



Fr Matthew Charlesworth, SJ

sj.mcharlesworth.fr

A homily for the Memorial of St Leo the Great, pope and doctor of the Church

Date: Monday, November 10, 2025 | **Season:** Ordinary Time after Easter | **Year:** C

First Reading: Wisdom of Solomon 1:1–7

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 139:1b–10 | **Response:** Psalm 139:24b

Gospel Acclamation: Philippians 2:15d, 16a

Gospel Reading: Luke 17:1–6

Preached at: the Chapel of Emmaus House in the Archdiocese of Harare, Zimbabwe.

Imagine the walls of Rome shaking as the Huns approach. At the city gates stands one man, Pope Leo I, unarmed but calm. He meets Attila not with force, but with faith in Christ. That moment shows what the Scriptures invite us to today: courage, compassion, and conviction.

The Book of Wisdom begins, “Love righteousness, you rulers of the earth.” Wisdom cannot live in a deceitful mind. The Spirit of God fills the world and sees every thought. We live within that Spirit as surely as we breathe. Every honest act moves with it; every falsehood pushes against it. For Israel, *tzedek* — righteousness — meant more than private virtue. It meant fairness in trade, care for the poor, honesty in judgement. It measured the soul of a people. True righteousness still asks the same of us: to protect the vulnerable and to make what is right visible. Leo lived this wisdom. He led the Church not for power but for peace, guided by trust in the Spirit who is present in all things.

Our Psalm says, “Lord, you search me and you know me.” There is nowhere beyond God’s care, no moment hidden. The psalmist finds rest in that truth. To be known by God is not to be watched, but to be understood. Ignatius would ask us to stop here and imagine God’s gaze — patient, searching, and kind. What happens in us when we allow that gaze to meet our own? When we let ourselves be seen as we are, prayer becomes honest, and wisdom begins again. Leo lived from that awareness. He knew that the same Spirit who fills creation also fills the ruins of human life. After the invasions, he fed the hungry, rebuilt the churches, and helped his people begin again.

In Luke’s Gospel, Jesus warns his disciples not to lead others into sin. A harsh word, a hard spirit, or a careless example can shake another person’s faith. The warning is gentle but clear: our lives influence the faith of others. Then Jesus speaks of forgiveness. “If your brother sins and repents, forgive him,” he says. The apostles, knowing how hard that is, answer, “Increase our faith.” Jesus replies that even faith the size of a mustard seed can uproot a mulberry tree — a tree known for its deep roots. He means that even a little trust can draw out what is most stubborn in us: resentment, pride, fear. Faith is small, but alive. Once planted, it spreads in ways we do not control. Mercy works the same way.

Leo’s strength came from his belief in the Incarnation. At the Council of Chalcedon, he taught that Christ is one person in two natures, divine and human. Because God has entered our humanity completely, no part of human life lies beyond his reach. That truth gave Leo the courage to stand before Attila without fear and to believe that peace could prevail where violence could not. Later, he helped rebuild a city broken by war and hunger. His teaching was not abstract; it was able to be put into action.

We face different trials now — division, mistrust, fatigue — but the same Spirit moves among us. It breathes wherever truth is spoken and kindness is shown. As we come to the altar, we can ask for that Spirit again: for honesty in our living, steadiness in our prayer, and faith that forgives and begins again.

For our reflection this morning:

- What truth is God inviting me to live more clearly today?
- How do I allow his gaze to shape my prayer and my work?
- Whom do I need to forgive, or ask forgiveness from, so that peace can take root?

Saint Leo the Great, pray for us, that we may be people of courage, compassion, and conviction.

Source: <https://sj.mcharlesworth.fr/homilies/2025-11nov-10-yc-ot-32/>

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