



Pope St. Leo the Great

Birth name: Leo

Born: c. 400 AD Tuscany, Western Roman Empire

Died: 10 November 461 Rome, Western Roman Empire Sainthood

Feast day: 10 November 11 April (pre-1969 calendar) 18 February (Eastern Orthodoxy)

Venerated: in Catholic Church Eastern Orthodox Church Anglican Communion

Attributes: Papal vestments Papal tiara Staff

Papacy began: 29 September 440

Papacy ended: 10 November 461

Predecessor: Sixtus III

Successor: Hilarius

Pope Leo I (c. 400 – 10 November 461), also known as Saint Leo the Great, was Pope from 29 September 440 and died in 461. Pope Benedict XVI said that Leo's papacy "... was undoubtedly one of the most important in the Church's history."

He was a Roman aristocrat, and was the first pope to have been called "the Great". He is perhaps best known for having met Attila the Hun in 452 and persuading him to turn back from his invasion of Italy. He is also a Doctor of the Church, most remembered theologically for issuing the Tome of Leo, a document which was a major foundation to the debates of the Ecumenical Council of Chalcedon. The Council of Chalcedon, the fourth ecumenical council, dealt primarily with Christology, and elucidated the orthodox definition of Christ's being as the hypostatic union of two natures, divine and human, united in one person, "with neither confusion nor division". It was followed by a major schism associated with Monophysitism, Miaphysitism and Dyophysitism.

Early life

According to the *Liber Pontificalis*, he was a native of Tuscany. By 431, as a deacon, he was sufficiently well known outside of Rome that John Cassian dedicated to him the treatise against Nestorius written at Leo's suggestion. About this time Cyril of Alexandria appealed to Rome regarding a jurisdictional dispute Juvenal of Jerusalem, but it is not entirely clear whether the letter was intended for Leo, in his capacity of deacon, or for Pope Celestine I directly. Near the end of the reign of Pope Sixtus III, Leo was dispatched at the request of Emperor Valentinian III to settle a dispute between Aëtius, one of Gaul's chief military commanders, and the chief magistrate Caecina Decius Aginatus Albinus. Johann Peter Kirsch sees this commission as a proof of the confidence placed in the able deacon by the Imperial Court.

Papacy

During his absence in Gaul, Pope Sixtus III died (11 August 440), and on 29 September Leo was unanimously elected by the people to succeed him.

Soon after assuming the papal throne Leo learned that in Aquileia, Pelagians were received into church communion without formal repudiation of their errors; he censured this practice and directed that a provincial synod be held where such former Pelagians be required make an unequivocal abjuration.

Manichaeans fleeing the Vandals had come to Rome in 439 and secretly organized there; Leo learned of it around 443, and proceeded against them by holding a public debate with their representatives, burning their books and writing letters of warning to the Italian bishops.

His attitude was as decided against the Priscillianists. Bishop Turibius of Astorga, astonished at the spread of the sect in Spain, had addressed the other Spanish bishops on the subject, sending a copy of his letter to Leo, who took the opportunity to write an extended treatise (21 July 447) against the sect, examining its false teaching in detail and calling for a Spanish general council to investigate whether it had any adherents in the episcopate.

From a pastoral perspective he galvanized charitable works in a Rome beset by famines, an influx of refugees, and poverty. He further associated the practice of fasting with charity and almsgiving particularly on the occasion of the Quattro tempora, (the quarterly Ember days).

Papal Authority

Decree of Valentinian

Leo was a significant contributor to the centralisation of spiritual authority within the Church and in reaffirming papal authority. The bishop of Rome had gradually become viewed as the chief patriarch in the Western church. Leo would push that authority into a new realm.

On several occasions Leo was asked to arbitrate disputes in Gaul. Patroclus of Arles (d. 426) had received from Pope Zosimus the recognition of a subordinate primacy over the Gallican Church which was strongly asserted by his successor Hilary of Arles. An appeal

from Chelidonius of Besançon gave Leo the opportunity to assert the pope's authority over Hilary, who defended himself stoutly at Rome, refusing to recognize Leo's judicial status. Feeling that the primatial rights of the bishop of Rome were threatened, Leo appealed to the civil power for support and obtained, from Valentinian III, a decree of 6 June 445, which recognized the primacy of the bishop of Rome based on the merits of Peter, the dignity of the city, and the legislation of the First Council of Nicaea; and provided for the forcible extradition by provincial governors of any bishop who refused to answer a summons to Rome.[5] Faced with this decree, Hilary submitted to the pope, although under his successor, Ravennius, Leo divided the metropolitan rights between Arles and Vienne (450).

Various regional matters

In 445, Leo disputed with Patriarch Dioscorus, St Cyril's successor as Patriarch of Alexandria, insisting that the ecclesiastical practice of his see should follow that of Rome on the basis that Mark the Evangelist, the disciple of St Peter and the founder of the Alexandrian Church, could have had no other tradition than that of the prince of the apostles.

The fact that the African province of Mauretania Caesariensis had been preserved to the empire and thus to the Nicene faith during the Vandal invasion and, in its isolation, was disposed to rest on outside support, gave Leo an opportunity to assert his authority there. In 446 he wrote to the Church in Mauretania in regard to a number of questions of discipline, stressing the point that laymen were not to be appointed to the episcopate.

In a letter to the bishops of Campania, Picenum, and Tuscany (443) he required the observance of all his precepts and those of his predecessors; and he sharply rebuked the bishops of Sicily (447) for their deviation from the Roman custom as to the time of baptism, requiring them to send delegates to the Roman synod to learn the proper practice.

Because of the earlier line of division between the western and eastern parts of the Roman Empire, Illyria was ecclesiastically subject to Rome. Pope Innocent I had constituted the metropolitan of Thessalonica his vicar, in order to oppose the growing influence of the patriarch of Constantinople in the area. In a letter of about 446 to a successor bishop of Thessalonica, Anastasius, Leo reproached him for the way he had treated one of the metropolitan bishops subject to him; after giving various instructions about the functions entrusted to Anastasius and stressing that certain powers were reserved to the pope himself, Leo wrote: "The care of the universal Church should converge towards Peter's one seat, and nothing anywhere should be separated from its Head.