January 7th: Memorial of Saint Raymond of Penyafort, Presbyter

Gospel text (*Jn* 10:11-16): Jesus said: “I am the good shepherd. A good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. A hired man, who is not a shepherd and whose sheep are not his own, sees a wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away, and the wolf catches and scatters them. This is because he works for pay and has no concern for the sheep. I am the good shepherd, and I know mine and mine know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I will lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. These also I must lead, and they will hear my voice, and there will be one flock, one shepherd.”

“I am the good shepherd”

Fr. Antoni CAROL i Hostench
(Sant Cugat del Vallès, Barcelona, Spain)

Today, the collect prayer for the mass of the saint of the day reads as follows: “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.” Here, then, we find ourselves before an eminent jurist (canonist) - a man of law - who excelled in the virtue of mercy.

What a contrast: man of law, man of mercy! Law and mercy: we might have the impression that they are two antagonistic concepts. However, in Jesus Christ the two realities converge: He is the "Law" ("I am the way"), and the "Mercy". Freedom, yes, and order as well. In the language of Benedict XVI: "eros" (desire) without "agape" (charity) degenerates into a "mad eros", an enslaving desire, annihilating personal freedom. Therefore, freedom yes, and order too.

Indeed, there is a law, a way, because love is not just anything or what each one wants (in fact, there are loves that kill.) The Son of God himself is the "Logos" ("order"), and has a "food" which is to fulfill the will of the Father: He has not spoken on his own. Yes, there is a Way, there is a Truth; and at the same time there is Mercy for the man who recognizes that he has erred on the way. This is why Christ, like the woman caught in adultery, asks me: "Has no one condemned you? -No one, sir. -Neither do I condemn you. Go and from now on do not sin any more" (Jn 8:10-11). To love one must be free, but freedom without the order of values ends up dying.

Behind that enormous task of ordination and compilation of laws and canonical decrees, beats the heart of a good shepherd, Raymond of Penyafort, who shone in mercy, while at the same time, as a responsible

shepherd, he did not fail to show the demands of love: "Your purity deserves and demands that your innocence be purified with frequent sacrifices; you should have it as a great joy and as a proof of love."