

May 6th: Saint Peter Nolasco, religious

Gospel text (Mt 25:31-40): Jesus said to his disciples: “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit upon his glorious throne, and all the nations will be assembled before him (...).

Then the righteous will answer him and say, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? When did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? When did we see you ill or in prison, and visit you?’ And the king will say to them in reply, ‘Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me.’”

Saint Peter Nolasco, religious (1189-1256)

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Today we celebrate the heroic charity and holiness of Saint Peter Nolasco (c. 1180–1256), founder of the Mercedarians. When we hear Jesus speak of the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger... (cf. Mt 25:35–36), we understand better the radical nature of Nolasco’s dedication: he saw that Christ was truly present in the captives of his time.

Peter did not merely feel compassion. A merchant by profession, he knew at first hand the drama of so many Christians deprived of their freedom and, moved by mercy, began using his own possessions to ransom them. When these resources ran out, he begged for alms for them and committed his entire life to this work. The needy neighbour is not a stranger, but Christ who comes to visit us: “Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me” (Mt 25:40).

—Peter lived a mercy that became sacrifice, detachment and self-giving. His thought and his life could be summed up in that Mercedarian logic: to visit, to set free and, if necessary, to give one’s own life.