

A short history of the apparition of Our Lady of Ransom

- On the 1st of August 1218 Our Lady of Ransom appeared to St. Raimund, and also to King James I of Aragon, and likewise to St. Peter Nolasco in three separate apparitions, making known to all three that she desired each of them to contribute to establishing an order for redeeming captives.

- The Order they established is known as the Royal, Celestial and Military Order of Our Lady of Mercy and the Redemption of Captives, and is also known as The Order of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Mercy, the Order of Merced, the Order of Captives, or the Order of Our Lady of Ransom.

- At that time in history, during the 13th century, the powerful Islamic Taifa kingdoms in Spain, as well as the Ottoman Empire at the opposite end of the Mediterranean Sea, operated a slave trade the scope of which has not been seen at any other time. The Spanish, particularly, were subject to raids in which they would be captured and imprisoned, sold into slavery and often forced to renounce their Catholic faith or face discrimination, torture and death.

- On the 10th of August, the Celestial and Military Order of Our Lady of Mercy and the Redemption of the Captives was officially constituted at the Cathedral of the Holy Cross in Barcelona. One of the vows of its members is that they will take the place of captives, and even die for any Christian who was in danger of losing his Catholic faith.

- In 1235 Pope Gregory IX formally recognized the Order inspired by Our Lady of Ransom, which at one point was renowned for having rescued 70,000 Christian souls. It is estimated that 2,700 were rescued during the lifetime of St. Peter Nolasco, who died in the year 1258.

Thou, O Jesus! camest to cast fire upon the earth, and Thy desire is that it be enkindled in the hearts of men. Thy desire was accomplished in Peter Nolasco, and the children of his Order.

Oh! pray that the fetters of false doctrines and passions may be broken, and then the world will enjoy that true liberty, which would soon put an end to tyranny, and make tyrants impossible.



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Our Lady of Ransom



Glory to the
Blessed Mother of God,
who raised up these
Redeemers of Captives!

The order of Our Lady of Ransom

- The order originally attracted young noblemen whose heritage equipped them to address the matter of ransom, and friars who were in holy orders.
- The knights were to guard the coasts against the Saracens, but were obliged to choir when not on duty. The founder, St. Peter Nolasco, himself was never ordained priest; and the first seven generals or commanders were chosen out of the knights, though the friars were always more numerous.
- The founder required of himself and his followers a special vow in addition to the usual three – to devote their "whole substance and very liberty to the ransoming of slaves," even to the point of acting as hostages in order to free others. According to records, the Order of the Blessed Virgin Mary for the Ransom of Captives accomplished approximately 70,000 rescues – some 2,700 during the founder's lifetime.
- The order elected a habit of white, signifying innocence. Some histories claim that Mary provided such guidance during her appearance to Nolasco. An enthusiastic King James authorized the members to wear – emblazoned on their breasts and long scapulars – his own distinguished arms of Aragon.



The image



- Sometimes Our Lady of Ransom is depicted holding the scapular of the order. As a mendicant order, the clerics sought donations to raise the funds to pay ransoms. When Christian rulers recovered more land on the Iberian peninsula, some of it was given to the Mercedarians. They divided their funds into thirds: to ransom captives, maintain the order, and assist the poor. The Virgin was often depicted holding two bags of coins, representing the ransoms raised. In other depictions, she holds the bag of coins in one hand and the scapular in the other.

- As Our Lady of Ransom was also known as *Nuestra Señora de la Merced* (Our Lady of Mercy), later representations mirrored that motif, showing people sheltering for protection under her outspread cloak.

Prayer to Our Lady of Ransom

Blessed be thou, O Mary, the honour and the joy of thy people! On the day of thy glorious Assumption, thou didst take possession of thy queenly dignity for our sake; and the annals of the human race are a record of thy merciful interventions.

The captives whose chains thou hast broken, and whom thou hast set free from the degrading yoke of the Saracens, may be reckoned in the millions.

We are still rejoicing in the recollection of thy dear Birthday; and thy smile is sufficient to dry our tears and chase away the clouds of grief. And yet, what sorrows there are still upon the earth, where thou thyself didst drink such long draughts from the cup of suffering!

Thou alone, O Mary, canst break the inextricable chains, in which the cunning prince of darkness entangles the easily-fooled he has deceived by the high-sounding names of equality and liberty.

Show thyself a Queen, by coming to the rescue. The whole earth, the entire human race, cries out to thee, in the words of Mordochai: "Speak to the King for us, and deliver us from death!" (Esther 15:3)