August 31st: Memorial of Saint Raymond Nonnatus, Religious

Gospel text (*Mt* 25:31-40): Jesus said to his disciples, «When the Son of Man comes in his glory with all his angels, He will sit on the throne of his Glory. All the nations will be brought before him, and as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, so will He do with them, placing the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

»The King will say to those on his right: 'Come, blessed of my Father! Take possession of the kingdom prepared for you from the beginning of the world. For I was hungry and you fed me, I was thirsty and you gave me drink. I was a stranger and you welcomed me into your house. I was naked and you clothed me. I was sick and you visited me. I was in prison and you came to see me'.

»Then the good people will ask him: 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and give you food; thirsty and give you drink, or a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to see you?'. The King will answer, 'Truly, I say to you: whenever you did this to these little ones who are my brothers and sisters, you did it to me'».

«Whenever you did this to these little ones who are my brothers and sisters, you did it to me»

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Today we remember a saint whose birth questions us all. It is St. Raymond Nonnatus (1204-1240). Tradition, in fact, calls him Nonnatus. (i.e., unborn), because he was drawn from his mother's body - deceased from the previous day - using a cutting instrument (the equivalent of a cesarean section). From the spiritual point of view we are all "unborn" in fact, until we receive baptism, the sacrament of "re-generation".

We are surprised by the peculiar circumstance of this saint and it turns out that, in our days, there are many "unborn children". Not to mention the plague of abortion: how many unborn children! Thousands, every year! (One would be too many already!). God have mercy on us! and we entrust it to his hands, for " All the nations will be brought before him, and as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats " (Mt 25:32), that is, He will discern the heart of each one.

As a young man, at the age of 21, Raymond heard of Peter Nolasco, the founder of the Order of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Mercy, and entered this congregation, also known as the Mercedarians. Their mission was to redeem the Christian captives of the Muslims. St. Raymond traveled to Africa where he dedicated himself to the task of preaching, consoling, healing and accompanying the captives of the Berber pirates, even offering himself as a hostage for the liberation of some of them. The words of Jesus can be very well applied to the saint of today: "I was a stranger, and you welcomed me (...); I was sick, and you visited me; in prison, and you came to see me" (Mt 25:35-36).

All this might seem like a thing of another time. But are we not surrounded by captives of all kinds in our "suburbs"? Sick people, outcasts, slaves of drugs... No, they are not things of the past. You will always have the poor among you" (Jn 12:8). And the Risen Lord is present among us, so that he can also say to us: "Whenever you did this to these little ones who are my brothers and sisters, you did it to me" (Mt 24:40).