

SAINT RAYMUND PENAFORT

A GREAT CANONIST

S.M.C.

IN the state papers of the Kingdom of Aragon is to be found this record: '1275. On the day of the Epiphany Raymund Peniafort of Barcelona departed this life in the convent of the Friars Preachers, than whom in Spain at this time there is no more illustrious example of a perfect religious life and longstanding holiness.'

In 1175-76 Raymund was born, probably at Villafranca de Banades, the family estate of the Penafort. His parents came of knightly stock, being descended from the royal family of Aragon.

From childhood, Raymund was serious and mature. Like so many saints and great men of the Dominican Order in its early days, he preferred study to amusement. He was a precocious student and by the time he was twenty years old had graduated in the school at Barcelona and had his own class of pupils to whom he taught the liberal arts, accepting no payment. They learnt other things from him besides letters: purity, piety and integrity of life.

Raymund was professor of canon law in Barcelona from 1195 until about 1210. Then, although by this time he was a man of thirty-five, he decided to go to the University at Bologna, the great centre for the study of canon law. He spent from eight to ten years there. The university course in law was not open to young men, but only to those who already had a reputation, and who were mature, capable of judging complicated cases and of giving sound advice to those who came to them.

In 1218 or 1219, the Bishop of Barcelona was returning to Spain having finished some business at the Roman Curia. By this time Raymund had become so well known for his knowledge of canon Law that the bishop wished to take him back, but there was difficulty with the authorities who did not want to part with so excellent a professor. However, in the end the bishop won his case and Raymund returned with him to be a canon of his cathedral chapter.

With the bishop came some Friars Preachers who were to found a convent in Barcelona; the first in Spain. Three years later, on Good Friday, 1222, Raymund was received into the Order at St Catherine's Priory. The *Ancient Life* says: 'At that time the Friars Preachers came to Barcelona. Considering, therefore, their exemplary behaviour and, moreover, the fruitfulness of their preaching . . . following his example who, being rich, was made poor for us, and gave himself entirely for the salvation of souls, the aforesaid Father Raymund, wisely scorning the approval of the world, turned his back on the glory he had already despised in his soul, and on Good Friday entered the Order of Friars Preachers.'

It was not long before he was given a task for which he was peculiarly suited. Since the friars in their work of preaching had to deal with cases of conscience of all kinds, Father Suggestus, the Provincial, directed Raymund to draw up a treatise which dealt with cases of conscience in every category. The fame of this work went far beyond the friars for whom it was written, and the *Summa Casuum* was looked upon as the final word in solving all difficulties arising from cases of conscience. Raymund himself says of it: 'This has been completed by God's grace, not by any merit or learning of mine, but through the prayers and merits of the brethren.'

In 1225 he was engaged on an entirely fresh type of work: namely, the foundation, in conjunction with St Peter Nolasco, of the Order of Mercy for the Redemption of Captives, and that by command of our Lady. Men and women who were captured by Moorish pirates, or taken prisoner in battle, suffered terribly at their hands; suffering which often ended in despair and apostasy.

Raymund the apostle prayed and pondered and, at last, with St Peter Nolasco, he assembled a number of devoted men, instructed them in a rule of life and advised them to undertake the public recitation of the Divine Office. He also gave them the rule of St Augustine and such portions of the Dominican constitutions as were suitable.

As for organization, they were to be subject to priors under one Master General. They were to collect alms for the ransom of those taken prisoner by the Moors. From their number were to be chosen active and prudent religious who were to travel through

Saracen lands wherever they could obtain a safe-conduct, to redeem as many captives as funds would allow, and were to bring safely home all those they had been able to ransom. The Order of Mercy was approved by Pope Gregory IX, and spread rapidly.

In 1229, Raymund was in Rome as auditor of the Rota, grand penitentiary and the Pope's confessor. Later Gregory commanded him to arrange and codify the decretals. This gigantic task occupied him for about three years, and by 1234 he had finished a complete code of canon law, which superseded the five former compilations and was in use until the present Codex was issued between thirty and forty years ago.

After five years in Rome, Raymund was taken sick and doctors said that if he were not sent back to Spain he would die. Reluctantly the Pope gave him permission to go. 'Although your presence is very dear to us, we would rather you lived, though absent, than lay in a coffin in Rome.'

In Barcelona, Raymund returned to his former missionary life for three or four years until, in 1238, he was summoned to Bologna to be Blessed Jordan's successor as third Master General. He was in office only two years when, on the plea of age and bad health, he persuaded the capitular fathers to accept his resignation; and returned to missionary work, a simple religious, travelling through Spain, converting sinners, Moors, Waldenses and Catharists.

While Master General, not content with teaching regular observance by word and example, he systematized the constitutions, dividing them into chapters under separate headings. To these he added some chapters of his own.

All this, though interesting, does not give much insight into his personality. However, about 1269, occurred the famous cloakship incident, and eyewitness accounts of this give a lively portrait of a very human person.

James of Aragon had a lady-love in Majorca whom he wished to visit; so he took Raymund, ostensibly for missionary work, but in reality as a cloak for his intrigue. Raymund was not long in discovering this. He spoke to the king privately and then denounced the sin of adultery from the pulpits of Majorca. Finding he was making no impression on James, he asked to return to Spain, but this the king would not allow. So he went with his companion to all the island ports, asking merchantmen

to take him to the mainland; but they refused, for the king had forbidden it under threat of heavy punishment.

Failing all else, and determined to go, Raymund spread his cloak on the water, fastened one end to his staff for a sail, and boarded, asking his companion to accompany him. The friar refused, so Raymund sailed out of the bay alone with a following wind. The terrified companion rushed into the town, rousing the people with his cries and lamentations. So a crowd, the king included, went to the cliffs. Meanwhile the ships in port, seeing what was happening, followed Raymund, but the cloak-ship outclassed them all.

People on the mainland, noticing something unusual on the water, crowded on the shore in time to see Raymund land, resume his cloak, which was quite dry, incline courteously to them and walk away. The priory doors were closed for the siesta, but they opened at his prayer. He went in, asked the prior for his blessing, and then hid in the enclosure until the throng outside had gone away.

Until 1270 Raymund continued his missionary work, when he became too feeble to travel. From then on until 1275, he remained quietly in the priory at Barcelona.

On the feast of the Epiphany, feeling himself dying, he asked for the last sacraments, and in the presence of his brethren, repeating the 19th Psalm, he gave up his soul to God.



A LENTEN SERMON OF ST AUGUSTINE ON THE FORTY-SECOND PSALM

THIS is a short psalm, so it can satisfy your listening minds without irking your fasting stomachs. May it feed the soul of every one of us, which is said to be sad by the psalm; sad, it seems to me, because it is fasting in some way, or rather because it is hungry. The Church is hungry, the body of Christ is hungry, that man, the whole Christ, who is all over the world, his head up above and his limbs down below. His voice singing or sighing in all the psalms, happy in hope for the future