

fervour, his humility, and the austerity of his penance. Agil's father dying, St. Columban, now without a protector at court, lay open to a violent persecution from Queen Brunehault, enraged against the saint for refusing women an entrance into his monastery. The persecution extended also to his disciples, who were commanded to quit their retreats. St. Agil on this occasion solicited an audience of King Thierry. He was graciously received; at his suit a stop was put to the ill effects of Brunehault's animosity; and the statute of St. Columban's rule regarding women was confirmed. Some years after, the bishops sent to St. Agil and St. Eustatius to preach the gospel to infidels who lived on the further side of Mount-jura. The two apostolical men penetrated into Bavaria; and their mission was attended with the happiest success. At their return, St. Agil resumed his penitential exercises with the usual exactness but was soon taken out of his retreat to govern the monastery of Rebas, which St. Owen, chancellor of France, had founded in the diocese of Meaux. He was appointed first abbot of it at a meeting of bishops in Clichy, in 636. The saint caused the strictest regularity to be observed at Rebas, till he died, about the year 650, in the sixty-sixth year of his age. He is mentioned in the Benedictin Martyrology. See his life by an anonymous writer, published by Mabillon, Act. SS. Ben., t. 2, and by Chifflet, Histoire de l'Abbaye de Tournus; Bulteau, Hist. de l'Ordre de Saint Benoît, l. 3. c. 14. and Baillet on the 30th of August.

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## AUGUST XXXI.

### ST. RAYMUND NONNATUS, C.

From the Chronicles of his Order, and other Memoirs collected by Pinus the Bollandist, Augusti, t. 6, p. 729. See also Helyot, who chiefly copies Baillet.

A. D. 1240,

ACCORDING to the rule laid down by our divine Redeemer, (1) that Christian approves 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

(1) John xiii. 34, 35, xv. 12, &c.

test of true sanctity we are to form our judgment of the glorious saint whom the church honours on this day. Saint Raymund Nonnatus\* was born at Portel in the diocese of Urgel, in Catalonia, in the year 1204, and was descended of a gentleman's family of a small fortune. In his childhood he seemed to find no other pleasure than in his devotions and serious duties. Such was his application to his grammar studies, and so happy his genius, as to spare his preceptor much pains in his education. His father, resolving to cross his inclination to a religious or ecclesiastical state, which he began to perceive in him, took him from school, and sent him to take care of a farm which he had in the country. Raymund readily obeyed, and in order to enjoy the opportunity of holy solitude, by voluntary choice, kept the sheep himself, and in the mountains and forests spent his time in holy meditation and prayer, imitating the austerities of the ancient anchorites. Some time after he was pressed by his friends to go to the court of Arragon, where, by his prudence and abilities, he could not fail to make a fortune, being related to the illustrious houses of Foix and Cardona. These importunities obliged him to hasten the execution of his resolution of taking the religious habit in the new order of our Lady of Mercy for the redemption of captives. Our saint could say with holy Job, that compassion for the poor or distressed had grown up with him from his childhood. The sufferings of the Christians, who, in neighbouring provinces, almost under his eyes, groaned in the most inhuman slavery, under the Moors, particularly afflicted his tender heart; by compassion he bore all their burdens, and felt the weight of all their chains. But if he was moved at their corporal sufferings, and earnestly desired to devote himself, and all that he pos-

\* The surname of Nonnatus or Unborn, was given him, because he was taken out of the body of his mother after her death by the Cæsarian operation. M. Mery has started objections in theory against the possibility of such an operation, which deserve the attention of practitioners (*Mém. de l'Acad. an. 1706.*) Nevertheless, it is justified by many remarkable instances: among others, Scipio Africanus, thence surnamed Cæsar, Manlius of Carthage, and according to some authors, Julius Cæsar, were by this means saved from perishing in the womb. See Heister's Surgery on this article, &c. Such an operation is never to be attempted without undoubted marks that the mother is really dead, lest a like misfortune happen to that by which an eminent surgeon was so shocked, as to renounce from that moment his profession.

essed, to procure them comfort and relief under their temporal afflictions, he was much more afflicted by their spiritual dangers of sinking under their calamities, and losing their immortal souls by impatience or apostacy from Christ. For this he never ceased to weep and 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, (1) *to spend and be spent himself* for their souls. In these dispositions he obtained of his unwilling father, through the mediation of the Count of Cardona, leave to embrace the above-mentioned order; and was accordingly admitted to his profession at Barcelona by the holy founder St. Peter Nolasco.

The extraordinary fervour of the saint in this new state, his perfect disengagement from the world, his profound humility, sincere obedience, wonderful spirit of mortification and penance, seraphic devotion, and constant recollection, rendered him the model and the admiration of his brethren. So surprising was the progress that he made in the perfection of his holy institute, that, within two or three years after his profession, he was judged the best qualified to discharge the office of ransom, in which he succeeded St. Peter. Being sent into Barbary with a considerable sum of money, he purchased, at Algiers, the liberty of a great number of slaves. When all this treasure was laid out in that charitable way, he voluntarily gave himself up as a hostage for the ransom of certain others, whose situation was hardest, and whose faith seemed exposed to imminent danger. The magnanimous sacrifice which the saint had made of his own liberty served only to exasperate the Mahometans, who treated him with uncommon barbarity, till the infidels, fearing lest if he died in their hands they should lose the ransom which was stipulated to be paid for the slaves for whom he remained a hostage, upon a remonstrance made on that account by the *cadi* or magistrate of the city, gave orders that he should be treated with more humanity. Hereupon he was permitted to go abroad about the streets; which liberty he made use of to comfort and encourage the Christians in their chains, and he converted and baptized some Mahometans. Upon information hereof, the governor condemned him to be

impaled, that is, to be put to death by thrusting a stake into the body through the hinder parts; 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, lest they should be losers, prevailed that his life should be spared; and, by a commutation of his punishment, he underwent a cruel bastinado. This torment did not daunt his courage. So long as he saw souls in danger of perishing eternally, he thought he had yet done nothing; nor could he let slip any opportunity of endeavouring to prevent their so frightful misfortune. He considered that, as St. Chrysostom says: (1) "Though a person shall have bestowed an immense treasure 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 talents; 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 Mahometan upon the subject of religion was capital by the standing laws of the Mussulmans. He could, however, still exert his endeavours, with hopes of some success, or of dying a martyr of charity. He therefore resumed his former method of instructing and exhorting both the Christians and the Infidels. The governor, who was immediately apprized of his behaviour, was strangely enraged, and commanded the zealous 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 keepers when the prisoner was to eat. In this condition he was loaded with iron bolts and chains, and cast into a dark 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 his dungeon, or at least the country of the infidels, where he desired to remain to assist the slaves; but he acquiesced in obedience to the orders of his general, begging God would accept his tears, seeing he was not worthy to shed his blood for the souls of his neighbours.

(1) S. Chrys. Or. 3, contra Jud.

Upon his return to Spain he was nominated cardinal by Pope Gregory IX. But so little was he affected with the involuntary honour, that he neither changed his dress, nor his poor cell in the convent, nor his manner of living. Much less could he be prevailed upon by the nobility of the country to accept of a palace, to admit an equipage or train, or to suffer any rich furniture to be added to his little necessities in his cell. 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. The saint obeyed, but could not be persuaded to travel otherwise than as a poor religious man. He went no further than Cardona, which is only six miles from Barcelona, when he was seized with a violent fever, which, by the symptoms which attended it, soon appeared to be mortal. St. Raymund prepared himself for his last passage. Some historians relate that he was favoured with a vision of angels, in which he received the holy viaticum. His death happened on the 31st of August, in the year 1240, the thirty-seventh of his age. He was buried in a chapel of St. Nicholas, near the farm in which he had formerly lived. St. Peter Nolasco founded a great convent in that place, in 1255, and St. Raymund's relics are still kept in that church. The history of many miracles wrought by his means is to be seen in the Bollandists. Pope Alexander VII. inserted his name in the Martyrology in 1657.

This saint gave not only his substance but also his liberty, and even exposed himself to the most cruel torments and death, for the redemption of captives, and the salvation of souls. But alas! how cold now-a-days is charity in our breasts, though it be the essential characteristic of true Christians! Far from the heroic sentiments of the saints, do not we, merely to gratify our prodigality, vanity, or avarice, refuse to give the superfluous part of our possessions to the poor, who, for want of it, are perishing with cold and hunger? Are not we slothful and backward in affording a visit or comfort to poor prisoners, or sick persons, or in using our interest to procure some relief for the distressed? Are we not so insensible to their spiritual miseries as to be without all feeling for them, and to neglect even to commend them to God with sufficient earnestness, to admonish sinners according to our circumstances and the rules

of prudence, or to instruct, by ourselves and others, those under our care? By this mark is it not manifest that self-love, and not the love of God and our neighbour, reigns in our hearts, whilst we seek and pursue so inordinately our own worldly interest, and are sensible to it alone? Let us sound our own hearts, and take an impartial view of our lives, and we shall feel whether this test of Christ, or that of Satan, which is self-love, be more sensible in our affections, and which of them is the governing principle of our actions.

### ST. ISABEL, VIRGIN.

THIS holy princess was daughter of Lewis VIII. king of France, and Blanche of Castile, and only sister to St. Lewis. She was born in 1225, and lost her father when she was but two years old. She was trained up in the purest maxims of religion, and in the heroic practice of all virtues, and attained so perfect a knowledge of the Latin tongue that she often corrected the compositions of her chaplains in that language. Her character, from her infancy, was a combination of every eminent virtue, and her whole life, from thirteen years of age, was almost one continued course of prayer, reading, and working. At that age she took a resolution to consecrate her virginity to God, and always shunned all vain amusements, and, as much as obedience to the queen would permit, all ornaments of dress. A match was proposed between her and the young Conrad, the emperor's eldest son; and her mother, St. Lewis, and the pope joined in persuading her, for the public good of the church and state, to accept so advantageous an offer. But she considered matters in another light, alleged the consecration she had made of herself to another state, and answered the pope in a letter, that it was something much greater to be the last among the virgins who are consecrated to the divine service, than to be an empress, and the first woman in the world. Her courageous resolution was honoured with congratulations from his holiness and St. Lewis, and the sequel showed how much the better choice she made, in preferring the calm harbour of a retired life to the tempests and vices of such a court. Isabel fasted three days a week, and never ate but of the coarsest food, and only what seemed absolutely necessary for the support of nature. She sent