Sixtus IV (r. 1471-1484), born Francesco della Rovere in Liguria. As a young man he joined the Franciscan order and studied philosophy and theology at the University of Pavia. In 1464 he elected Minister General of the Franciscan order and made cardinal by Paul II in 1467. Elected pope in 1471 and took the name Sixtus, not used since 5th century, and immediately declared a crusade against the Ottoman Turks in Smyrna; after victory the fleet disbanded and Sixtus turned his attention to more temporal issues – embellishment of Rome and his dynasty. Sixtus IV saw himself as *Urbis Restaurator* and a new Augustus.

[Sixtus] “made Rome from a city of brick into stone just as Augustus of old had turned the stone city into marble.” Raffaelo Maffei

“But Sixtus dared this and he alone ordered old Rome to rise up again; no, actually he himself founded a new Rome!
This man returned beauty to the city and he removed the old ruins and he laid out in all directions a road of baked brick.
He built a famous work of a bridge and restored churches, many to be sure, but he built still more new ones.
He collected books of the ancients, he collected books of recent writers.
He himself brought back the Aqua Vergine to the Campus Martius.
And what those and others did in 1500 years, this man himself accomplished in ten years.
Father Romulus, yield! All ancients, yield!” Aurelio Brandolini

“You restored a Rome fallen from magnificence. You remade the Tiberian bridge, broken by the flood of waves of the river after much time: they even call the bridge "Sixtus" taken from your name. You straightened out the common road, which was long ago rather filthy.” Adamo de Montaldo

"Through you Rome has now been returned to itself, the Tiber is covered with bridges, the extensive streets are restored. You built marble towers, golden palaces, you restored ancient churches, and established new ones." Pacifício Massimi

“Sixtus IV, the highest and greatest pontiff, began to restore the city. First, namely, he destroyed the dark porticoes and also extended the streets and squares of the city and covered them with brick, and brought back many completely destroyed churches into their original form. To be sure, his successors attempted to copy the man himself. Finally your sanctity conquered even Sixtus himself and others in the space of brief time: indeed the structures themselves demonstrate the truth of the matter plainly, so that the city is able deservedly to be called new."
Nevertheless, it differs much from that first ancient time. For the ruins themselves teach how
great Rome once was.” Francisco Albertini, *Opusculum de Mirabilibus Novae Urbis Romae*

Melozzo da Forli, *Dedication of the Vatican Library, 1477*: “Rome owes to you, Sixtus, temples,
a home for foundlings, streets, market squares, walls, bridges, the repairs done to the Aqua
Vergine of the public square, the decision to give the sailors a harbor, their ancient privilege,
and the walls around the Monte Vaticano. But it owes even more to you; for the library that was
hidden in dirt, can now be seen in a prominent place.”

Arch of Constantine, Marcus Aurelius reliefs:

*Justitia*: Roman Emperors were the source of the law and justice. Marcus Aurelius is
seated on a podium. His hand gesture articulates his judgment, while a barbarian being
supported pleads his case below. In images of justitia the emperor is traditionally seated
upon the sella curulis, which would be appropriated in the Christian tradition
the *cathedra*, or the seat of the bishop, carries with it the connotations of authority, the
"seat of justice."

*Liberalitas*: Emperors saw themselves as providers for the needs of the Roman citizens
in the building markets, aqueducts, road systems, amphitheaters, etc. Acts of charity
showed the interests of the Emperors in the welfare of the people of Rome. The
Emperor is shown seated on a *sella curulis*, or the seat of the magistrate, and thus the
seat of civil authority.

*Lysippus the Younger, Ponte Sisto Medal of Pope Sixtus IV, 1473*, bronze; inscribed: SIXTUS IIII
PONT MAX SACRICVLTOR and on reverse CVRA RERVM PVBLICARVM

*1471, Renovation of the Capitoline and donation of Lateran antiquities: She-wolf, Spinario,
Constantine, Camillus, Hercules.*

Baccio Pontelli, *Santa Maria del Popolo, 1472- c. 1480*, dynastic monument to the della Rovere
family.

“we proceeded to our blessed Lady de Populo, which is a monastery of the Augustinians, keeping his observances.
The monastery lies close by the Porta Flaminia, through which one enters coming from our country. In this church
is a picture of our Lady which St. Luke made, which performs many miracles. Item where this monastery stood was
formerly a nut-tree on which many devils lived who plagued all those who passed to & fro, and no one knew
whence they came. It was shown to St. Pascasius, the Pope, in a dream that he should have the nut-tree cut down
and cause a church to be built on the spot in honour of our blessed Lady. The Pope made a great procession, which
he accompanied, to the nut-tree, and struck the first blow himself, and the tree was at once rooted up. Beneath
the tree, deep under the ground, they found a coffin in which lay Nero, the wicked tyrant, who slew St. Peter and
St. Paul and many other martyrs. The Pope caused it to be burnt to ashes with the nut-tree and thrown into the
Tiber. The church was then built in honour of our blessed Lady. In this church is daily indulgence for 3000 years.”

A von Harff, The Pilgrimage of Arnold von Harff, Knight

Pinturicchio, *Adoration of the Christ Child*, fresco altarpiece, Chapel of Cardinal Domenico della
Rovere, 1478 – 80, Santa Maria del Popolo

Pinturicchio, *Virgin and Child with Saints Augustin, Francis, Anthony of Padua and Nicholas of
Tolentino*, fresco altarpiece, Chapel of Cardinal Girolamo Basso della Rovere, 1484,

Pinturicchio, *Assumption of the Virgin*, fresco, Chapel of Cardinal Girolamo Basso della Rovere,
1484, Santa Maria del Popolo

Pinturicchio, *Coronation of the Virgin surrounded by Evangelists, Sibyls and Fathers of the
Church*, apse, c. 1490
Baccio Pontelli, Hospital of Santo Spirito in Sassia, Rome, c. 1478. Built on the site of the ancient Schola Saxia erected by King of Wessex at the end to the 7th century to host the many Anglo-Saxon pilgrims visiting Rome. In 1471 a fire led to its almost destruction; Sixtus decided to rebuild it in view of the Jubilee of 1475. In 1478 the walls of the Corsia Sistina with frescoes depicting the origins of the hospitals and events in the life of Sixtus IV.

Baccio Pontelli, Ponte Sisto, 1473-1479, built on the foundations of the ancient Roman bridge, the Pons Aurelius; spans the Tiber connecting Via dei Pettinari to Piazza Trilussa in Trastevere. Inscriptions were written by humanist Bartolomeo Platina in honor of Sixtus IV:

XYSTVS IIII PONT MAX
AD UTILITATEM P RO PEREGRINAEQVE MVTILI
TVDINIS AD JVBLAEVM VENTVRAE PONTEM
HVQEM QVEM MERITO RVPTVM VOCABANT A FVN
DAMENTIS MAGNA CVRA ET IMPENSA RESTI
TVIT XYSTVMOQVE SVO DE NOMINE APPELLARI VOLVIT
MCCCCLXXV
QVI TRANSIS XYST QVARTI BENEFICIO
DEVM ROGA VT PONTEFICEM OPTIMVM MAXI
MMV DIV NOBIS SALVET AC SOSPITET BENE
VALE QVISQVIS ES VBI HAEC PRECATVS
FVERIS
For the use of the Roman people and the crowds of pilgrims coming for the Jubilee. For they rightly called this bridge "broken," [but] with great care and expense [Sixtus] reconstructed it from the foundations and he wished it to be called by his own name Sixtus.

Baccio Pontelli, Sistine Chapel, 1475-82; dedicated on August 15 (Feast of the Assumption of the Virgin), 1483 – rebuilt the old Palatine chapel of Nicholas III. Designed to accommodate the conclave of cardinals who met to elect the pope and the ceremonies of the capella papalis (Papal Chapel), which included the pope and some 200 high-ranking clerical and secular officials. It met at least 42 times a year and celebrated 27 masses. A cancellata (marble screen) divided the chapel in half – sancta sanctorum on altar side was reserved for members of the Papal Chapel.

Pietro Perugino, Assumption and Coronation of the Virgin, 1481-83, fresco, destroyed for Michelangelo’s Last Judgment; recorded in a drawing in Albertina; Sistine Chapel dedicated on August 15, 1483, Feast of the Assumption

Life of Moses, Life of Christ, First 32 Popes (Petrine Succession), frescoes by Perugino, Pinturicchio, Ghirlandaio, Botticelli, Signorelli, and Cosimo Roselli; ceiling probably decorated with stars and zodiac by Pier Matteo d’Amelia; sub lege (under the law of Moses), sub gratia (under the law/grace of Christ)

Perugino, Journey of Moses into Egypt, fresco, 1480-82; inscribed: Observatio Antique
Regeneration is a Moyse per Circumcisionem; Exodus 4:24-26: “then Zipporah took a sharp stone and cut off the foreskin of her son and cast it at Moses's feet and said, Surely a bloody husband art thou to me.”

**Perugino, Baptism of Christ**, fresco, 1480-82; inscribed: Institutio Nove Regenerationis a Christo in Baptism; Matthew 3:13-17

**Botticelli, Trials of Moses**; inscribed Temptatio Moisi Legis Scriptae Latoris (Temptation of Moses, Giver of the Written Law). On the right, Moses kills the Egyptian who harassed a Hebrew; Moses fights the shepherds who prevent Jethro’s daughters from watering their cattle; upper left, Moses removes his shoes to receive the tak to return to Egypt from God; in lower left, Moses drives the Jews to the Promised Land.

**Botticelli, Three Temptations of Christ**; inscribed Temptatio Iesu Christi Latoris Evangelicae Legis (The Temptations of Christ, Bringer of the Evangelic Law). Upper left, Christ is tempted by the devil in the guise of a hermit to turn stones into bread; in upper center Christ is on top of the temple of Jerusalem and the devil challenges him to throw himself down to test God’s promise; upper right, the Devil has taken Christ to the top of a mountain and promises him domain over earth if he will deny God. In foreground, young man whom Christ has cured of leprosy presents himself to the High Priest to be pronounced clean.

**Botticelli, Punishment of Corah**, fresco, 1480-82; inscribed: CONTURBATIO MOISI LEGIS SCRIPTAE LATORIS (Challenge to Moses bearer of the written law); Moses as a Christ type; Stoning of Moses // a challenge to Christ and to his vicar, the pope; Moses has the earth swallow up the Jewish schismatics, Datham and Abiram; power to damn; sons of Korah saved on a cloud = power to save; Moses has Korah and 4 Jewish rebels, who all tried to usurp Moses’ authority, destroyed by fire (allusion to Great Schism and power to damn)

Aaron (wearing papal tiara) and son Eleazar, duly appointed successors of Moses, are saved (allusion to Petrine succession and power to save)

Arch of Constantine inscribed: NEMO SIBI ASSUMMAT HONOREM NISI VOCATUS A DEO TANQUAM ARON (Let no man take this honor [of Priesthood] upon himself unless called by God as was Aaron); based on Numbers 16:40 and Hebrews 5:4 (alludes to Petrine Succession while condemning schism; arch commemorated Constantine’s victory over Maxentius at the Milvian Bridge AD 312; unified the Roman Empire and the church

**Perugino, Christ Consigns the Keys to St Peter** (with Tribute Money and Stoning of Christ), fresco, 1480-82; inscribed: CONTURBATIO JESU CHRISTI LEGIS LATORIS (Challenge to Jesus Christ bearer of the law); arches inscribed: IMENSU[M]

SALAMO TEMPLUM TU HOC QUARTE SACRAST SIXTE OPIBUS DISPAR RELIGIONE PRIOR (You Sixtus IV unequal in riches but superior in wisdom to Solomon have consecrated this vast temple);

Tribute Money = challenge to Christ by temporal authority and symbol of Christ’s redemption of humankind and primacy of Peter

Stoning of Christ = challenge to Christ’s spiritual authority

**Fra Carnevale (attributed), Ideal City**, c. 1480; close ties between Sixtus and Federico da Montefelto’s court at Urbino; Sixtus arrange the marriage of his nephew, Giovanni della Rovere, to Federico’s daughter.
Pollaiuolo, Tomb of Sixtus IV, 1484-93, commissioned by Giuliano della Rovere

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OAKRTBkalGI

Reclining figure of the pope surrounded by the seven theological and cardinal virtues: Charity, Hope, Prudence, Fortitude, Faith, Temperance, and Justice. Below, on the sides of the tomb, are 10 liberal arts: Philosophy, Theology, Rhetoric, Grammar, Arithmetic, Astrology, Dialectic, Geometry, Music and Perspective.

Baccio Pontelli (attributed), Palazzo della Cancelleria, 1484-1513, commissioned by Raffaele Riario who inherited fortune from his uncle Sixtus IV in 1484 and then in 1489 won a huge fortune in a game of cards from Franceschetto Cybo, the illegitimate son of Innocent VIII.

Additional Reading:
Carol Lewine, The Sistine Chapel Walls and the Roman Liturgy, UPenn, 1993
Vatican Museums Online: Sistine Chapel A virtual detailed tour of the frescoes and panels
High-resolution interactive virtual tour of the Sistine Chapel