

# Memorial of St. Leo the Great

## Homily of Bishop Barres

### St. Agnes Cathedral

November 10, 2021

Today we celebrate the Memorial of St. Leo the Great, the great 5<sup>th</sup> Century Pope.

The Opening Prayer of this Mass explains critical aspects of St. Leo's intellectual charity and missionary spirit. It reads: "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."

In his 2008 *Catechesis on St. Leo the Great*, Pope Benedict writes: "The Council of Chalcedon, which rejected the heresy of Eutyches who denied the true human nature of the Son of God, affirmed the union in his one Person, without confusion and without separation, of his two natures, human and divine. The Pope asserted this faith in Jesus Christ, true God and true man, in an important doctrinal text addressed to the Bishop of Constantinople, the so-called *Tome to Flavian* which, read at Chalcedon, was received by the Bishops present with an eloquent acclamation. Information on it has been preserved in the proceedings of the Council: 'Peter has spoken through the mouth of Leo', the Council Fathers announced in unison.

From this intervention in particular, but also from others made during the Christological controversy in those years, it is clear that the Pope felt with special urgency his responsibilities as Successor of Peter, whose role in the Church is unique since 'to one Apostle alone was entrusted what was communicated to all the Apostles', as Leo said in one of his sermons for the Feast of Sts Peter and Paul (83, 2). And the Pontiff was able to exercise these responsibilities, in the West as in the East, intervening in various circumstances with caution, firmness and lucidity through his writings and legates. In this manner he showed how exercising the Roman Primacy was as necessary then as it is today to effectively serve communion, a characteristic of Christ's one Church.

The fame of one particular episode in Leo's life has endured. It dates back to 452 when the Pope, together with a Roman delegation, met Attila, chief of the Huns, in Mantua and dissuaded him from continuing the war of invasion by which he had already devastated the northeastern regions of Italy. Thus, he saved the rest of the Peninsula. This important event soon became memorable and lives on as an emblematic sign of the Pontiffs action for peace.”

No wonder that St. Leo is a Doctor of the Church. We give thanks to God for his holy witness which is still a point of reference centuries later.

The story of the ten lepers in Luke 17 emphasizes the role of giving thanks to God and the role of the daily “thank you” in life.

Giving God thanks, living a rhythm of thanksgiving to God is a jet pack to union with God. Thanksgiving takes us out of ourselves and keeps us focused on God.

The very word “Eucharist” means thanksgiving and is such a critical dimension of the Catholic Mass.

It is astonishing in Luke 17 that ten lepers were completely healed and their lives were completely changed but somehow only one leper returned to thank Christ.

Perhaps the other nine remind us of the depths of ingratitude we can recognize in ourselves. How often we forget to thank Our Lord for both the large graces and the small graces that are bestowed on us every day in life. How often we take charity for granted and lose our focus and forget to return to the Lord.

**The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* explores the Prayer of Thanksgiving:**

2637 Thanksgiving characterizes the prayer of the Church which, in celebrating the Eucharist, reveals and becomes more fully what she is. Indeed, in the work of salvation, Christ sets creation free from sin and death to consecrate it anew and make it return to the Father, for his glory. The thanksgiving of the members of the Body participates in that of their Head.

2638 As in the prayer of petition, every event and need can become an offering of thanksgiving. The letters of St. Paul often begin and end with thanksgiving,

**and the Lord Jesus is always present in it: "Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you"; "Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving."**