



## TERTIUS ORDO REGULARIS SANCTI FRANCISCI CONSILIUM GENERALIS

Prot N° 54/2011

*Letter of the Minister General  
and General Council  
to all the Brothers and Sisters  
of the Third Regular Order of Saint Francis  
on the occasion of the Solemnity of St. Francis of Assisi*

### RAMON LLULL

#### Introduction

As we celebrate the Feast of Saint Francis this year we thought it fitting that we reflect on the radical challenge that we have been given through our profession to celebrate the fullness of the Franciscan charism in our lives, in our ministries, and in our fraternities. It is clear that many of us have a tendency to be “busy about many things,” to become complacent with where we are in the spiritual life, and to ignore how truly transformative our call to follow the Gospel really is. This calls for us to be attuned and sensitive to the action of the Spirit of the Lord and to be willing to be cooperative and docile to the divine grace that calls us to embrace an ever-greater life of holiness. One of the ways that we can do this is to reflect on how the Franciscan life has been lived and through the years by the men and women in the Franciscan Third Order over the course of the last eight hundred years.

For this reason we would like you to join us in reflecting on the witness of a number of important figures from the Third Order. Our hope is that these reflections will encourage us all to recognize that the same Spirit that empowered these great figures in our history is still at work in our own lives as professed Franciscan religious. Given the close connection that our friars in Mallorca have with Ramon Llull, we thought that it would be appropriate to begin with him.

How is Ramon Llull relevant and contemporary after so many centuries? What is the message he conveys to our TOR Franciscan men and women today?

#### A Converted Man

Ramon Llull (1232-1316) was born into a wealthy family in Palma, the capital city on the island of Mallorca in the year 1232, three years after King James I conquered the Moors and was able to integrate the territories of the Balearic Islands under the Crown of Aragon. He was the son of an affluent supporter of the king from Barcelona and “probably received the same education as other sons of middle-class families: basic knowledge of doctrine, rudiments of reading and writing (perhaps even in Latin), and the whole cultural and ideological background proper to the dominating class (customs, norms, legends, reading



matter, and so on).”<sup>1</sup> There is some evidence that he worked for a time as a tutor for James II of Aragon. In 1257 he married Blanca Picany with whom he had at least two children, Domènec and Magdalena. Around the same time he became the seneschal, the administrative head of the royal household, to the future King James II of Mallorca.

Despite his marriage and his duties in the royal household Ramon continued to live the life of a footloose poet. He was devoted to writing poems in the style of the troubadours of the time and extolled courtly love. Ramon apparently felt a strong need to love and be loved during the years of his youth. This vital need manifested itself in the form of an infatuation that went beyond the desire for searching for the object of his desires into a love that was aggressive, passionate, and intense. The force of this passion led Ramon to struggle with an inner darkness and for an understanding of the mystery of love, a theme that he later developed in his book *Llibre D'amic I Amat (The Book of the Lover and The Beloved)*.

His life began to change when the Lord touched him in a dramatic way in 1263. Ramon describes this important event in his conversion experience in an autobiography that he dictated to a French monk in 1311.

Ramon, while still a young man and seneschal to the king of Majorca, was very given to composing worthless songs and poems and to doing other licentious things. One night he was sitting beside his bed, about to compose and write in his vulgar tongue a song to a lady whom he loved with a foolish love; and as he began to write this song, he looked to his right and saw our Lord Jesus Christ on the cross, as if suspended in mid-air.<sup>2</sup>

The crucified Christ appeared to Ramon a total of five times and God, as He did with St. Augustine and St. Francis, called him to a life of conversion and penance. Thus began a difficult journey of conversion and penance that eventually led him to focus his life and energies totally and exclusively on the Kingdom of God.

At the age of thirty Ramon left the royal court, provided for his family and left them in order to devote himself totally to the service of the Lord and to the conversion of Muslims and Jews. In 1265 he had another religious epiphany and became a tertiary Franciscan. He made long pilgrimages to the shrines of Our Lady of Rocamadour in southern France and Saint James at Compostela, and finally returned to Mallorca. He clothed himself in the rough habit of a hermit and headed for the lonely mountain of Randa on the southern side of the island that faces the invisible shore of Muslim Africa over the expanse of the Mediterranean. As a reminder of his presence in this spot the TOR Franciscans on the island have lovingly cared for a shrine dedicated to Nuestra Señora de Cura (Our Lady of Health) and a Hall of Grammar for students preparing for entry into university for over a hundred years.

Ramon spent the next nine years studying Islam, Judaism, philosophy, theology, Arabic, and other languages to help him in his mission of converting unbelievers to the Church. He modeled his life on that of St. Francis and gave up all his worldly possessions to

---

<sup>1</sup> Maria Ruiz, Josep and Soler, Albert, “Ramon Llull in his Historical Context,” in *Catalan Historical Review*, I, 2008, p. 48.

<sup>2</sup> Bonner, Anthony (ed.) “Historical Background and Life” in *Doctor Illuminatus*, Princeton University Press, 1985, pp. 10-11.



embrace a life of penance in loving service to the Lord. His life became consumed by a threefold desire: “he would devote his entire life to working for the conversion of non-Christians; he would write the best book ever written to denounce the errors of non-Christians; and he would promote the foundation of monasteries where missionaries could study the languages spoken by non-Christians.”<sup>3</sup>

His education continued in Montpellier, a city that was an important center for the culture and politics of that period. The city was instrumental in developing Raymond as a thinker and a scholar. His formation continued in Paris, the center of academic excellence; in Rome, the center of Christianity, the seat of the Papacy, and the site of great decisions; and in the Holy Land, then controlled by the Muslims. Islam and Judaism became the great obsessions for Ramon and he eagerly sought out scholars of these great religions to discuss their views. Lull’s famous work *El libre del gentil i dels tres savis* (*The Book of the Gentile and the Three Wise Men*) was the result of this search and a model of inter-religious and cultural dialogue. The story focuses on a Gentile who is searching for truth. He encounters three wise men, a Jew, a Muslim, and a Christian, who each present their respective religions as the answer to his quest. Though Ramon fairly presents the position and merits of each of these religions he is clear in his belief that Christianity is the only true faith.

Ramon pushed for the study of Arabic and other then-insufficiently studied languages for those who were to be sent on mission and opened a school in 1275 for this purpose in Miramar on the island of Mallorca. As mentioned above, the following forty years he traveled to the important theological and political cities in Europe including Montpellier, Rome, Naples, Genoa, Pisa, Paris, Barcelona, and even Jerusalem. In each of these cities he continued to study, write, preach, teach, and debate with fervor and conviction. He was a prolific writer and produced over 260 books in Catalan, Latin, and Arabic over a period of approximately 40 years. His writings included “poetry, narrative fiction, mystical treatises, philosophical and theological works, scientific discussions, and an autobiography.”<sup>4</sup>

Not content to prepare others to go on mission, Ramon made three missionary trips to North Africa with a goal to convert the whole Muslim world to Christianity. During his second trip in 1307 he was imprisoned for six months and was shipwrecked off the coast of Italy on his return to Europe. Seven years later he made his last trip to Tunis in northern Africa. According to tradition he died in 1316 at the age of 84 either during his return to Mallorca or shortly after his arrival on the island. An ancient tradition states that his death was due to the injuries or ill treatment that he received during his last journey to Africa and he is venerated as a martyr. The mortal remains of Blessed Ramon Lull were interred in a beautifully carved sepulcher that dates back to the 15<sup>th</sup> century and is found in the Basilica of St. Francis in Palma de Mallorca. The church is currently under the care of the TOR friars of the Immaculate Conception Province in Spain. Pope Pius IX approved the liturgical cult for the veneration of Ramon as a Blessed and Martyr in 1858.

Ramon Lull has the honor of being respectfully known as the “Illuminated Doctor” and is known for his incredible intelligence. He was a philosopher, theologian and grand

---

<sup>3</sup> Maria Ruiz and Soler, p. 49.

<sup>4</sup> Schulman, Jane K., “Lull, Ramon (Raymond Lull)” in *Rise of the Medieval World: A Biographical Dictionary*, Greenwood Press, 2002, p. 273.



mystic, a contemplative and a man of great activity, the father and creator of Catalan as a cultural language, attentive to the problems of the Church and the society of his day, a great missionary to the Jews and to the Muslims, and open to dialogue and the search of wisdom and understanding. It is clear that he lived an intense and prolific life.

## **What can we learn from the life and witness of Ramon Llull?**

### *The Importance of Prayer, Contemplation, and the Pursuit of Knowledge*

Even in the midst of great activity Ramon was always a man of deep prayer and contemplation, a man with an intense experience of God, and a man who loved silence and solitude. For Ramon, his all-consuming pursuit of knowledge flowed from his passionate love of God and his habit of intense and frequent prayer. He spent several years of his life in study and contemplation on the lonely mountain of Randa on the island of Mallorca where he reports that he experienced the gift of being “illuminated” and was directed to develop a system for the conversion of unbelievers.

He considered this illumination as a supernatural gift that impelled him to develop a system of thought and apologetics, which he referred to as the *Ars Magna* (Great Art), with which Ramon thought he could instruct and convince Muslims, Jews, and pagans of the truth of the Christian faith. The work provides a wonderful insight into the depth and core of Llull’s thought and is considered essential for those who wish to understand his theological, philosophical, and scientific insights – some of which are considered to anticipate computer science. According to Ramon, the true starting point for dialogue between the great religions can be found in the *attributes* with which the three religions define God: “God exists, He is one, He is the first cause of all things, etc...”<sup>5</sup> He then goes on to explain, with some kindness, without violence, and with a spirit of peace and understanding, the true search of the Divine Trinity and the Incarnation.

While working on the *Ars Magna* he composed a number of other works, including *The Book of the Gentile and the Three Wise Men* and several on contemplation. Around 1238 his tireless efforts produced *The Book of the Lover and the Beloved* and the delightful novel entitled *Evast and Blaquerna*. In a sense all of these can be seen as the fruit of a lifelong dedication to prayer and contemplation.

### *A Tremendous Love of Creation and Awareness Presence of God in All Things*

Like St. Francis, who he admired and followed as a Secular Franciscan, Ramon sang about the wonders of God that he saw reflected in the book of creation. He joined with the creatures of the world and sang of the beauty of God with them. He had a great capacity for wonder and an ability to marvel as is evidenced in his book *Fèlix* or *Libre de meravelles* (*Félix* or the *Book of Wonders*). In this work Ramon praises God and all the wonders he sees in His creatures.

---

<sup>5</sup> Bonner, Anthony, *The Selected Works of Ramon Llull*, Princeton University Press, 1985, p. 59.



The bird sang in the garden of the Beloved. The Lover came, and he said to the bird: “If we understand not one another’s speech, we may make ourselves understood by love; for in thy song I see my Beloved before my eyes.” (*The Book of the Lover and the Beloved*, 26)

In this song Raymond poetically relates a profound experience of God that he found in nature, “between the vineyard and the fennel, He took me to love, making love to God with sighs and tears.”

#### *A Dedication to Mission and Evangelization*

Ramon Lull was a man passionate and totally focused on just one cause: to make known the treasure that he had discovered and that had completely filled his life – Jesus Christ. From his Mallorcan roots he can be considered the architect of Catalan literature that, thanks to him, reaches a peculiar freshness and malleability. However, he knew how to remain open to other cultures and languages – especially Arabic and Latin.

Ramon believed that the announcement of the Christian faith should be done in a peaceful way through dialogue and convincing argumentation. All of his works were aimed at the evangelization of peoples, especially of Islam. To do this, he founded the school in Miramar on the island of Mallorca with the support of King James II and with the approval of Pope John XXI where a group of Franciscan friars could study the Arabic language and Islamic culture so that they would be prepared to present the Christian faith in Islamic countries in a way that it would be understood and appreciated by those professing this religion.

In his *Libre de sancta Maria (The Book of Holy Mary)* we encounter an admirable and surprising prayer in favor of the evangelization of peoples. It is an example of his apostolic zeal, singular devotion and confidence with which he turned to Mary, full of grace, Lady and Advocate, and Protector of both non-Christians and of the missionaries who will evangelize them.

#### *A Passion for Reform*

In works like the *Romanç d’Evast e Blaquerna* Lull clearly displays his ideas regarding the renewal of Christianity on the personal and family level and as it relates to Church and society as a whole. This book has been regarded as the first example of a social and biographical novel in Western literature. The plot of this novel goes through five states of life or vocations in the Church in which Lull gives a narrative expression to his philosophical and theological principles and their practical application in its various scenes. *El Blaquerna* is also looked upon from the point of view of its ideal of social and political reform, which some have described as utopian. This is to no surprise if we consider the innovative and profound changes literarily described by the Illuminated Doctor with respect to the ingrained social practices and anti-evangelical forces of his day. The themes that Lull develops in this work provide a great example and encouragement for our prophetic imagination and concrete experience as we live out our Christian faith in our contemporary society.



Some of the recurrent topics that Lull creatively explore include: the poor of Jesus Christ; the integration of marginalized groups in society; the moral integrity that should characterize various trades and professions; the great social responsibility of political leaders; the importance of being consistent with the Gospel for all Christians – especially the clergy and other pastoral agents; the centrality of the Word of God, especially of the Gospel, in daily life and in the organization of the Church. In all of these Ramon demonstrates that he is not shy about examining every phase of the society of his day through the prism of a faith that was deeply rooted in Catholic doctrine. Perhaps we should not be shy about doing the same.

### *The Transformative Love of God*

As was mentioned above, even in his youth Ramon was consumed with a desire to love and to be loved. In a sense his whole life, the various studies and ministries that he devoted himself to, and his prodigious literary output are the direct results of this passion that shines through everything he did and wrote.

We get a clear glimpse of this ineffable mystical experience in his wonderful work *The Book of Lover and the Beloved (Blaquerna)*:

Love is an ocean, its waves troubled by the winds; it has no port or shore. (v. 229)

The Lover was in peril in the great ocean of love, and he trusted in his Beloved, who came to him with troubles, thoughts, tears, sighs and griefs; for the ocean was of love. (v. 292)

They asked the Lover: “Who is thy Beloved?” He answered: “He who makes me to love, desire, pine, weep, sigh, suffer, and die.” (v. 231)

Said the Lover: “O ye that love, if ye will have fire, come light your lanterns at my heart; if water, come to my eyes, whence flow the tears in streams...” (v. 165)

They asked the Lover: “Whence art thou?” He answered: “From love.” “To whom dost thou belong?” “I belong to love.” “Who gave thee birth?” “Love.” “Where wast thou born?” “In love.” “Who brought thee up?” “Love.” “How dost thou live?” “By love.” “What is thy name?” “Love.” “Whence comest thou?” “From love.” “Whither goest thou?” “To love.” “Where dwellest thou?” “In love... in my Beloved there is justice and mercy...” (v. 95)

Ramon guided his life by love so much that it would be safe to say that he wanted to die from love, not from old age. Perhaps he willingly embraced his martyrdom as a result this search.





## Conclusion

As we look over the life and witness of our brother Ramon Llull it is clear that he demonstrates a number of essential elements of a true Franciscan vocation:

- a life totally dedicated to the Lord and open to ongoing conversion;
- a life that is consumed by prayer, contemplation, and the pursuit of knowledge;
- a life committed to the spread of the Gospel, to the conversion of unbelievers, and to the mission of the Church; and,
- a life that is clearly transformed by loving and being loved by the Lord.

As we celebrate the Feast of St. Francis this year let us reflect on the example that Ramon leaves us and embrace the same challenge to grow in holiness in our lives.

We pray that you all had a wonderful celebration of the Solemnity of St. Francis!

Rome, October 17, 2011  
For the Solemnity of Saint Francis

p. Michael J. Higgins, TOR  
*Minister General*

p. John Kochuchira, TOR  
*Vicar General*

p. Bernat Nebot Llinás, TOR  
*1<sup>st</sup> General Councilor*

p. Amando Trujillo Cano, TOR  
*2<sup>nd</sup> General Councilor*

fr. Mark McBride, TOR  
*3<sup>rd</sup> General Councilor*

p. José A. Martorell Pou, TOR  
*4<sup>th</sup> General Councilor*  
*General Secretary*