Leo the Great  
*Bishop of Rome, 461*

When Leo was born, about the year 400, the Western Roman Empire was almost in shambles. Weakened by barbarian invasions and by a totally inefficient economic and political system, the structure that had been carefully built by Augustus had become a chaos of internal warfare, subversion, and corruption. The social and political situation notwithstanding, Leo received a good education, and was ordained deacon, with the responsibility of looking after Church possessions, managing the grain dole, and generally administering finances. He won considerable respect for his abilities, and a contemporary of his, Cassian, described him as “the ornament of the Roman Church and the divine ministry.”

In 440, Leo was unanimously elected Pope, despite the fact that he was absent at the time on a mission in Gaul. His ability as a preacher shows clearly in the 96 sermons still extant, in which he expounds doctrine, encourages almsgiving, and deals with various heresies, including the Pelagian and the Manichean systems.

In Gaul, Africa, and Spain, Leo’s strong hand was felt as he issued orders to limit the powers of one over-presumptuous bishop, confirmed the rights of another bishop over his vicars, and selected candidates for holy orders. Leo’s letter to the Council of Chalcedon in 451 dealt so effectively with the
doctrine of the human and divine natures of the One Person of Christ that the assembled bishops declared, “Peter has spoken by Leo,” and affirmed his definition as orthodox teaching. (See page 864 of the Prayer Book.)

With similar strength of spirit and wisdom, Leo negotiated with Attila when the Huns were about to sack Rome. He persuaded them to withdraw from Italy and to accept an annual tribute. Three years later, Genseric led the Vandals against Rome. Again Leo negotiated. Unable to prevent pillaging by the barbarians, he did dissuade them from burning the city and slaughtering its inhabitants. He worked, thereafter, to repair the damage, to replace the holy vessels in the desecrated churches, and to restore the morale of the Roman people.

Collect
O Lord our God, grant that your Church, following the teaching of your servant Leo of Rome, may hold fast the great mystery of our redemption, and adore the one Christ, true God and true Man, neither divided from our human nature nor separate from your divine Being; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Preface of the Epiphany
Psalm 77:11-15

11 I will remember the works of the LORD, *
    and call to mind your wonders of old time.

12 I will meditate on all your acts *
    and ponder your mighty deeds.

13 Your way, O God, is holy; *
    who is so great a god as our God?

14 You are the God who works wonders *
    and have declared your power among the peoples.

15 By your strength you have redeemed your people, *
    the children of Jacob and Joseph.

II Timothy 1:6-14

I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you through
the laying on of my hands; for God did not give us a spirit of
cowardice, but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-
discipline. Do not be ashamed, then, of the testimony about our
Lord or of me his prisoner, but join with me in suffering for the
gospel, relying on the power of God, who saved us and called us
with a holy calling, not according to our works but according to his
own purpose and grace.
This grace was given to us in Christ Jesus before the ages began, but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. For this gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher, and for this reason I suffer as I do. But I am not ashamed, for I know the one in whom I have put my trust, and I am sure that he is able to guard until that day what I have entrusted to him. Hold to the standard of sound teaching that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. Guard the good treasure entrusted to you, with the help of the Holy Spirit living in us.

Matthew 5:13-19

Jesus said, “You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled under foot. You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house.”
In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven. Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, will be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.”