

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. And he will separate them one from another, as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will place the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

Then the king will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father. Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me, ill and you cared for me, in prison and you visited me.’

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.’”

“Whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me”

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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 better understand the radical nature of Nolasco’s self-giving: he saw that Christ was truly present in the captives of his time.

Pedro did not merely sympathize. A merchant by trade, he witnessed firsthand the plight of so many Christians deprived of their freedom and, moved by mercy, began using his own wealth to save them. When those resources were exhausted, he begged for alms on their behalf and dedicated his entire life to that mission.

Leo XIV described the historical circumstances of that era as follows: "Between the late twelfth and the early thirteenth centuries, when many Christians were captured in the Mediterranean (...), two religious

orders arose: the Order of the Most Holy Trinity and of the Captives (Trinitarians), and the Order of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Mercy (Mercedarians), founded by Saint Peter Nolasco [in 1218] with the support of the Dominican Saint Raymond of Peñafort. These communities of consecrated persons were born with the specific charism of freeing Christians who had been enslaved, placing their own possessions at the disposal of the enslaved and many times offering their own lives in exchange."

The neighbor in need is not a stranger, but Christ visiting us: "Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me" (Mt 25:40). Peter did not settle for a comfortable form of charity; instead, he lived out a mercy that translated into sacrifice, detachment, and self-giving. His philosophy and his life could be summed up in that Mercedarian principle: to visit, to liberate, and, if necessary, to give one's own life.

Let us ask Saint Peter Nolasco for a heart like his: one capable of seeing the forms of captivity in our time, being moved by them, and committing ourselves to the cause. For before Christ the King, what will matter is not how much we have preserved, but how much love we have managed to translate into deeds. And perhaps the Lord will ask us, even today: "Whom have you set free, comforted, or served out of love for Me?"