

# A DAY IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF FATHER DE MONTFORT AND MARIE-LOUISE TRICHET IN POITIERS

## INTRODUCTION

Poitiers, at the time of Father de Montfort and Marie-Louise Trichet, was a city of barely 20,000 inhabitants. Marked by religious wars (Catholic-Protestant), Poitiers had a real vitality linked to its intellectual, judicial, and administrative activity. As an episcopal city, it had become a stronghold of Catholicism. The number of secular and regular clergy was impressive (almost a thousand), with about twenty parish churches and numerous convents of nuns and religious.

The Jesuits had a renowned College in Poitiers. In contrast to the upper part of the city, where the wealthiest people lived, the city's physiognomy was also marked by the general hospital, in the lower part of the city, a place of containment for the underprivileged, the poor, and a refuge from misery.

For Father de Montfort, Poitiers was an unknown city where Providence led him in 1701 and where he stayed three times from 1701 to 1706. For Father de Montfort, these stays in Poitiers,

"represented a real school of training". It was in this city that everything began, the commitment to the poor, the missions, the preaching, the spiritual guidance, but also de Montfort's contemplation of Jesus' Wisdom and the very special place of Mary in our salvation and sanctification. It was also there that Father de Montfort, Marie-Louise Trichet and their faithful companion Mathurin, planted the seeds that would become the community of the *Daughters of Wisdom*.

If we look at how lay people (men and women) were involved in various aspects of the life and mission of Fr. de Montfort in Poitiers, we might be surprised by the number and diversity of these people.

The most important thing is to ask ourselves in what way these experiences lived by, and with, lay people can enlighten, stimulate and open us to reflection. It can help us to examine our life and our mission as Christians today, right where we are.

The following is a brief, non-exhaustive overview of the lay people who played a role in the mission of Father de Montfort and Marie-Louise Trichet, in Poitiers:

If we consider how lay people have been associated with the different aspects of the life and mission of Father de Montfort in Poitiers, we might be surprised by the number and diversity of these people.

The most important thing is to ask ourselves in what way these experiences lived by and with lay people can enlighten, stimulate and inspire us to reflect on our mission as Christians today.

Here is a small, non-exhaustive overview of the lay people who played a role in the mission of Father de Montfort and Marie-Louise Trichet, in Poitiers:

- Mme de Montespan
- The residents of the general hospital
- The group of Gouvernantes inside the hospital
- Marie Louise's sister
- Marie-Louise Trichet herself
- Mathurin Rangeard
- The 'elite' students' association of the Jesuit College
- Jacques Goudeau
- The inhabitants of Montbernage (see letter)
- Five individuals and four groups of people
- Madame de Montespan

## THE MYSTERIOUS AND DEEPLY HUMAN WAYS OF PROVIDENCE.

In April 1701 Mr. Grignon, who was in the community of Saint Clément in Nantes, received a letter from his sister who lived at the Abbey of Fontevraud. The letter was written "by order of Madame de Montespan" asking him to "come to Fontevraud immediately to witness the ceremony of nuns who were receiving the veil/habit. The ceremony was to take place the following Tuesday. Montfort specifies in his letter addressed to Mr Leschassier, Superior of the Seminary of Saint Sulpice in Paris: "I, therefore, left the same day on foot. I arrived at Fontevraud on Wednesday morning, the day after my sister took the habit".

In his letter, Mgr. Grignon goes on to say: "During the two days that I stayed at Fontevraud, I had the honour of having several private conferences with Madame de Montespan. She asked me about many things, but particularly about myself. She asked me what I wanted to become. To this, I naively told her of the attraction (you know I have) of working for the salvation of the poor, my brothers.

She told me that she very much approved of the plan I had, especially as she knew from experience that the instruction of the poor was much neglected and that she would give me a canonry, if I wished, which depended on her. For this I thanked her humbly and promptly, stating that I never wanted to change Divine Providence in a canonry or a benefice. On this refusal, she told me to go and see Monseigneur de Poitiers at least, to discover my intentions. Although I was reluctant to comply with this desire of Madame de Montespan, both because of the 28 leagues I still had to travel and for many other reasons. I nevertheless obeyed her blindly out of a desire to do the holy will of God, which was my only concern.

*Notes on Mme de Montespan 1640-1707 (Château de Versailles website):*

### AN INFLUENTIAL FAVOURITE

Mistress of Louis XIV in 1667, the Marquise de Montespan arrived at Court thanks to Anne of Austria. This dazzlingly beautiful woman, feared by the courtiers thanks to the famous "Mortemart spirit" that characterised her family, had a great influence on the life of the Court. Passionate about the arts and protected by the king, she occupied a flat close to his before being ousted around 1680 by Madame de Maintenon and leaving Versailles for good in 1691.

M. Grignon was still a seminarian when he met Madame de Montespan for the first time between 1695 and 1697; she offered him the management of the future of two of her sisters. From Paris, where the girls had joined her, Mme de Montespan "had them taken, a few days later, to Fontevraud. Mme de Rochechouart, her sister, who was abbess, received them with open arms [ . but one of them was obliged to leave and return to her parent's home in Rennes, because of a flux on her eyes, which threatened to make her lose her sight (Grandet, p.18).

The girls' names were Sylvie (born 1677) and Françoise-Marguerite (born 1679). The latter left the monastery. Sylvie took the habit on the 26th April 1701 and died at Fontevraud in 1743. A little further on in the same letter he says: "When Monseigneur de Poitiers returned, I went to greet him, and I told him in a few words what Madame had ordered me to do."

### QUESTIONS

- *What can we retain for today from this episode of the meeting between Mme de Montespan and Father de Montfort ?*
- *Since Mme de Montespan already knew Father de Montfort when he was a seminarian at Saint Sulpice in Paris, if she wanted to meet him, it is because this first meeting had not left her indifferent. What was it that had touched her so much at that meeting? The young seminarian's inner attitude ?*

When Father de Montfort received the letter of invitation to go to Fontevraud, he did not hesitate, he left immediately. And then he considered it an honour to have "several private conferences with Mme de Montespan". Finally, he accepted Mme de Montespan's proposal to walk a good distance to meet the Bishop of Poitiers in an attitude of blind obedience to do the holy will of God, which he looked upon solely. Father de Montfort, therefore, recognised that God/Holy Spirit was speaking to him through this meeting with Mme de Montespan. This is a surprising path that the Lord takes to help the young priest de Montfort to discern the will of God, which he never ceases to seek.

#### FOR ME TODAY

- What does this experience teach me ?
- What do you think of the initiative and the attitude of Madame de Montespan towards Father de Montfort ?
- What do you think of the attitude of Father de Montfort ?
- How can I listen to people who, a priori, are not part of my social network ?
- What steps should I take to listen to what the Lord is saying to me in unpredictable circumstances ?
- What does it mean for me to do the holy will of God ?

#### THE RESIDENTS OF THE GENERAL HOSPITAL

The year was 1701. de Montfort writes "*I arrived in Poitiers on the eve of Saint James and Saint Philip, and I was obliged to wait there for four days for Monseigneur de Poitiers, who would soon return from Niort. During this time, I made a little retreat to a small room, where I was shut up in the middle of a large town, where I knew no one according to the flesh. I thought of going to the hospital to serve the poor corporally if I could not serve them spiritually. I went to pray to God in their little church, where I spent about four hours waiting for supper, which seemed very short. They seemed very long, however, to some of the poor, who, having seen me on my knees, and wearing clothes so much like their own, went to tell the others and urged each other to give me alms; some gave more, others less, the poorest a penny, the richest a sol. All this happened without my knowing it. But I was deceived on the one hand, having learned that they did not eat in the community, and surprised on the other, having learned that they wanted to give me alms and that the porter had been ordered not to let me leave. I blessed God a thousand times over to be poor and to wear the glorious livery, and I thanked my dear brothers and sisters for their goodwill.*

*Since then they have taken such a liking to me that they all say publicly that I will be their priest, that is to say, their director, for there has been no fixed director in the hospital for a considerable time, so poor and abandoned is it. They have since taken such a liking to me that they all say publicly that I am to be their priest, that is to say, their director, for there has not been a fixed one in the hospital for a long time, so poor and abandoned is it."*

In 1704, while Father de Montfort was in Paris, he received a petition from the poor of the general hospital of Poitiers addressed to Mr. Leschassier, his former superior of the seminary of Saint-Sulpice: "By the death and Passion of Jesus, Sir, we four hundred poor people, beg you very humbly, for the greatest love and glory of God, to bring us our venerable pastor, the one who loves the poor so much, Mr. Grignon."

The choice of Father de Montfort to go and pray in the hospital chapel dressed in a poor man's habit touched the hearts of some poor people who took two initiatives:

- They spoke about it around them and organised a collection to give alms to Father de Montfort.
- They said publicly that Father de Montfort would be their priest.

#### FOR ME TODAY

*What does this experience of Father de Montfort being welcomed by the poor at the General Hospital teach me ?*

## THE GROUP OF WOMEN AT THE GENERAL HOSPITAL

If Father de Montfort was concerned to raise the dignity of the poor in the hospital by improving their material living conditions, he did not forget the souls. "Inside the hospital, he had organised a humble association of girls,' which he wanted to dedicate to the Wisdom of the Incarnate Word that confounds the false wisdom of the world".

From among the women boarders and staff, Father de Montfort chose women who were crippled, lame, and disregarded and placed a blind woman at the head of this small association. The group met in a room which he called Wisdom and in which he erected a cross. These women met according to a set of rules for exercises of piety, meditation, and praying the rosary, but also for manual work and recreation. It was at this 'School of Wisdom', a school of humility, poverty and obedience, that Marie-Louise Trichet came to learn when she entered into the service of the poor in the hospital.

Thus Fr. de Montfort could write to Mr. Leschassier: "It is true, however, my dear Father, that among all these troubles and contradictions,...God wanted to make use of me to bring about great conversions."

The hour of rising, of going to bed, of vocal prayer, of the rosary in common, of hymns and even of mental prayer for those who want it, still exists.

In setting up this small association within the General Hospital, Father de Montfort associated himself with other people chosen not according to the usual criteria we would spontaneously think of physical, intellectual, organisational, etc., but on the contrary, he chose women who were "poor" but undoubtedly rich inside.

Wisdom's folly according to God and all this to improve the material and spiritual climate of the hospital and thus "humanise" this place of confinement of people that "the world abandons".

Although the experience was brief, it can inspire us today.

### FOR ME TODAY

- *What lesson did I learn from this experience ?*
- *How can I associate myself with people I would not even think of to carry out the mission entrusted to me ?*
- *What inner attitude do I need to develop for that ?*
- *How can I live the "folly of Wisdom" in my context ?*

## ELISABETH, MARIE LOUISE'S SISTER

One day Elizabeth, Marie Louise's sister, goes to the church of St. Augustine. She returned enthusiastic about the sermon she had just heard from the preacher. It was Grignon de Montfort. So, "she was so touched by the sermon of this man of God, that she was not more eager to tell her sister what she had heard as soon as she returned home. Oh sister, if you only knew the beautiful sermon I have just heard, never in my life have I heard anything so pathetic and touching; the preacher is a saint! (cf Besnard).

Marie-Louise then decided to go to confession to him and confide in him her desire to become a nun. Thus, it was thanks to her sister that Marie-Louise met Father de Montfort. All this because she was deeply touched by the words of this preacher whose name she did not even know. Elisabeth, a relay person full of spontaneity, will thus allow Marie-Louise, without knowing it, to discover her vocation within the Church.

## FOR ME TODAY

- *How am I attentive to the words of each person I encounter, even those who are given little importance ?*
- *Do I believe that God, through them, can accomplish his work of salvation ?*

## MARIE-LOUISE TRICHET

Following the exciting report from her sister Elisabeth, Marie-Louise decided to go and see the "great preacher" the very next day. "She finds him in the confessional, and that is what she wants; she prepares herself for the sacrament, she introduces herself: what a surprise when the confessor, before going into the details of her conscience, asks her who the person who talked her about him! ... It's my sister, sir. No, no, my daughter, it was not your sister who told you to come here, it was the Blessed Virgin who sent you to me for confession" (cf. Besnard).

From that moment on, Marie-Louise's life took a new direction. She placed herself under the spiritual direction of this young priest. She followed the retreats he preached in the hospital or the suburbs of Poitiers. She attended the small association of young girls, "La Sagesse", which Father de Montfort had set up in the hospital.

Preoccupied by God's call to commit herself to religious life, Marie-Louise insisted on speaking to Father de Montfort. She repeatedly expressed to him her desire to become a religious. She wanted him to tell her where this desire could be realised. Well...go to the hospital! Marie-Louise had the intuition that this proposal was the expression of God's will. She decided to take the necessary steps and spoke to Father de Montfort before asking for the approval of the new Bishop.

He addressed the hospital office, which refused. Marie-Louise insisted on asking the Bishop: "Well, Monseigneur, these gentlemen do not want to receive me as a Governess, perhaps they will not refuse as a poor woman, and if, out of kindness, you would like to entrust me with a letter from you, I am sure that I will enter" (cf. Besnard).

The bishop wrote her a letter which she took to the hospital office. Her approach aroused the admiration of the directors who could not help but accept her as a poor woman. She was asked to help the superior. Marie-Louise then gradually acquired know-how and knowledge in the field of treasury and hospital organisation. Father de Montfort integrated her into a small association. She was nineteen years old. This choice of Marie-Louise Trichet did not go unnoticed in the city of Poitiers. A prosecutor's daughter living among the poor in the hospital! She, therefore, lived as a laywoman until 2 February 1703, when she took the habit, pronounced her first vows, and received her new name "Marie-Louise de Jésus".

Marie-Louise's choice to follow Father de Montfort was not to the delight of her mother. "You will go crazy like him! When the latter saw her daughter dressed in the habit he had given her on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of February 1703, she felt dishonoured and asked her to remove it: "Remove this habit immediately, take up your ordinary clothing again, and obey your mother. Father de Montfort had to intervene with her mother to tell her that from now on Marie-Louise was no longer hers but God's. One can imagine the inner struggle of Marie-Louise, then just 19 years of age.

Marie Louise, a young laywoman, made the courageous choice to commit herself to the particular mission of caring for the poor, guided by Father de Montfort. She took the initiative and made her choice to become a religious. She did not go it alone. Despite opposition from her mother, who was displeased that her daughter had chosen Father de Montfort as her spiritual guide.

## FOR ME TODAY

- *How can the experience of the young Marie-Louise be a source of inspiration for me today as a lay associate ?*
- *What is it about this experience that particularly touches me ?*

## MATHURIN RANGEARD—AN ENCOUNTER, A CALL, AND A RESPONSE

The year was 1705 in Poitiers. A young man named Mathurin came to Poitiers to become a Capuchin. He entered by chance the Church of the Penitents to pray. When Father de Montfort saw him, he invited him to come and see him, and knowing his intention, he asked him to stay with him to serve him in his missions, where for nearly 15 years he taught catechism and schooling to the children and sang hymns with many blessings. Father de Montfort did not speak to him in any other language than that used by the Saviour to call his apostles : "Seque me! Follow me! And immediately this good boy obeyed. He was tonsured after the death of Mr. Grignon and had many talents for carrying out his duties.

### REFLECTION — A LIFE-CHANGING ENCOUNTER

God often calls unexpectedly. For Mathurin, God's call comes through the encounter and the request of Father de Montfort: "Follow me". Father de Montfort speaks in the name of Jesus himself in Matthew's call. Matthew did not expect this. He had another project in mind. But he answers as a free man, without any hesitation.

### FOR ME TODAY

- *What reflections do Mathurin's call and his response inspire in me ?*
- *Take the time to remember the calls I have heard in my history that have been decisive for my commitment.*
- Give thanks to the Lord for the calls heard and the responses given.
- Who today could I call to join us as a Montfortian associate ?

### PRAYER

Lord, you who called your disciples to leave everything and to follow you, you continue to call whomever you want to follow you, like our Brother Mathurin. I give you thanks for all the lay associates who respond today to your calls. Give us the audacity and the faith of Fr. de Montfort and Br. Mathurin so that we in turn may dare to launch calls to others to work in the mission of education in the Montfortian way. We ask this through the intercession of Fr. de Montfort and of our Brother Mathurin, of the Virgin Mary, and Jesus your Son, Wisdom Incarnate. Amen!

## JACQUES GOUDEAU MONTBERNAGE POITIERS

In the year 1705 the mission of Montbernage, given in the lower quarter of the city of Poitiers, came to an end. As always, Father de Montfort was careful to put in place simple means so that the mission would continue to produce fruit after his departure. Already, in the barn of the Bergerie, transformed into a chapel, the rosary prayer is well in place in front of the statue of Mary Queen of Hearts. But who is going to provide this service now? So, he launched the appeal: "If someone agrees to recite the rosary here on Sundays and feasts and to sing the little crown at noon, I will leave the image of my good Mother there". It was then that Jacques Goudeau, a master weaver, offered to fulfil this mission. He would be faithful to it for 40 years.

Thus, thanks to this "yes" to the call launched by Father de Montfort, Christians in this neighbourhood with a difficult reputation would remain faithful to prayer. Father de Montfort can leave at ease.

After the death of Father de Montfort, when Sister Marie-Louise returned from La Rochelle and was thinking of setting up the community of the Daughters of Wisdom in Poitiers, it was again Jacques Goudeau who suggested to her the idea of going to meet a lady, Mme de Bouillé, in Saint Laurent sur Sèvre, where the

tomb of Father de Montfort is located, who could help her to find a house there to set up the motherhouse of the Community of the Daughters of Wisdom.

Father de Montfort had had the audacity, in this difficult neighbourhood, where people were far removed from the life of the Church, to establish a chapel for prayer in a former dance hall, which for him was equivalent to a place of debauchery. The other audacity was to ask someone from among those who had just lived the mission and therefore someone who has publicly lived the act of renewing the promises of his baptism before the Christian community. He trusted this layman, Jacques Goudeau, a simple craftsman who responded to his call, to ensure the rosary. Thanks to him, the mysteries of Jesus' life will continue to be contemplated with Mary. The mission continues with the Virgin Mary who leads to Jesus-Wisdom.

#### FOR ME TODAY

- *In reading about Jacques Goudeau's experience as a partner in the pursuit of Father de Montfort's mission, what is it that particularly touches me ?*
- *What does this imply for me today, where I am involved as a lay associate with the Brothers of Saint Gabriel ?*
- *What place is given to the prayer of the rosary, as a simple means of supporting each other and growing in the knowledge and love of Jesus-Wisdom ?*

#### PRAYER

Lord, your servant Saint Louis-Marie de Montfort wanted companions to help him with his missions. In Jacques Goudeau, a simple layman, de Montfort recognized the authentic baptized person, ready to take on responsibilities to help his Christian community by agreeing to ensure the service of the rosary prayer. Virgin Mary, "Queen of Hearts" with you, we thank the Lord for all those who remain faithful in contemplating with you the mysteries of the life of your Son Jesus Wisdom Incarnate. We pray to you for all those who commit themselves to ensure in confidence the service of prayer in our communities.

Virgin Mary, "Queen of Hearts", intercede for us with the Lord so that, following the example of Jacques Goudeau, we too may be attentive to the calls that are made to us to help our brothers and sisters grow in Christ. Rejoice, Mary "Queen of Hearts", full of graces, the Lord is with you, you are blessed among all women and Jesus who trusts his disciples is blessed.

Holy Mary etc...

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, forever and ever. Amen!

#### ASSOCIATION OF ELITE PUPILS OF THE JESUIT COLLEGE

"I give a lecture every week to the 13 or 14 pupils who are the elite of the college, with the approval of the late Monsignor. (O.C. L. 11, 4 July 1711, p. 35-36)

OC note p. 36 "The college of the Jesuit Fathers. The students of the Collège Sainte-Marthe were joined by students from the University. M. Grignon brought them all together in a "Congregation" (as one of them put it), with its own rules and daily exercises .... (Mémoire de Le Normand; Grandet, p. 465).

According to Grandet, Father de Montfort admitted into this Congregation: "those who were the most docile", and to whom he recommended oration, spiritual reading, the frequentation of the sacraments and the apostolate with their "most deranged comrades"; he urged them to join the Congregation of the Virgin established at the Jesuit College. It was especially the congregation members whom he grouped together at his conferences. This pious society was a breeding ground for excellent priests, holy religious and virtuous laymen (e.g., Alexis Trichet, Marie-Louise's brother, who became a priest; Mr Le Normand, a lay prosecutor at the Presidial of Poitiers...)

Father de Montfort did not invent, but adapted an experience of this type of "congregation" of students, having lived it himself when he was a student at the Jesuit college in Rennes. He knew the benefits of such an association with the spiritual help of a priest, to nourish and live his faith through teaching and prayer, but also to experience commitment to the poor.

#### FOR ME TODAY

- How can we be inventive in offering young people the opportunity to live an experience of "community", of "Church", allowing them to deepen their faith and to live it in a form of commitment towards those whom society neglects?
- Father de Montfort takes care of the poor but also of those who can have a positive influence on others thanks to their human and spiritual formation. What does this inspire me in my responsibilities, especially with young people?

#### THE INHABITANTS OF MONTBERNAGE

##### CIRCULAR LETTER TO THE INHABITANTS OF MONTBERNAGE (1706)

##### GOD ALONE

1. Dear inhabitants of Montbernage, St. Saturnin, St. Simplicien, the Resurrection and others who have benefited from the mission that Jesus Christ, my Master, has just given you, greetings in Jesus and Mary. Unable to speak to you in person, because holy obedience forbids me to do so, I am taking the liberty of writing to you on my departure, like a poor father to his children, not to teach you new things, but to confirm you in the truths I have told you. The Christian and paternal friendship I bear you is so strong that I shall always carry you in my heart, in life, in death and eternity! I would rather forget my right hand than forget you wherever I am, even to the holy altar! I would rather forget my right hand than to forget you anywhere, even to the holy altar, what shall I say? To the ends of the earth, to the gates of death: be sure of it, provided you are faithful to practice what Jesus Christ has taught you through his missionaries and me unworthy, despite the devil, the world and the flesh.
2. Remember, then, my dear children, my joy, my glory and my crown, to love Jesus Christ ardently, to love him through Mary, to make your true devotion to the Blessed Virgin, our good Mother, shine forth everywhere and before all, so that you may be everywhere the good odour of Jesus Christ, so that you may constantly carry your cross in the wake of this good Master and win the crown and the kingdom which awaits you. So do not fail to fulfil and practice faithfully your baptismal promises and practices, to say your rosary daily in public or in private, and to attend the sacraments, at least every month.
3. I beg my dear friends of Montbernage, who have the image of my good Mother and my heart, to continue and increase the fervour of their prayers, not to suffer with impunity in their suburb the blasphemers, swearers, singers of ugly songs and drunkards. I say with impunity: that is to say, if they cannot prevent them from sinning, by rebuking them with zeal and gentleness, at least let some man or woman of God not fail to do penance, even public penance, for public sin, even if it be only a Hail Mary in the streets or the place of their prayers, or to carry a lighted candle into the room or church. This is what you must do, and you will continue, God willing, to persevere in the service of God. I say the same to other places.
4. My dear children, you must serve as an example to all Poitiers and the surrounding area. Let no one work on non-working days. Let no one spread out or open his shop, even against the ordinary practice of the bakers, butchers, shopkeepers and others of Poitiers who steal God's Day, and who unfortunately rush into damnation, whatever fine pretexts they may bring, unless you have a real need recognised by your worthy parish priest. Do not work on holy days in any way, and God, I promise you, will bless you in the spiritual and even the temporal, so that you will not lack the necessities of life.

5. I beg my dear fishmongers of St. Simplicien, butchers, dealers and others to continue the good example they are giving to the whole town, by practising what they have learned in the mission.
6. I beg you all, in general, and in particular, to accompany me with your prayers on the pilgrimage I am going to make for you and many others. I say for you: for I am undertaking this long and arduous journey, to Providence, to obtain from God, through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin, perseverance for you. I say for many: I carry in my heart all the poor sinners of Poitou and other places, unfortunately damned. Their souls are so dear to my God that he gave all his blood for them, and I would give nothing? He has made such long and arduous journeys for her, and I would give none? He risked his own life, and I would not risk mine. Ah, only a pagan or a bad Christian is not touched by the immense loss of these infinite treasures, the redeemed souls of Jesus Christ. Pray for this.

My dear friends, pray for me too, so that my malice and unworthiness do not hinder what God and his holy Mother want to do through my ministry.

I am looking for divine Wisdom, help me to find her. I have great enemies in mind: all the worldly people, who esteem and love things that are out of date and perishable, despise me, mock me and persecute me, and all hell, which has plotted my downfall and will raise all the powers against me everywhere. In the midst of all this, I am very weak and weak indeed, ignorant and ignorant indeed, and the rest I dare not say. There is no doubt that being alone and poor, I shall perish, unless the Blessed Virgin and the prayers of good souls, and especially yours, sustain me and obtain for me from God the gift of the word or divine wisdom, which will be the remedy for all my ills and the powerful weapon against my enemies.

With Mary it is easy: I put my trust in her, even though the world and hell may grumble about it, and I say with St. Bernard: "Hoc, filii mei, maxima fiducia mea ac tota ratio spei meae". Have these words explained to you, I would not have dared to say them myself. It is through Mary that I seek and will find Jesus, that I will crush the head of the serpent and defeat all my enemies and myself for the greater glory of God. Farewell, without farewell, for if God keeps me alive, I shall pass this way again, either to remain here for some time under the obedience of your illustrious prelate, who is so zealous for the salvation of souls and so sympathetic to our infirmities or to pass on to another country, because, since God is my Father, I have as many places to dwell as there are where he is so unjustly offended by sinners "Qui justus est justificetur adhuc. Qui in sordibus est sordescat adhuc. Aliis quidem odor mortis in mortem, aliis quidem odor vitae in vitam".

All yours. Louis-Marie de Montfort, priest and unworthy slave of Jesus in Mary.

In this circular letter, Father de Montfort expresses all his love for the inhabitants of Montbernage and the other poorest parishes of the city of Poitiers. He exhorts them:

- "to love Jesus Christ ardently, to love him through Mary, to make your true devotion to the Blessed Virgin manifest everywhere and before everyone,
- to be faithful to what they received during the mission "that Jesus Christ my Master has just given you"... to be "faithful to practise what Jesus Christ taught you through his missionaries and myself unworthy..."
- to continue to be a good example of Christian life for the whole city of Poitiers and its surroundings
- to pray for him, for the pilgrimage to Rome that he is undertaking "I am looking for divine Wisdom, help me to find it". Even if we do not know how these parishioners of Montbernage and the surrounding area received this circular letter, it may be interesting to see how it resonates with us today.

#### FOR ME TODAY

- *What does the love and trust that Fr. de Montfort expresses in his letter towards the inhabitants of Montbernage and the other poor parishes of Poitiers inspire in me ?*

- *Fr. de Montfort is counting on the witness of the Christian life of these laymen and women so that the mission will continue to bear fruit for the whole city and its surroundings. What lessons do I draw from this for myself ?*
- *Fr. de Montfort also relies on their prayer "I am looking for Divine Wisdom, help me to find it". What does this request for communion in prayer between lay people and priests inspire me*
- *What touches me, particularly in this letter to the inhabitants of Montbernage ?*

## CONCLUSION

We have just discovered several lay figures, men and women, young people and adults, of very different social conditions, members or not of an association, etc. Each one, in his or her own way, played a role so that the providential mission of Father de Montfort in Poitiers might bear fruit, despite the various obstacles he encountered.

If we can risk finding a common point between all of them, it is surely that of *having simply lived the grace of their baptism which is the foundation of every vocation.*

For all this let us give thanks to the Lord. This is what he is calling us today.

F. Maurice Hérault

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*Note: the extracts from the texts quoted come for the most part from the booklet "Louis-Marie Grignion de Montfort, Marie-Louise Trichet" Le temps des commencements, collection Trésors Poitevins, under the responsibility of Jean-Paul Russeil.*