

Reflection December 17, 2017 Isaiah 45:1-13 and a Letter by Saint Leo the Great, pope

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Having become a Dominican has been a wonderful gift for me. One of the many things I am learning is the appreciation of the Liturgy of the Hours – especially the “Office of the Readings.”

Today’s Readings are from Isaiah 45:1-13 and a letter written by Saint Leo the Great, pope.

I learned the following facts from Wikipedia and other Internet sources:

Cyrus the Great (born 590–580 BCE, Media, or Persis [now in Iran]—died c. 529, Asia), conqueror who founded the Achaemenian empire, centered on Persia and comprising the Near East from the Aegean Sea eastward to the Indus River. He is also remembered as a tolerant and ideal monarch who was called the father of his people by the ancient Persians. In the Bible he is the liberator of the Jews who were captive in Babylonia.

The reign of Cyrus the Great lasted approximately 30 years.

Cyrus the Great respected the customs and religions of the lands he conquered

Cyrus the Great is also well recognized for his achievements in human rights, politics and military strategy as well as his influence on both Eastern and Western civilizations.

Isaiah 45 begins with Isaiah stating that Cyrus was the Lord’s anointed and His chosen one. Isaiah makes it clear that although Cyrus had been unaware of God, God had been with him and carried him from victory toward victory. Cyrus was recognized as a Just Man.

Isaiah wrote in this passage the words:

Let justice descend, O heavens, like dew from above,
Like gentle rain let the skies drop it down.
Let the earth open and salvation bud forth;
Let justice also spring up!
I, the Lord, have created this.

However, right after those beautiful words, Isaiah quoted God:

Woe to him who contends with his Maker;
A potsherd among potsherds of the earth!
Dare the clay say to its modeler, “What are you doing?”

These words emphasize that, although God’s Mercy and Love are unbounded, we must keep in mind that God is not a soft warm fuzzy – Justice is also His. He is, after all, the creator of the forces that caused the Big Bang and the forces that continue to cause black holes, novae, creation of new stars and the destruction of planets and the death of existing stars. God is the intelligence behind the gift of life and all the wonders that scientists have and are discovering. They, like Cyrus, are often unaware of who is guiding them and why.

This statement about Saint Leo the Great is found on Wikipedia

Pope Saint Leo I (c. 400 – 10 November 461), also known as **Saint Leo the Great**, was Pope from 29 September 440 to his death in 461. Pope Benedict XVI said that Leo's papacy "...was undoubtedly one of the most important in the Church's history."

He was a Roman aristocrat, and was the first pope to have been called "the Great". 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 a major foundation to the debates of the Ecumenical Council of Chalcedon. The Council of Chalcedon, the fourth ecumenical council, dealt primarily with Christology, and elucidated the orthodox definition of Christ's being as the hypostatic union of two natures, divine and human, united in one person, "with neither confusion nor division". It was followed by a major schism associated with Monophysitism, Miaphysitism and Dyophysitism.

Within the letter Saint Leo writes about the two genealogies found in the Gospels Matthew and Luke. Matthew traces Jesus' genealogy to Abraham while Luke traces Jesus' genealogy back to Adam.

It is my understanding the genealogy of Luke echoes the words of Isaiah when he writes about Cyrus. Although Cyrus is a pagan he was still part of God's plan for the world and by tracing Jesus' genealogy back to Adam, we can see that God's plan for Christ's Salvation is for the whole human race. This belief does not in anyway lessen the value of the genealogy of Matthew in showing who Jesus is as a Jew and the part Judaism plays in the message of Christ.

Saint Leo's letter is important for us today because he explains the necessity of believing that Jesus was both man and God. This is a concept that most Christians, especially Catholics accept without thinking but it is not an easy concept to understand if we have not been conditioned to it since childhood.

It takes several readings to grasp what St. Leo is writing.

For unless the new man, [Christ] by being made *in the likeness of sinful flesh*, had taken on himself the nature of our first parents, unless he had stooped to be one in substance with his mother while sharing the Father's substance and, being alone free from sin, united our nature to his, the whole human race would still be held captive under the dominion of Satan. The Conqueror's victory would have profited us nothing if the battle had been fought outside our human condition. But through this wonderful blending the mystery of new birth shone upon us, so that through the same Spirit by whom Christ was conceived and brought forth we too might be born again in a spiritual birth; and in consequence the evangelist declares the faithful to have been *born not of blood, nor of the desire of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.*