present circumstances require neither less strength nor less goodness. We thus turn our gaze towards him; we hear the voice of his examples, and to him, in this hour which is specially dedicated to his memory, we present the solemn promise of our hearts.
O excellent Pontiff, the greatness and the seriousness, the cares and the suffering of the time in which Divine Providence wished to place our life and our work, do not daunt us. Harsh as it is, threatened by dangers, aggravated by forms of bitterness, we however love this time, we embrace it like the cross destined for us by the Lord from the beginning of time, and on whose rough hardness must be experienced the genuineness of our love, the firmness of our faithfulness, the absoluteness of our faith, the range of our intimate participation in the pain, the needs, and the mission of the Bride of Christ. Your words and your example are for us a stimulus and an encouragement to walk in the footsteps left by your energy and your intrepid activity, all

consecrated to promoting the return to Christ of your generation. May the Lord give us the grace to calmly follow, as you did, the invitation of the Master *Duc in altum*,6 with a strength if not equal than at least similar to yours, and to obtain from divine omnipotence that which goes beyond purely human power.

If the Lord so wishes, in a few days' time we will proceed to the opening of that Holy Door that the hand of Pius XI opened two times during his pontificate. We will do so with the strong trust that He who reigns in heaven and reigns over the destinies of peoples and above all the destiny of his Church, will concede to us, at this time of prayer and forgiveness, to experience the rich efficacy of his promise: *Qui petit accipit, et qui quaerit invenit, et pulsanti aperietur*.7

May he who is the King and the centre of all hearts be moved to move obstinate spirits, to open the ears of men to the infinite sweetness and mercy of his words: *Ecce sto ad ostium et pulso*,8 so that by his victorious grace many of those who have so far been hostile to him and his Church, casting off the shadows of their errors, will come into the light of Christ *ut vitam habeant et abundantius habeant*.9

In this expectation and with this prayer, we willingly impart on you, venerable brothers and loved children, on all those who are united with us in spirit in the commemoration of our great predecessor, on all our sons and daughters spread on the face of the earth, on those above all else who in prisons and forced confinement, in torment and slavery, in oppression and humiliation, 'were counted worthy to suffer dishonour for the name of Jesus',10 in hoping and wishing for the most chosen celestial favours, our paternal Apostolic Blessing.

1 *1 M* 14:30.

2 *Ml* 2:7.
3 *Lux Veritatis*, 25 December 1931.
4 *Quinquagesimo Ante Anno*, 23 December 1929.
5 *Ep* 1:10.
6 *Lk* 5:4.
7 *Mt* 7:8.
8 *Rv* 3:20.
9 *Jn* 10:10.
10 *Ac* 5:41.

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