

TUESDAY OF THE 32ND WEEK IN OT Pope St. Leo the Great 11/10/2020

Today the Catholic Church worldwide honors Pope St. Leo the Great. In our long series of Popes only three have been given the title “Great”. The first was today’s saint, Pope Leo I, whose name in Latin means “lion.” He died in 461. The two other “Great” Popes are St. Gregory I, who died in 604, and St. Nicholas I who died in 867. All lived roughly 250 years apart. Elected in 440, Leo had one of the longest reigns of any Pope -- 21 years. Three achievements in particular probably led to his title of “the Great.” First, though his writings and his diplomacy Leo was largely responsible for formulating what we Latin Catholics still hold today, known as “Petrine Supremacy.” This is the recognition that the Bishop of Rome, in which city are the tombs of Saints Peter and Paul, is the Vicar of St. Peter. Hence this Bishop’s authority and rank are above those of all of the other Catholic Patriarchs and Bishops anywhere else on earth.

Secondly, at the Council of Chalcedon, held in a suburb of present-day Istanbul, Turkey, in 451, Pope Leo supplied the wording for what we Catholics continue to believe and teach today. We hold that Jesus Christ is “one person, the Divine Word, in whom are two natures, one human and one divine, permanently united, without confusion or mixture.” In accepting this formulation, the assembled Council Fathers shouted out: “Peter has spoken through the mouth of Leo.”

Thirdly, and what Pope Leo is best known for in secular history, is that in 452, he persuaded face-to-face Attila the Hun, the barbarian leader who had ravaged most of the great Christian cities in northern Italy, to spare Rome. Attila did, and then died the following year in present-day Hungary. Add to this all of Leo’s many theological writings, which have earned him as well the title of “Doctor of the Church,” and you can see why Pope Leo I is called “the Great,” and why he has had an influence on the Catholic Church that has lasted for over 1500 years, right down to this very day. Largely because of Pope Leo I, the Catholic Church would eventually emerge as perhaps the strongest institution of the medieval world in

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Europe and be the preserver of much of the best of the Greek and Roman civilizations.

For several days this week our First Reading is from a letter, attributed to St. Paul, sent to his young gentle companion, Titus, honored as the saintly first Bishop of the island of Crete, today a part of Greece. Titus is directed to set up a structured Church in each evangelized community, one having leaders variously called bishops, elders, presbyters and deacons. The necessary qualities for each are listed. Bishops, for example, are to have been married only once and not be drunkards or have children who are randy or rambunctious. They are to teach only what they have been taught, exhorting with sound doctrine and being able to refute the falsities and errors of any opponents.

Today we hear St. Paul instruct Bishop Titus on the quite precise qualities that he should instill in the members of his flock. For example, Paul says that "older women should be reverent in their behavior, not slanderers, not addicted to drink, teaching what is good." All the followers of Jesus should live "temperately, justly and devoutly."

Finally, in our Gospel today Jesus tells His Apostles -- and quite likely us as well -- WHEN YOU HAVE DONE ALL THAT YOU HAVE BEEN COMMANDED, SAY : WE ARE UNPROFITABLE SERVANTS ; WE HAVE DONE WHAT WE WERE OBLIGED TO DO.