

## A STUDY OF “THE SAINTS THROUGH THE CENTURIES”

By Richard Thornton

### SAINT LEO THE GREAT (400-461) – FIFTH CENTURY

Saint Leo was declared Pope and Doctor of the Church and only one of two Popes (with Gregory I) to earn the title “The Great.”

Saint Leo was born in Tuscany in Italy. He came from a noble Roman family and was a dedicated student of scripture and theology.

When Pope Sixtus died in 440, Saint Leo became Pope. The new Pope set himself to make the Roman Church a pattern for all other Churches. In his ninety-six sermons which have come down to us, we find Saint Leo stressing the virtues of almsgiving, fasting and prayer, and also expounding Catholic doctrine with clarity and conciseness, in particular the dogma of the Incarnation.

The Doctrine of the Incarnation was formed by Saint Leo in a letter to the Patriarch of Constantinople. At the Council of Chalcedon, this same letter was confirmed as the expression of Catholic Faith concerning the person of Christ.

In his duties, Saint Leo felt that strict discipline was significant. This was very important during a time when barbarians were introducing disorder into all conditions of life, and the rules of morality were being seriously violated. Saint Leo used great energy in maintaining discipline, insisting on the exact observance of the ecclesiastical laws of the church.

Saint Leo had a firm belief that the Holy See was the supreme authority in human affairs because of divine and scriptural mandate. Saint Leo is credited with advancing the rightful authority of the Papacy and for stabilizing the Church in a critical era by developing a central authority that performed with both wisdom and action.

These were difficult times for the Church. Barbarian armies were attacking Christians in many places. When Attila the Hun and his barbarians came to attack Rome, all the people were filled with great fear. They knew that barbarians had already burned many cities. To save Rome, Saint Leo rode out to meet the fierce leader, Attila.

The only weapon Saint Leo had was his great trust in God. Miraculously the cruel pagan leader showed the Pope great honor and respect. He made a treaty of peace with him.

Attila said afterward that he had seen two mighty figures standing by the Pope while he spoke. It is believed that they were the great apostles, Peter and Paul. They had been sent by God to protect Pope Saint Leo and the Christians.

In 1774, Pope Benedict XIV exalted Saint Leo to the dignity of Doctor of the Church. Two centuries later, Pope Pius XII, in a sermon given on October 12, 1952, noted that Pope Saint Leo is “The greatest among the great” Faithful Catholics the world over still cherish this wonderful saint, this “greatest among the great”