

Saint of the Month for November 2012

(A monthly series compiled by Tom Quinlan)

Saint Leo the Great, Pope and Doctor of the Church
Saturday, November 10

St. Leo I, now generally known as “the Great,” reigned as Pope from 440 until his death in 461 A.D.; he was the 45th person to hold the chair of St. Peter. His commemoration is given the rank of Obligatory Memorial.

Saint Leo was probably born in Rome. He was a true pastor and father of souls. He labored strenuously to safeguard the integrity of the Faith and vigorously defended the unity of the Church. He was both political and courageous in his dealings with the Eastern Church. He asserted the authority of Rome and his primacy as pope and successor to St. Peter. During his pontificate, the Council of Chalcedon (451) defined that Christ is one divine person with two natures, divine and human, combating a 5th century heresy called Monophysitism, which claimed that Christ had only one nature, a composite of human and divine. It was a confirmation of his *Epistola Dogmatica* of 450 (dogmatic letter) to the Patriarch Flavian of Constantinople. He pushed back or at least softened the onrush of the barbarians under Attila in 452; the city of Rome was saved from the Huns for some years, but was eventually sacked. He has then deservedly won the title “the Great.” He is the patron of choristers and musicians. (Magnificat, November 2012; Daily Roman Missal, Third Edition; Catholic Dictionary)

Collect from the Mass of St. Leo:

O God, who never allow the gates of hell
to prevail against your Church,
firmly founded on the apostolic rock,
grant her, we pray,
that through the intercession of Pope Saint Leo,
she may stand firm in your truth
and know the protection of lasting peace.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity
of the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. (Roman Missal, Third Edition)

I am reminded of a painting by Raphael Sanzio of St. Leo going out to meet the barbarian leader at the gates of Rome. The Huns were hardly known for their weak ways, but the Pope so impressed Attila that they withdrew from Rome for a time.

Not all of us have the level of courage of Saint Leo, but we can pray for an increase in what we do have, to face difficult problems inside ourselves, in our families, in our cities, our country, and the world at large. Saint Leo, help us to adhere to the important principles in life and to persevere when times are difficult and opposition is strong. Saint Leo, pray for us!