

WHO IS SAINT LOUIS MARY OF MONTFORT?

I. Some biographical details

He was born in Montfort-la-Cane on January 31st 1673. He died in St-Laurent-sur-Sèvre on April 1716.

A man, a Christian, a missionary priest in the century of Louis XIV, king of France from 1643 to 1715, (absolute Monarch since 1661).

Wars... Poverty... Century of the classic literature.... **"Century of the souls"**.

1673-1685: in his family, in Montfort and Iffendic.....until 12 years old

1685-1693: studies in Jesuit school in Rennes.....from 12 to 20 years old
(*Cesson bridge*)

1693-1700: Studies at Saint Sulpice seminary in Paris..... from 20 to 27 years old
(priestly ordination on June 5th 1700)

1700-1706: First apostolic experiences.....from 27 to 33 years old
Near the poor and in parish missions
(*incomprehension, refusal Winter of 1703-1704: street Pot-de-Fer*
(*Summer of 1706: journey to Rome to ask the Pope what he must do...*)

1706-1716: Apostolic missionary: parish missions, retreats, etc.....from 33 to 43 years old
- first two years (some months in the team of M. Leuduger), in the dioceses of
Rennes, St. Malo and St. Brieuc (till mid-1708)
- then 8 years (as a team leader)
Two and a half years in the diocese of Nantes (till early in 1711)
(*Pontchâteau Calvary*)
And the rest in the dioceses of Luçon, Saintes and above all La Rochelle
(*he dies at 43, in fully carrying out his mission*)

II. Some highlights to get near Montfort

1. A rich and contrasted personality

Physically healthy. Without ever losing his health: fasting, bodily penance, apostolic work, pilgrimage trips.

Sensitive temperament. He is an artist: painter and sculptor.

Intellectually endowed: solid studies, writer in prose and verse, pedagogue.

Naturally little sociable: he has a certain natural uniqueness which he tries to correct. If he has always remained singular in the eyes of others, it is certainly less because of a deliberate nonconformity than because of an unwavering fidelity to the Gospel and a zeal for the salvation of souls.

Separated from his family, having done at the same time much for his brothers and sisters.

2. A leader of crowds

* Close to the small and humble... who are attached to him (for example, in Poitiers, the poor "locked up" in the hospital and the people of the suburbs of St Simplicien).

* Gifted to communicate with the poor and the simple people, (being, at the same time, at ease with the rich). "The good father of Montfort" was the name given to him by the people of the village.

* Human charity, in the name of the Gospel, in his preaching, and..., the goodness in the

confessional.

* Bold to undertake and mobilize the people: the calvaries of Montfort, Sallertaine and especially Pontchâteau; the restoration of the chapels; the moving of the tombs out of the church.

* Sense of organization (hospital of Poitiers) and of staging at the service of evangelization (processions, planting of crosses, songs, pampered preaching, paintings, banners and pictures, etc.).

* Concern to incorporate people into various groups, so that they may gather after the mission: sororities of virgins, friends of the cross, penitents, soldiers, the rosary.

3. A disturbing man

If he arouses the sympathy and the enthusiasm of the little ones, the simple and the poor, he also provokes hostility from those (priests - or even bishops - and other Christians) who do not share his wisdom of evangelical life.

It is above all his radicalness to follow Jesus Christ in poverty and total abandonment to Providence, on the one hand, and on the other, their pressing call to live the Gospel and the demands of baptism (through conversion and the flight from the occasions of sin), that bothers many: the "well-to-do" priests, the "honest" of the "Grand Siècle", the Calvinists, the libertines.

He is a free man who disturbs by the poor way he dresses, to lodge in the house of the families, to pray a lot, to invite the poor to eat with him when he himself is invited...

He fears no one: he dares to break the game (of checkers) of the soldiers; he confronts those who duel; he enters the places of debauchery; five times they tried to kill him...

4. A man who loves everybody, but especially the less privileged...

During his studies (Rennes and Paris), from 1700 to 1706 (when he sought his way), and throughout his life, he loved especially the poor and tried to improve their situation.

Note his work in hospitals (Poitiers, Paris), the asylum for incurables he founded in Nantes, his approach to the rich to meet the needs of the poor (Dinan), the place of the poor at the table of the missionaries.

He has the art of loving them: not only as he loves himself, but more than himself; he takes the first step; he forgets for himself the elementary measures of hygiene; he goes to beg for them (Poitiers), he gives them his own bed (Dinan). He is in charge of serving them... and at the same time he avoids disturbing his collaborators.

He tried to organize charity (Poitiers, Nantes) and put the first Daughters of Wisdom at their service (Poitiers).

He was "charitable" and "firm" towards them. He sees Jesus Christ in the poor and the sick. Socially and affectively, he must be considered closer to the "Plain State" than to the "Clergy" (of which he is a member) or to the "Nobility".

5. A preacher who touches the hearts

He has the gift of the word (numerous testimonies from Jesuits, Capuchins, Secular Priests). A "gift received from God" as he himself says.

Some, who have come "to see" or to mock... burst into tears (even the clergy).

He organizes pilgrimages to ask for the grace to touch hearts and he obtains it.

He does not speak like the "fashionable preachers", but "preaches as an apostle", "abandoned to Providence". He lets God speak, as he will ask his missionaries of the Company of Mary. His language is understandable to simple people. He composed hymns to help the illiterate retain his teachings (the catechism in the form of songs).

His missions bear fruit.

6. A contemplative in action...

He has a particular inclination towards solitude and silence (child, student, missionary).

His "failures" often led him to disappear momentarily in order to find peace in silence and prayer (for example, after the Pontchâteau Calvary affair).

His moments of retreat are the pillars of his missionary life (about 1/4 of his life as a priest).

Prayer is good for oneself, as he says, in order to be good for others.

He loves the "hermitages": Saint Lazarus in Montfort; Saint Eloi in La Rochelle; the forest of Mervent.

He also likes pilgrimages: Chartres, Saumur, Mont St-Michel, Lorette...

This did not prevent him, in less than 16 years of activity, from preaching nearly 200 missions or retreats in the West of France, from writing books and hymns and traveling more than 20,000 kilometers on foot.

7. A man at the service of the Church, obedient and nonconformist...

Availability and unconditional obedience to the bishops.

Seven of them forbade him to preach or celebrate in their dioceses (some of them reversed their decision after being better informed). He went to Rome to find confirmation of his apostolic projects.

He will always be faithful to the instructions of Pope Clement XI to help "renew the spirit of Christianity in Christians" from baptism onwards, in view of holiness.

To participate in the perspectives of the Bishop of La Rochelle, he had Marie-Louise Trichet come from Poitiers to La Rochelle. She leaves the hospital where she has been working for 10 years, to go to school.

For him, the Church is a people that must be taught and nourished by the Word of God and the sacraments.

With his own life, he challenges the priests who seek comfort, tranquility, security.

8. A man of wish...

Wish "to give missions in the East to convert the unbelievers" (cf. Grandet during the meeting with Pope Clement XI), to teach catechism to the poor.

Wish to know, love and possess Jesus Christ (Wisdom of God).

Wish to make Jesus Christ known, loved and served through Mary.

Wish to see evil retreat wherever he goes and to "save souls".

Wishes that result in prayer to obtain everything from God, "Father who can do everything (unquestionable, infallible, almighty)..."

Wishes that he turns into forgetfulness and unreserved dedication and missionary commitment.

9. A spiritual Teacher and Guide

* From what he read and especially from his own experience of God, he gave birth to what we call "Montfortian spirituality". The main poles of this spirituality are God the Father; Jesus Christ, Wisdom Incarnate, Crucified and Glorified; the Holy Spirit; Mary. With particular accents (which we call "Montfortians").

Note: - the privileged place of the mystery of the Incarnation and the Cross,

- the total and irrevocable gift of oneself to Jesus Christ, through the hands of Mary, to live as a continuous renewal the promises of baptism,

- the life of intimacy with Mary: to do everything through her, with her, in her and for her...

* "The Love of Eternal Wisdom", "The Treatise of True Devotion of Mary", "The Secret of

Mary", "The Letter to the Friends of the Cross", some of his "Canticles", are the works of Montfort which allow us to deepen his spirituality. But our life (as "Montfortians") and the rereading of our own spiritual experience will teach us much more.

* Witness, prophet, saint, teacher and spiritual guide:

He invites us to make a decisive choice between the wisdom of the world and the wisdom of God.

He shows us Mary as the way to Christ.

He reminds us that the disciple must take up his cross and follow in the footsteps of the Master.

He urges us to take care of the poorest.

He stimulates us in our willingness to participate in the mission of the Church.