November 10th: Memorial of Saint Leo the Great, Pope and Doctor of the Church

Gospel text (*Mt* 16:13-19): When Jesus went into the region of Caesarea Philippi he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” They replied, “Some say John the Baptist, others Elijah, still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” Simon Peter said in reply, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

Jesus said to him in reply, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah. For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my heavenly Father. And so I say to you, you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of the netherworld shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys to the Kingdom of heaven. Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”

“For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my heavenly Father.”

Fr. Vicenç GUINOT i Gómez
(Sant Feliu de Llobregat, Spain)

Today we celebrate the sanctity "of one of the greatest pontiffs to have honored the Roman See (...). His pontificate (5th century) lasted for more than 21 years and has been without any doubt one of the most important in the history of the Church" (Benedict XVI). In addition to various actions for peace - protecting Rome from barbarian incursions -, Pontiff St. Leo the Great excelled because his voice was heard at the Council of Chalcedon (. 451) defending Christ’s two natures – human and divine -. The Council fathers acclaimed him by saying: “Peter has spoken through the mouth of Leo.”

Today's Gospel is eloquent. Jesus Christ’s question about His own identity shows the Master’s pedagogical refinement. He wants to lead his disciples to a truth which is far away from those human views equating Jesus of Nazareth to one of Judaism’s great men.

In keeping with his impulsive spirit, Peter quickly responds: “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” (Mt 16:16). Simon is not referring to Jesus as a great man; that would imply saying very little, not telling the truth. He is asserting the divine status of the Man he follows. And Jesus confirms it, while explaining to him that his response goes beyond his human capacity: it comes from above! Equally, as his disciples, the same question reaches us: “But who do you say that I am?” (Mt 16:15).

Pontiff Leo the Great said that Peter’s profession of faith was the rock upon which the Church rested.

Similarly, without the help from above we could not simply be Disciples of Christ. Certainly Jesus is a wonderful man, a spiritual guide, a prophetic voice... but it is necessary to "believe" in Him to become his disciple. Only thus is it possible to become a disciple, on the basis of the faith.

With Peter, we acknowledge our faith in Jesus because, as Pope Francis says: “He loves you, He gave his life to save you, and now He is living at your side every day to enlighten, strengthen and free you.”