

Ransomer of Captives from the Muslims

Written by Wendy Larkson
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Perhaps some readers might be interested to know that January 28 is considered a feast day among Catholics – actually 2 feast days are celebrated on the same day – one is of ST Thomas Aquinas, the great medieval theologian and philosopher who adapted Aristotle to the western Judeo-Christian worldview. . It is also the feast day of a lesser known person – St Peter Nolasco, the great ransomer of captives from the Muslims.

Peter Nolasco was born of a noble family in 1189 at Recaudun, near Carcassonne, in France, and lost his parents while still young. From his youth was noted for his piety, almsgiving, and charity. He he decided to live the life of a monk. He lived at the time of the growth of the Albigensian heresy –like the Manicheans it held that there was a good principle and evil principle pervading the universe and that the human body for example was created by the evil one. Judaism and Christianity on the contrary always held to the goodness of all created existence and saw evil as the lack of a due good. Big difference. In any caase, St Peter tried to avoid the Albigensians and moved to Spain.

In the early 13th century the Moors still held much of Spain, and in sudden raids from the sea they carried off thousands of Christians, holding them as slaves in Granada and in their citadels along the Africa



n coast. He was so affected by the miserable state of the Christians who were in slavery to the Moors, that he expended his whole fortune in ransoming as many of them as possible, and used to say that he wished he could be sold himself to ransom more, or could himself change places with them.

Peter went at once to St Raymond Peñafort, his confessor who used his influence with King James I of Aragon and with Berengarius, Archbishop of Barcelona, to obtain approbation and support for a new community which Peter Noalosco wanted to establish. And so, he founded the Order of the Blessed Mary of Ransom for the Redemption of Captives – the Mercedarian Order of monks. There are also Mercedarian sisters as well.

The Order spread rapidly and was solemnly approved by Gregory IX in 1230. Peter and his companions travelled throughout Christian Spain, recruiting new members and collecting funds

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to purchase the captives. Then they began negotiations with the slave-owners. They penetrated Andalusia, crossed the sea to Tunis and Morocco, and brought home cargo after cargo of Christians which they paid for by ransom. The order still exists today and does work mainly in hospitals but there is just as much need to liberate slaves from Muslim captives.