

Saint of the Month for January 2015

(A monthly series compiled by Tom Quinlan)

Saint Raymond of Penyafort, Priest
Wednesday, January 7

Saint Raymond was born about 1175 at Penyafort, near Barcelona, Catalonia (now northeastern Spain). (His name sometimes appears as Raymund, and his town as Peñafort, as in Spanish.) His family was well connected, and claimed descent from the counts of Barcelona; they were allied to the kings of Aragon. At this time there were multiple kingdoms in what is now the country of Spain, including Aragon, Castile, Murcia, and others.

He made very rapid progress in his studies, and by the age of twenty taught philosophy at Barcelona. About ten years later he went to Bologna to study canon and civil law (1218-1221), and took the degree of doctor.

In 1219 the bishop of Barcelona made Raymond his archdeacon; he was noted for his zeal, devotion, and liberalities to the poor.

In 1222 he assumed the habit of the Dominicans; St. Dominic had died less than a year earlier. Like a number of saints, he sought to do some penance for his perceived sins. His superiors agreed, but he did not get what he expected- he was to write a collection of cases of conscience for the benefit of confessors and moralists. This work became the *Summa de casibus poenitentialibus (Concerning the Cases of Penance)*, the first work of this sort.

Raymond spent much time preaching, instructing, and converting heretics, Jews, and Moors. (It must be remembered that Muslim rulers had control of almost all of modern Spain at this time.)

In 1230 Pope Gregory IX called him to Rome, and he was set to work on gathering into one body the scattered decrees of popes and councils since the 1150 collection made by Gratian. Three years later Raymond was finished, and the five books of the *Decretals* were confirmed by the same pope in 1234. This body of work stood the test of time, and was regarded as the best arranged body of canon law until the *Codex Juris Canonici* of 1917. (A new English translation with commentary by canonists came out about 2000.)

In 1235 the pope made Raymond the archbishop of the capital of Aragon, but this post was too much for him, and he developed a serious illness. After many entreaties the pope excused him.

Raymond returned to his native country in 1236 and continued his work of contemplation, preaching, and hearing confessions.

In 1238 he was knocked off his feet by the arrival of deputies from the general chapter of his order at Bologna with the news that he had been chosen the third master general of the order; the previous one had recently died. He didn't want this post, but at length

accepted the mission. In this role he instilled a love of regularity, solitude, studies, and the work of the ministry. He redid some of the order's constitutions to make them clearer; these modifications were accepted. In 1239 he established a regulation that the voluntary resignation of a superior should be accepted if there were just reasons. In the next year he took advantage of this regulation, and resigned after only two years in the post, claiming that he was already sixty-five years old.

However, St. Raymond was to live another thirty-four years! During that time he worked for the conversion of the Moors in Spain and opposed heresy. He engaged St. Thomas Aquinas, of his own order, to write *Summa contra gentiles* (*Against the Gentiles*); here Gentiles means those Christians not in communion with the pope, and Jews and Muslims.

During his last illness the King of Castile and the King of Aragon visited him, and received his final blessing. On January 6, 1275, St. Raymond died; he was 100 years old. He was canonized in 1601 by Pope Clement VIII.

The commemoration is given the rank of Optional Memorial. (**Daily Roman Missal, Third Edition** (Scepter Publishers); **Magnificat**, January 2015; **Butler's Lives of the Saints, 2nd Edition** (Ave Maria Press); **Encyclopaedia Britannica**, 15th Edition; **Catholic Dictionary, Revised Edition** (Our Sunday Visitor))

Collect from the Mass of Saint Raymond of Penyafort:

O God, who adorned the Priest Saint Raymond
with the virtue of outstanding mercy and compassion
for sinners and for captives,
grant us, through his intercession,
that, released from slavery to sin,
we may carry out in freedom of spirit
what is pleasing to you.

Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. (**Roman Missal, Third Edition**)

I have chosen St. Raymond because of his work on canon law, which governs how the Church operates but which is not widely understood. I've also been impressed by how much he did in various endeavors, while keeping his ego under control. Saint Raymond of Penyafort, pray for us!