

AN EARLY LIFE OF SAINT RAYMUND OF PENNAFORT

URBAN FAY, O.P.



THE original text of this short but interesting life of Saint Raymund of Pennafort is found in a manuscript in the library of the University of Barcelona. It is very probably the first biographical sketch of the Saint. It was written before 1351, and although its author is not known for certain, it is most commonly attributed to a noted Dominican writer of the fourteenth century, Nicholas Eymeric. The text from which this translation has been made is contained in a collection of documents pertaining to the life and writings of Saint Raymund, edited by Francis Balme, O.P., and Ceslaus Paban, O.P.¹

* * * * *

Herein are contained some brief notes on the holy life and miracles of Brother Raymund of Pennafort.

The resplendent brightness of divine virtue no longer allows the burning lamp, hidden in the secret cell of profound humility, to remain concealed. This is that brightly burning lamp, the venerable Father, Brother Raymund of Pennafort, once Master General of the Order of Preachers, a Spaniard by birth, Catalanian by nationality, whose life, pleasing before God and man, the magnificence of divine grace has approved by many miracles.

Descending from a military line, he rendered the nobility of his parents even more noble by his exemplary life. In his earliest years he seemed to have had a matured spirit, and rejecting the allurements of worldly conversations and devoting himself wholeheartedly to the charms of discipline and study, he advanced so rapidly that when he was scarcely twenty years old he was well instructed in the liberal arts. He himself instructed many in Barcelona in these branches of learning without fee, and by the example of his holy life was a model of good conduct.

Finally under the guidance of Providence, which alone could foresee what great good would come to the church from his labor, he set out for Bologna where he diligently studied both canon and civil law. In due time he merited promotion to the honor of a master's chair.

He remained there for three years teaching canon law and

¹ *Monumenta Ordinis Fratrum Praedicatorum Historica*, IV, 1, Raymundiana, (Rome, 1898), pp. 19-37.

was esteemed so highly that many, especially the nobles and more learned, flocked to his lectures. The citizens of Bologna, wisely noticing that so great a master demanded no fees from his hearers but that he freely gave what he freely received from God, decreed, without his knowledge, that a sizeable sum should be offered him each year by the community that their city should not be deprived of so desirable a teacher. But of all he received from whatsoever source, he faithfully and devoutly gave tithes to God and to the pastor in whose parish he resided.

Baranger de Palon, the Bishop of Barcelona, passing through on his return from the Roman Curia, brought it about after much pleading that he (Raymund) should return with him to the place of his birth, to the diocese of Barcelona where he had been reared. There he was cordially received among the canons by the Bishop and the entire chapter, and a subsidy was set aside for him.

Desirous of enhancing the divine worship he requested and obtained from the Bishop and the chapter that the feast of the Annunciation of Our Lady be raised to the rank of a duplex. He himself, on this feast, distributed to the canons out of his own subsidy that portion which was customary for totum-duplex feasts. Through his efforts this was made a perpetual observance.

Advancing in every virtue he was kindly disposed to all. Clerics and laymen alike, and especially prelates and princes, held him in reverence. Although he lived in the world he was continually leading the souls of his admirers to the celibate life by the holiness of his ways.

About that time Raymund began to consider diligently the Friars Preachers, who had recently come to Barcelona, and especially did he take heed of their virtuous life and the fruitfulness of their preaching which the Lord Himself was producing through them by the imitation of Him who "when He was rich became poor for us" and undertook all for the salvation of souls. Raymund, wisely despising the scoffing world and leaving all the mundane glories for which his soul had never yearned, entered the Order of Friars Preachers on Good Friday.² His entrance was an example and inducement to many to do likewise; for many clerics, renowned alike for learning and virtue entered the Order, led on by the forcefulness of his preaching and example.

Father Suero, the first provincial of Spain, upon coming to Barcelona and knowing of the skill and unquestioned mastery of the science of law which Raymund possessed, asked him to compile a Com-

² This was in the year 1222.

pendium of Cases which most frequently occur in the tribunal of penance that he might give information and direction to the friars, and in fact to all hearing confessions, and salutary instructions to penitents. Father Sureo enjoined this task on Raymund for the forgiveness of his sins, and Raymund, as an obedient son, humbly complied with this request.

His fame as a man of sound doctrine, ready counsel, and great virtue rapidly grew. When he happened to meet the Cardinal legate *a latere* of Pope Gregory IX, the Cardinal of Santa Sabina, that worthy prelate, hearing of the great talents of Raymund, attached him to his legation. In his humble way he followed the Cardinal throughout Spain, on foot and without changing in the least the fasts prescribed by the Order. With an associate he would precede the Cardinal on foot, travelling to the place where the Cardinal was to come. He would call together the people, absolve excommunicates, hear confessions, preach, and give to the people other helps towards salvation.

In this way the Cardinal learned for himself that Raymund's virtues exceeded his renown, and as a faithful legate he proposed to present this precious treasure to Pope Gregory for fitting recognition. But Friar Raymund humbly declined the invitation to return with the Bishop. The Bishop, however, when he returned to the curia, related to the Pope what he knew of the holiness of Raymund, his great reputation, and his humility, the chief guardian of the other virtues.

Pope Gregory, considering how fruitful and pleasant would be the presence of such a one who spread the fragrance of virtue even in his absence, summoned Raymund by letter. Raymund, ever the obedient son of the Pope, whose commands may not be denied, acquiesced and came to Rome. Gregory cordially received him, and in consideration of his holy life, great learning, and prudence appointed him his chaplain and penitentiary. The Pope chose him as his own confessor. Raymund frequently enjoined on the Pope in place of a penance that he should himself hear the causes of the poor who came to the curia and who, because of their poverty, were sometimes turned away by certain men in the curia. Gregory faithfully fulfilled this penance, and beyond that he entrusted cases to the judgement of Raymund and left their settlement to the friar's discretion. It was for this reason that the Pontiff in addressing letters to Raymund sometimes referred to him as "father of the poor."

After deliberating on how the vast number of widely scattered decretals might be reduced to an orderly and compendious collection useful to the whole world, Pope Gregory placed Raymund in charge

of making this compilation. Raymund, confiding in the mercy of Jesus Christ, obediently took upon his shoulders the great burden and labor. Wonder of wonders! He undertook the task in humility and obedience as the sweet and light yoke of the Lord; but he fled the honor of dignities after the example of the Lord who willingly carried the cross imposed but fled when they sought to make Him king.

When the see of Taragona became vacant Pope Gregory appointed Raymund to the Archbishopric and commanded him under obedience to take the appointment. He could not bring himself to accept this appointment, and, as he himself told the brethren, he was taken with a violent fever and suffered bodily and mental torments for three days until at last the Pope released him from the obedience. However Gregory enjoined on Raymund, who had an intimate knowledge of the people of that region, to name a person fitted for the office. Raymund nominated William de Mongriu. This was to prove a valuable appointment for this noble and strenuous worker for the cause of the church acquired an island called Iviza, which he took with a large fleet and a powerful army. He also seized a fortress within the boundaries of Catalonia which at that time was known to be a nest of heretics. (It was there that the heretics had poisoned one of the Dominican friars who was acting as inquisitor.) And although within the fortress there were vast numbers of heretics and their followers, he bravely marched against them and captured them. Some he condemned to life imprisonment, and others, because of the particular viciousness of their heresy, he sentenced to the stake.

After five years in the Curia the immensity of his labors and the frailty of his body took their effect on Raymund. His long vigils, prayers, and studies, coupled with his endless rounds of service to the Pope, brought on a severe illness. The doctors informed the Pope that in the natural course death would follow unless Raymund quickly returned to his native climate.

Therefore at the request of Raymund, the Pope allowed him to return to Spain, adding that although he held his presence dear he preferred to have him absent, alive, rather than present in death. With the blessing of the Pope and great joy in his heart Raymond returned to the convent at Barcelona whence he had received the first call to Rome. It was remarked of him at this time by many competent to make such judgements that, "this man returned from the Curia just as he had entered it, for the honors and dignities that had been heaped upon him could make no impression on his humble soul."

When Raymund was returning from the Curia, he and four companions happened to put in at a port called Tossa. At about the same

time a certain Barcelo de Faro was suddenly struck with a violent malady while working in the fields. He lost the power of speech and was unable to move or show any sign of life. Those around him took him for dead. Those standing about quickly carried him to Raymund and his four brethren. Raymund, accompanied by these four brethren and a crowd of people, drew near to the stricken man and in a loud voice asked him if he wished to make confession of his sins. To this question the poor man was unable to make reply or give any sign. Then Raymund, moved more by the plight of the man's soul than the plight of his body, bade his brethren and the bystanders to beseech the Lord that He would grant this dying man the time and grace to make a good confession. They all fell to their knees and began to pray for this request, and soon Raymund arose, and confident in the mercy of God, went to the dying man and asked, "Barcelo, do you wish to make your confession?" The man, waking and opening his eyes, which up to now had been closed as in death, replied, "I do, Father, I wish very much to confess." Raymund sent away the crowd and heard the man's confession and prayed for his soul. Then the man, who had been able to say nothing save his confession, peacefully returned his soul to his Creator.

Although there were many others who could have attested this miracle, only the testimony of two priests, written and sworn to, was taken by the diocesan judge of the Bishop of Gerona and stamped with his seal. It is contained in his letter, the tenor of which is as follows:

Letter of the Diocesan Judge of the Bishop of Gerona, A. D. 1284.

To the Reverend Friar Benedict de Bosco, Prior of the Friars Preachers of Barcelona, P. de Balneolis, *Officialis* of the Bishop of Gerona. Greetings in the Lord:

Having received the testimony of two priests regarding a certain miracle which the Lord was pleased to work through the merits of the venerable Father, Friar Raymund of Pennafort, we are sending this to you under our seal, prepared at all times to render to you and your Order (God granting) whatever honor and glory is your due. We beseech you to commend us to the merits and prayers of that venerable Father and of your convent as well as to your own prayers.

Returning to Barcelona, Raymund, having regained his health and having enjoyed a somewhat restful convalescence after such great hardship, began again to give himself up to deeper contemplation. The holiness of his life made him indeed the cynosure of all eyes. As soon as his presence was known men of all walks of life came to him seeking salutary advice and consolation in their manifold difficulties. All these, the lowly and the exalted, Raymund cordially received and out of the treasures of grace which God had given him

he poured his blessings on all and did whatever he could to satisfy every one who came to him.

Pope Gregory had continued to entrust to Raymund the power of Penitentiary which he had held when at Rome. But Raymund, noticing the great numbers that flocked to him from all parts, was unwilling to keep such great power, in deference to the Roman Curia and Mother Church. He was, however, willing to retain that part of the office which pertained to the Friars Minor and his own Order. Nevertheless, Pope Gregory and his successors continued to commit many arduous tasks of a confidential nature to Raymund, such as the confirmation of bishops and making provisions concerning bishops and abbots. In their letters the Pontiffs showed him such confidence that he was not hesitant to reply according as it seemed best to him.

At the instance of several bishops, Raymund compiled a manual or form for all bishops and prelates according to which they might visit the churches entrusted to them and in a practical way provide for the welfare not only of the clerics but of the lay people as well. For merchants he prepared a manual explaining how they could conduct themselves in business without sin. He explained how and to what extent merchants were held to restitution in cases of unjust profit or other injuries.

Raymund was exceptionally temperate in matters of food and drink. He took but one meal a day except on Sundays when, because of his reverence for the Lord's day, it was his custom to partake of two meals. In his conversations with the brethren his words were an abundant source of edification. He could not even listen to detractions, much less speak them. He was the constant defender of the absent brethren, and he restrained the tongues of those who would attempt detraction.

He recited all the hours of the Office, whether in choir or out of choir, slowly and with mature devotion, making all the prostrations prescribed and avoiding all interruptions and whatever else might interfere with the devout recitation of the office. In his private prayers, especially at night, he frequently shed copious tears. Sometimes he would try to hide himself in the secret corners of the church or cloister but his sobbing could be heard at a distance. The efficacy of his prayers was often attested by those who received favors and cures through his praying.

Elissende Eymeric, a Spanish Lady, often related to the brethren how she had been afflicted with a quartane fever and suffered intensely. Around the feast of the Nativity of Our Lord the fever was more violent than usual, and it so happened that Raymund, ac-

accompanied by her relative, Brother William Pons, came to see her and to console her. As was his custom, Raymund comforted her with kindness and exhorted her to be patient.

She received such confidence from his words and even from his very presence that, full of devotion, she seized his cloak and most earnestly besought him to help her by his prayers and especially that he should ask God to release her from the tortures of the fever. At first Raymund was unwilling to concede this request and tried to turn her away from this petition, but the wise woman would not let go of his cloak until he had obtained for her what she desired. Raymund finally agreed to her request, and what the woman had asked for with such insistence was granted as soon as Raymund finished his prayer. From that moment she was never again molested by the fever, and she attributed the sudden cure to the sanctity of Raymund.

Brother Benedict, a laybrother, had been troubled for over two years with severe headaches and had become so weakened that he could scarcely endure any noises without great discomfort. Coming to Raymund, he threw himself at his feet and begged Raymund to touch his head, for he felt that the touch of Raymund's hand would be enough to rid him of the pain. When Raymund had touched his head, the laybrother felt not only such great comfort and relief in his head but in his whole body as well and such spiritual consolations that he firmly believed that strength had gone out from Raymund and by his merits he had received it in his body and soul. The laybrother was never again afflicted with the headaches or weakness.

Every night Raymund severely lashed his flesh with the discipline. After matins and again after compline he would visit each of the altars in the church, prostrating at each one and performing some special devotion.

He had a special reverence for his guardian angel, and frequently this angel of God would awaken him for prayer before the signal for matins. Always obedient to the call of the angel, he would rise to spend some time in prayerful vigil and then return to sleep for a short space. After this he would diligently prepare himself for the celebration of Mass.

He celebrated private Mass almost daily, always taking care to confess his sins humbly and devoutly before the Mass. He once told some of the brethren that if sometimes, albeit rarely, he did not celebrate Mass, all that day he went about without the joy he usually felt.

It happened that a certain laybrother, Martin by name, who in the world had been too much given to worldly pleasures, was vexed by the sting of the flesh by force of his long habit of sin. He con-

sidered the holiness of Raymund and the special devotion with which he said Mass, and while hearing one of Raymund's Masses, he was filled with confidence and prayed God to free him from his affliction and grant a permanent remedy through the merits of Raymund. When Raymund elevated the Sacred Body of the Lord in the usual manner, Brother Martin saw in Raymund's hands Jesus Christ Himself in the form of a most glorious little Boy. From that time till his death the brother never again felt those stings of the flesh. He himself gave this testimony to the brethren shortly before he died.

Whenever anyone either out of devotion or confidence commended himself to Raymund's prayers, whether on account of sickness or any other necessity, he would gather the brethren about him and humbly kneel with them in prayer. The example of his prayer would so inflame the hearts of the others that he would frequently move his companions to tears. It was very often found that the effect desired would immediately follow the petitions made in this manner.

Raymund was an ardent student of the Scriptures, and whenever he was free, he could be found reading the Holy Bible. He voluntarily attended as a humble student the classes of those lecturing in the convent. Whenever he was asked a question of law on some case that had arisen, even though he had treated the subject many times or had otherwise settled the matter, nevertheless, cautiously reading through the books or having the opinions of others on the question read to him, he would read or listen, and finally, after the most minute investigation, he would give his reply with gravity and mature circumspection. He had this special grace of counsel from the Lord that all who came to him for such advice he would treat so benignly, advise so sweetly, and answer so wisely that they went away consoled. Divine grace indeed shone in him.

The Jews and Saracens, admiring his eminent goodness and wisdom, showed him special reverence and affection. His whole being was inflamed with the fire of charity for procuring their conversion. In this matter a remarkable divine vision was vouchsafed him in which God revealed to him that the conversion of a great number of infidels to the Catholic faith would be brought about by the Friars Preachers. With this vision burning in his mind he obtained the permission of the Master General of the Order and the help of the kings of Castile and Aragon for the erection of a studium for the study of Arabic, in which twenty or more Friars of the Order were instructed in that tongue. Great fruit followed this venture, for more than ten thousand Moors were converted and the truths of the faith were dif-

fused not only among the Saracens in Spain but in Africa as well. Many of the learned were disposed to accept the truths of the faith and even the masters of the Friars in the study of Arabic were nearly all converted through their efforts.

Under his guidance and encouragement the Hebrew language was likewise studied by the brethren that they might be able to overcome the malice and errors of the Jews, which up to this time they were not able to do. For heretofore the Jews were accustomed boldly to deny the true texts of the Scriptures and attempt a concordance between the glosses of their ancient scholars and the Catholic saints in those things which pertained to the faith. The interpolations and corruptions which they had inserted in many places in the Bible to obscure the mystery of the Passion and other sacred teachings of the faith were exposed, to their confusion and the strengthening of the Christian belief.

The converted Saracens and Jews looked to Raymund as their singular refuge. Considering that he had begotten them in the Lord, he secured from the princes and prelates legislation for their support and protection. He took upon himself the work of instructing them and was in all things an edifying example.

On the death of Jordan, the second Master General of the Order,, the brethren came together according to their custom to choose another Master General at a general chapter. After invoking the help of the Holy Ghost, the electors unanimously chose Raymund. The elder Fathers personally went to Barcelona, where Raymund was at the time, and over his refusals and excuses they prevailed upon him to accept.

In his office he exercised great care in the government of the Order, never forgetting his accustomed spirit of contemplation but always yearning for its embrace. Nor did he desert humility, always tempering the rigor of justice with mercy. He held fast to piety and used mature judgement in his actions, was abstemious at table, moderate in his speech, modest in his works, circumspect in his counsels and admonitions and displayed such a spirit of holiness that he was a shining example not only to the Friars themselves but to those who lived in the world as well.

But considering in his humility the talents of others and his own defects, which he daily placed before his eyes, he set about to find a way to be excused from his office. He besought the definitors and the others with constant pleas to release him from the office, and, although many were unwilling, he finally overcame the reluctance of the brethren and obtained his request.

Filled with joy at the attainment of his desire, he returned to Barcelona and resumed his peaceful contemplative life. He continued to give salutary advice and to perform fruitful works of piety for his neighbor. He was a source of edification to religious and secular alike. The fragrance of his fame pervaded the land, and through the great devotion and confidence which he inspired even the touch of his clothing worked cures far and near from divers diseases.

Burgeta, the daughter of Ferrarius, had from her infancy been afflicted with a disfigurement of the face which gave her a most unlovely appearance. After trying many different medicines, the deformity lessened somewhat. But when she reached young womanhood, the blemish came back with all its former horror. No medicine seemed to be able to rid her of her affliction. The grandmother of this young lady had hidden away out of devotion a cloak which Raymund had been in the habit of wearing. When the maiden saw this cloak, inspired with confidence in the merits of so great a father, she began earnestly to entreat her grandmother to let her have the cloak for a time. She hoped to obtain through Raymund what she was unable to obtain through medicine. Her grandmother gave her the cloak and shared in her devotion. Wonder of wonders! When on the following night she went to sleep with the cloak placed over the blemish, she awoke in the morning so entirely freed from the affliction that not even a trace of it remained.

Some time later this same Burgeta became troubled with severe headaches, and, mindful of the former benefits derived from the cloak, applied it to her head and almost immediately the pain left her head but centered around her heart. Another application of the cloak drove the pain from that region altogether. Burgeta had a sister whose son was distressed by fever. Through the merits of Raymund, divine power responded to the devotion of the sisters in applying the cloak to the boy, and he was straightway cured of the fever.

So great was his zeal in consoling and prescribing remedies for the disconsolate that his counsels seemed more divine than human. There was a certain woman in Barcelona, a very pious woman, faithful in performing all the works of mercy. She had the greatest regard for the salvation of her soul, confessing frequently and receiving Communion on all the principal feasts, as is the custom of lay-people. Whenever she communicated (and never otherwise); she suffered from nausea, and all that day she could retain no food. Raymund was consulted when no one else could prescribe a remedy or discover the cause of such a dangerous condition. Raymund asked whether this woman had been baptized. The woman assured him

that she had been baptized, and others agreed that beyond all doubt she had been baptized, for she was the daughter of Christian parents. Nevertheless Raymund said: "Bring here those who were present at the baptism." These were summoned and interrogated regarding the form used at the baptism, and it was discovered that there had been a mistake in the essentials of the form. On Raymund's counsel the woman was baptized according to the proper form, and, although she frequently communicated, she never again was afflicted with this perilous condition.

Raymund gave heed to the negligence of Christians in ransoming captives and noticed that few had the necessary price to pay for their ransom. Fewer indeed even attempted to approach the Saracens who held them captive. Because of this there were some captives who could no longer endure their wretched state and were forced to apostatize from the faith through fear or promises of leniency. With deep sorrow and sympathy for such bodily suffering and danger to souls, he set about, with God's help, to find ways of obviating this twofold misery. Finding holy and devout men suitable for this work, he instructed them and drew up for them a form of life, advising them to adopt the Dominican Breviary and the Rule of St. Augustine and some of the Constitutions of the Order of Preachers suitable to their duties. It was called the Order of Mercy and the members of the institute had priors and one master whom all were held to obey. Their task was to solicit alms for the ransom of captives and to send honest and upright men to the Saracens to negotiate peace and ransom those held captive and lead them back to their own lands. With Raymund as advisor and with the approval of the Sovereign Pontiff, the Order was begun, and the members attained eminent success.

Raymund, therefore, having ordered his whole life for the glory of God and the salvation of his neighbor and having turned his back on the world, mindful only of the heavenly things of the future, at last fell asleep in the Lord at the age of a hundred years. He received the last sacraments of the Church, and, with his brethren at his side in prayer, he died in the year 1275.

Because in life he had always fled honors, according to the just judgment of God, royal honors followed him in death. The king of Castile, who had never before set foot in Barcelona, came for the funeral along with his sons. The king of Aragon and his sons together with a large number of Bishops and prelates were also present for the services and gave honor to Raymund in a magnificent burial.