

ST RAYMUND NONNATUS,

CARDINAL AND Conf.

ACCORDING to the words of our divine Redeemer, that Christian proves himself His most faithful disciple and gives the surest and greatest proof of his love of God, who most perfectly loves his neighbour for God's sake. By this test of sanctity we are to form our judgement of the saint whom the Church honours on this day. St Raymund was brought into the world at Portel in Catalonia in the year 1204, and was called *non natus*, "not born," because he was taken out of the body of his mother after her death in labour. In his childhood he seemed to find no other pleasure than in his devotions and his grammar studies. His father took him from school, and sent him to take care of a farm which he had in the country. Raymund readily obeyed, and enjoyed the opportunity of solitude. He was pressed by his friends to go to the court of Arragon, where by his prudence and abilities he could not fail to better himself, especially as he was related to the illustrious houses of Foix and Cardona. Instead of doing this, he made a resolution of taking the religious habit in the new order of Our Lady of Mercy for the redemption of captives. He could say with holy Job that compassion for the poor and distressed had grown up with him from his childhood. The sufferings of the Christians who in the neighbouring provinces, almost under his eyes, groaned in slavery under the Moors, particularly afflicted his heart; by compassion he already bore their burdens and felt the weight of their chains. But if he was moved at their bodily sufferings, and desired to devote himself and all that he possessed to procure them comfort and relief, he was much more troubled by their spiritual danger of sinking under their calamities and losing their souls by impatience or apostasy from Christ. Against this he never ceased to pray, entreating the God of mercy to be Himself the comfort and support of the weak and of the strong; and he wished with St Paul to spend and be spent himself for their souls. He obtained of his father, through the mediation of the Count of Cardona, leave to enter the Mercedarian order; and was accordingly admitted to his profession at Barcelona by St Peter Nolasco.

So swift was the progress that he made in the perfection of his institute that within two or three years after his profession he was judged the best qualified to discharge the office of ransomer, in which he succeeded St Peter. Being sent into Barbary with a considerable sum of money he purchased at Algiers the liberty of a number of slaves. When all other resources were exhausted, he voluntarily gave himself up as a hostage for the ransom of certain others, whose situation was desperate and whose faith was exposed to imminent danger. The sacrifice which the saint had made of his own liberty served only to exasperate the Algerians, who treated him with barbarity till, fearing lest if he died in their hands they would lose the ransom which was stipulated to be paid for the slaves for whom he remained a hostage, the magistrate of the city gave orders that he should be treated with more humanity. He was permitted to go about the streets and he made use of this liberty to comfort and encourage the Christians, and he converted and baptized some Mohammedans. When the governor heard of this he condemned him to be impaled, this being a barbarous manner of executing criminals much in use among those infidels. However, the persons who were interested in the ransom of the captives prevailed that his life should be spared lest they should be losers; and, by a commutation of his punishment, he was made to run the gauntlet. This did not daunt his courage. So long as he saw souls in danger, he thought he had yet done nothing; nor could he let slip any opportunity of ministering to them. He considered that, as St John Chrysostom says, "Though a person shall have given away a large fortune in alms he has done nothing equal to him who has contributed to the salvation of a soul. This is a greater alms than ten thousand pounds—than this whole world, how great soever it appears to the eye—for a man is more precious than the whole world." St Raymund had, on one side, no more money to employ in releasing poor captives; and, on the other, to speak to a Mohammedan upon the subject of religion was by the Islamic law to court death. He could, however, still exert his endeavours with hope of some success or of dying a martyr of charity. He therefore resumed his former method of instructing and exhorting both Christians and infidels. The governor, who was immediately told of his behaviour, was enraged and commanded the servant of Christ to be whipped at the corners of all the streets in the city, his lips to be bored with a red-hot iron in the market-place, and his mouth shut up with a padlock, the key of which he kept himself and only gave to the gaoler when the prisoner was to eat. In this condition he was kept in a dungeon, where he lay full eight months, till his ransom was brought by some religious men of his order, who were sent with it by St Peter. Raymund

was unwilling to leave the country of the infidels, where he wanted to remain to assist the slaves; but he acquiesced in obedience to the orders of his general, begging God to accept his tears, seeing he was not worthy to shed his blood for the souls of his neighbours.

Upon his return to Spain in 1239 Pope Gregory IX nominated him cardinal. But so little was he affected by the unlooked-for honour that he neither changed his dress, nor his poor cell in the convent at Barcelona, nor his manner of living. The Pope, being desirous to have so holy a man about his person and to employ him in the public affairs of the Church, called him to Rome. He obeyed, but could not be persuaded to travel otherwise than as a poor religious. He got no farther than Cardona (Cerdagne), which is only six miles from Barcelona; he was seized with a violent fever and died there, being only about thirty-six years old. He was buried in the chapel of St Nicholas, near the farm in which he had formerly lived at Portello. The life of St Raymund Nonnatus was not written down till some hundreds of years after his death, and it is a task of great difficulty to separate truth from fiction in the document that has come down to us; it is adorned with numerous miracles and other marvels of very doubtful worth. He is the patron saint of midwives.

Raymund gave not only his substance but also his liberty, and exposed himself to cruel torments and death, for the redemption of captives and the salvation of souls. But how cold is charity in *our* breasts, though it be the essential characteristic of true Christians Do we not, merely to gratify our desire for pleasure or out of vanity or avarice, refuse to give the superfluous part of our possessions to the poor, who for want of it suffer from cold and hunger? Are not we slothful and backward in visiting unfortunate or sick persons, and in doing our best to get some relief for the distressed? Are we not so insensible to their miseries as to be without feeling for them, and to neglect even to commend them to God with sufficient earnestness? Do we not fail to remonstrate with sinners according to our circumstances and with regard for prudence, and neglect to instruct, by ourselves and others, those under our care? Is it not manifest that self-love, and not the love of God and our neighbour, reigns in our hearts, when we pursue so inordinately our own worldly interest? If we sound our own hearts and take an impartial view of our lives we shall soon know whether this test of Christ, or that of Satan, which is self-love, be uppermost in our souls, and the governing principle of our actions.

St Raymund Nonnatus, Pray for us
