

Rev. Paul A. Hottinger

**Confronting a Crisis**    Thirty-first Week in Ordinary Time    Friday, November 10, 2017  
8:15 AM    Rom 15:14-21;    Lk 16:1-8    **St. Leo the Great, pope and Doctor of the Church**    (Even the saints did not always accomplish what they intended, but it is what we intend ultimately that matters.)

This morning we are celebrating the memory of Leo the Great, Pope Leo the Great. Pope Leo I. He lived in a very crucial time and **there really was no gamebook; everything was changing.**

Now a century before Leo the Church had undergone a great deal of persecution, and then suddenly that all stopped. The Emperor Constantine made all religions free and equal. That was nice for a while, but it didn't last. By the end of the century **Constantine's second successor decided to make the Catholic faith the official religion of the Roman Empire.** Now that might sound like victory, but it wasn't, because once that happened, then the politicians, the Emperor and the various people in the court and the **various powers that be wanted to use the Church and the faith to shore themselves up.** And this began a problem that was resolved only a couple hundred years ago.

Now Leo lived in Italy, Rome, whereas the Emperor had moved to Constantinople in modern-day Turkey; Istanbul it's called. One of the great controversies was **what is really the role of the Church, the pope, the bishops versus the Emperor and the various nobles?** Pope Leo was one of the ones who set down the basic stipulations. He was extremely humble and extremely reserved in what he said was the role of the bishops and the pope in the society that was now all one Church/state, giving actually enormous—**enormous—amount of power away to the so-called secular or civil rulers.**

However at this very time the **civil rulers were failing to rule;** and in central Italy there was no real protection. There was no army. Italy started to be overrun with barbarians, the most famous being Attila the Hun. **So Pope Leo found himself confronting Attila the Hun.** Now what he said

to him, no one knows, but Attila turned back and left Italy. What this resulted in was that gradually but inexorably **the popes became for all intents and purposes the king in central Italy** because everything depended on the pope, every form of government, every aspect of leadership: civil, ecclesiastical, secular, spiritual, it didn't matter; it all depended on the pope. **This led to of course a great deal of problems in the future, and a great deal mixing up of what should be kept separate.**

Nonetheless, **Leo himself did what he had to do at the time in order to confront what was really an overwhelming crisis.** So the Church holds up Leo because he was, first of all, very courageous in confronting Attila, but also because in his writings he was very clear that he was not claiming any kind of divine authority over the secular interests of the people of Italy. And yet in spite of that he became the king of Italy, at least the northern part. **So we don't always accomplish what we intend. Even the saints did not always accomplish what they intended, but it is what we intend ultimately that matters.** With the grace of God our intentions will be also good performances.