

Leo and Martin

**Leo of Rome 10<sup>th</sup> November**  
**Martin of Tours 11<sup>th</sup> November**

Leo 1 was Bishop of Rome from 440 till his death on 10<sup>th</sup> November in 461. He lived at a time of great turmoil, both politically and theologically, making his Bishopric of great importance for the West.

In 1508 Pope Julius 11 commissioned rising young artist Raphael to decorate a suite of rooms in the Vatican as his private apartment. These rooms, known as the Stanze, are outstanding examples of High Renaissance painting. By the time Raphael and his workshop came to fresco the last room, the Stanza di Eliodoro in 1514, Julius had been succeeded by Leo X. In one of the curved segments of the room was painted the encounter of Leo 1 with Attila the leader of the Huns. The Huns were a nomadic people from the east who had gradually defeated the tribes of a huge area of central Europe in the 4<sup>th</sup> c. In 440 their forces under Attila crossed the Danube and began to menace the Roman empire. They were repelled from the capital, then at Constantinople (Istanbul). In 450 Attila advanced into Gaul, then into northern Italy (incidentally occasioning the foundation of Venice, as settlers fled to the lagoon islands for safety). His further advance was halted after negotiations with three envoys sent by the Emperor, one of whom was Leo 1, who was apparently chiefly responsible for their successful conclusion. According to one account, SS Peter and Paul appeared, menacing the invaders.

This is what Raphael represents. However, the setting is clearly Rome, not Mantua where the talks actually took place, and it is actually Leo X, wearing the Papal crown, who is represented in the role of his great predecessor.

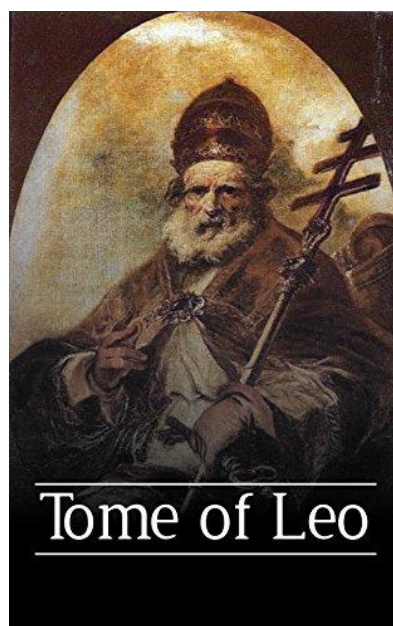


Interestingly, in the illumination of this event in the *Chronicon Pictum* of about 1360 it is Attila who is on the white horse, while Leo is on foot. A Baroque sculptural version by Alessandro Algardi (c 1640) clearly inspired by Raphael's painting, is placed behind the altar in the chapel dedicated to St Leo in St Peter's Basilica in Rome.



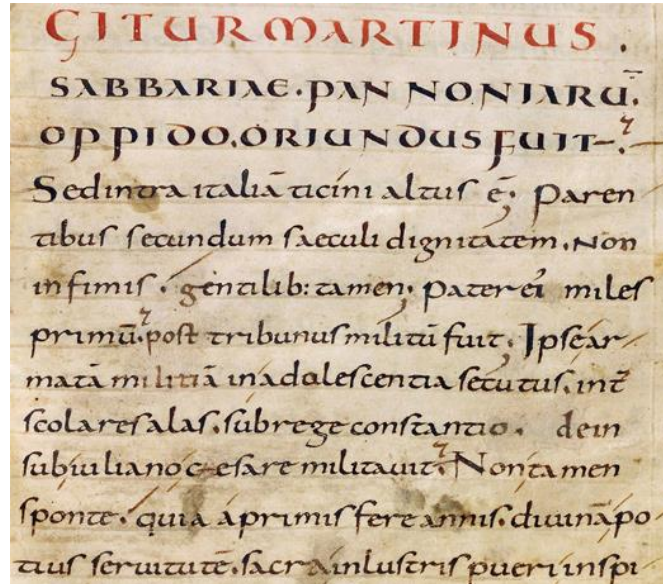
Leo 1 was also renowned as a theologian. Some of his sermons have survived – that on the Beatitudes is particularly famous. He was active in using both church and secular authority against heretical teachings. At the Council of Chalcedon (451) a major point of controversy was the “two natures” (human and divine) of Christ. At the Second Council of Ephesus (449) a letter from Leo to Archbishop Flavian of Constantinople was presented, a document known as the *Tome*, in which he argued from Scripture and the creed that the natures were indivisible. This was the position affirmed at Chalcedon.

A current English translation of the *Tome* uses a painting of Leo by Francisco Herrera the Younger (mid 17<sup>th</sup> c) on its cover.



## St Martin of Tours 316 – 397

Martin was born in the Roman province of Pannonia in Central Europe. We know some details of his life from the skilled Roman writer and orator Sulpicius Severus, who was a native of Bordeaux. After the early death of his wife Severus was greatly influenced by Bishop Martin, and devoted himself to helping the poor and contemplation. His *Life* of the saint was written around 403, just a few years after Martin's death.



Page from the *Life of Holy Martinus* written around 900 in beautiful script.

While the *Life* is chiefly a catalogue of miracles associated with Martin we learn that he was in the army cavalry as a young man, serving in Gaul. However, after coming in contact with St Hilary of Poitiers, he was converted at the age of 18.

Simone Martini's fresco in San Francesco in Assisi (c 1325) shows him renouncing the military life – one of Martini's compositions which, according to some authorities, suggests that he may have been influenced by scroll paintings brought from China.



Martin eventually became the Bishop of Tours in 371. Severus also documents his struggles with various sects deemed heretical, particularly followers of Priscillian, Bishop of Avila in Spain, who encouraged an individualist and highly ascetic life for Christians, and the idea of "degrees of perfection" among believers. He was executed as a sorcerer by the Emperor Maximian around 385.

By far the best known and frequently represented incident of Martin's life is from the time of his military service, when he cut his cloak in half on a bitterly cold day and gave half to a beggar. That night he had a vision of Christ wearing the half cloak. It is from the Latin word for cloak that the terms "chaplain" and "chapel" are both derived – the latter from the fact that a textile deemed to be the half cloak, first attested in 679, was toured through France and even carried in to battle by the kings of France. (Interestingly, Martin continued to be important even in post Revolutionary France, partly due to the rediscovery of his tomb in 1860).

The wonderful Tuscan Romanesque Cathedral (Duomo) of Lucca (begun 1063) is dedicated to St Martin, and a sculpture on the exterior represented him with the beggar.



A more wellknown version is that painted by el Greco around 1578 ,with St Martin in contemporary armour of the type crafted in Toledo, where el Greco was resident.

