

Attila the Hun and Pope Leo of Rome



Pope Leo the Great of Rome (AD 391-AD 461),

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 foundational to the debates of the Ecumenical Council of Chalcedon.

From St. Demetrius of Rostov, *"The Eighteenth Day of the Month of February"*, **The Great Collection of the Lives of the Saints, Volume VI, February**, Chrysostom Press, House Springs, MO, 2003, p. 205-206.

Leo the renowned hierarch and pastor of God's Church, was born in Italy. His father Quintianus provided him a superb education, especially in philosophy, and instructed him in Christian virtue. Rather than pursue a secular career, Leo devoted himself to the spiritual life, and became the archdeacon of Pope Sixtus III. Upon Sixtus' death, he was chosen Pope of Rome, on account of his exceptional purity. As a good shepherd *ready to lay down his life for the sheep*, Leo tended well Christ's flock.

During those days Italy was invaded by Attila, Prince of the Huns, who was known as the “Scourge of God.” The cruel tyrant had already conquered many lands, and devastation of the peninsula by fire and sword appeared imminent; therefore Leo, realizing that resistance was hopeless, undertook a fast and begged God to come to the rescue. After calling upon the holy chief apostles Peter and Paul for help, he went to meet the barbarian chief. Saint Leo was fully prepared to die for his flock in the effort to calm Attila’s wrath. Awed by the holy and venerable countenance and the archpastoral dignity of the man of God, and swayed by his eloquent, divinely inspired admonitions, Attila agreed to all of Leo’s requests. The wolf was changed into a sheep and straightway returned to his own domains. Attila’s chieftains and warlords were amazed by the sudden transformation of their master and asked. “Why were you afraid of a single, unarmed Roman? Why did you do his bidding? Why did you order a retreat, when so much plunder awaited us in Italy?”

“Apparently, you could not see the two men from heaven, one standing to the right of the Pope, and the other to the left. They held bared swords and threatened to kill me if I disobeyed God’s prelate,” replied Attila. From this it is evident that the Lord’s great favorite Leo was feared not only by invisible foes, but by visible ones as well. After he had bravely interceded on their behalf and proved his readiness to suffer for them, his sheep loved him even more than before.