

# SAINT LOUIS-MARIE AND THE BIBLE

## The Word of God at the heart of life



How did the Bible accompany Louis-Marie ? That's the question I'm going to answer.

Louis-Marie's experience can touch us and invite us to examine our own relationship with the Bible. His life can show us in what ways it can today, where we are, resource us and guide us, calm us and energise us, challenge us... so that together we can live better as disciples in our Montfortian Family.

- It was 1701 in Poitiers. It was the first time Louis-Marie met Marie-Louise Trichet, who had come to confess. Naturally, he asked her :

"Who referred you to me?

- Father, it was my sister.

- You're wrong, my daughter, she's not your sister, she's the Blessed Virgin!"

Louis-Marie invites us to go beyond the concrete, immediate aspect of the encounter. He invites us to see the Invisible beyond the visible, to see the active Presence of the Lord who "...dwells in all things to contain, sustain and renew them...". ASE 32

For the Bible, it's the same thing. Based on the Word of God I have received, through my reading of the Bible, Louis-Marie invites me to :

- relate this Word to my life,

- experience how the Word relates to my life. In this way, the Word is no longer outside me, but within me :

"It is in our lives that, from morning to night, the Word flows between the shores of our house, our streets, our meetings, where God wants to dwell..."

It is in our spirit... through the acts of our work, our sorrows, our joys, our loves, that the Word of God wants to dwell.

The words of the Lord that we have plucked from the Gospel during a morning Mass, or on an underground journey, or between two chores, or in bed at night - they must never leave us, any more than they leave our lives or our spirits.

It wants to fertilise, modify and renew the handshake we give, the effort we put into our work, the way we look at those we meet, the way we react to fatigue, the way we jump out of our skin in the face of pain, the way we blossom in joy.

She wants to be at home wherever we are at home.

It wants to be us wherever we are us. (1)

The Bible is the starting point of Louis-Marie's life, where he discovers God's ways for him. (2) People, events and Creation are also the Word of God for him. (3)

For Louis-Marie, the Word of God is a person: Jesus Christ Wisdom, a person who loves him and whom he loves ardently, the love of his life, his only model :

"Our only teacher who must teach us,  
our only Lord on whom we must depend,  
our only leader to whom we must be united,  
our only model to whom we must conform,  
our only doctor who must heal us,  
our only shepherd who must feed us,  
our only way that must lead us,  
our only truth which we must believe,  
our only life which must give us life  
and our only all-sufficiency in all things". VD 61

The Word of God is the foundation of our spirituality, our spiritual attitude.  
It nourishes his life, his mission, his decisions...

### **To go further :**

"You're wrong, my daughter, it's not your sister, it's the Blessed Virgin!"

- Look at an event in your life in which Louis-Marie might say to you, "You're mistaken... it's not this person who's telling you, it's the Lord..."
- What does this invite me to do?

### **A mystical and spiritual reading of the Word of God**

We meet Louis-Marie in the rue du Pot-de-Fer, Paris, in 1703. He was distraught, having just been rejected from the Salpêtrière hospital, and took refuge under the stairs in the rue du Pot-de-Fer. He lived there very poorly. The sisters gave him one meal a day. He was young and full of missionary zeal but, in the eyes of men, he went from one failure to another and his future was uncertain. What is he going to do? I am personally convinced that he is having a powerful mystical experience. Christ meets him at the heart of his desire, of his poverty. It is the poor Christ who reaches out to him, the Christ who has experienced what he is experiencing. He experienced the loving presence of Christ, who tenderly revealed to him the immensity of his love and his desire to be a friend to human beings, to bring them happiness.

Louis-Marie is overwhelmed by this mystical experience...

I invite you to read the very beautiful chapter VI of L'Amour de la Sagesse Éternelle (from n° 64 to 71) and especially the letters 15 and 16 that he wrote to Marie-Louise: "Heaven and earth would rather pass away...that God should be at a loss for words by allowing a person who hoped in him with perseverance to be frustrated in his expectation. I sense that you continue to ask God for divine Wisdom for this poor sinner, by means of crosses, humiliations and poverty. Courage, my dear daughter, courage. I am infinitely indebted to you, and I feel the effect of your prayers, for I am more impoverished, crucified and humiliated than ever...". The words he uses reflect his life, his suffering, his prayer, his encounters with God, his search, but also God's active presence and faithfulness... In his great poverty, he is joined by Wisdom. He is touched by her tenderness and love. In our difficulties and sufferings, let us be touched by Christ crucified...

The Word of God, his life and his spiritual experience are intertwined. What's at the heart of it is listening to the Word of God, and the desire to live it. It's a journey of conversion.

Louis-Marie is looking for the Word that continues to make itself heard by believers. He is a spiritual writer who lives and wants people to live a spiritual, mystical experience, thus enabling an inner knowledge of the Lord. It is the Lord himself who gives this knowledge. The aim of his writings is to provide an interpretation that is beneficial to the spiritual life. So he does not confine himself to the literal meaning of the Bible. He reads Scripture spiritually, finding in it the Holy Spirit at work, past and present.

For Louis-Marie, Christ is eternal Wisdom incarnate. It is the action of the Spirit within him that makes him sensitive to this characteristic, this 'Wisdom' component of Christ. In his reading of all the main sapiential texts, he perceives, in the background, the figure of Christ, Wisdom incarnate. The Church invites us, Montfortians, to highlight this Wisdom trait in the face of Christ, to reread the whole mystery of Jesus, the whole of Scripture, in the light of his reality as the Wisdom of God.

### **The Word of God and the life of Louis-Marie**

In 1714, near Rouen, Louis-Marie met his great friend Blain, canon of Rouen Cathedral. (4) Blain suffered from his friend's bad reputation. He was well aware of the rejection he had suffered and was still suffering. He was critical of his friend's attitudes and ways of acting. He reproaches him, telling him that if he doesn't continue in this way he will never have the companions he desires. I can see Louis-Marie's incomprehension in the face of such reproaches. Our Founder showed him his New Testament and told him that he was simply following Jesus Christ by living as He did, by living what He practised and taught... And he challenged his friend to prove him wrong...

For Louis-Marie, Jesus Christ is his only Master... His contemplation of Christ - during his Incarnation - is the source of his discernment about how to live. This contemplation gradually transformed him. Like Christ, he is moved by the Holy Spirit.

#### **To go further :**

- I invite you to take the time to relate Louis-Marie's life to that of Christ. Take a particular passage from his life and look at the words and attitudes of Christ that guided him.
- Louis-Marie assumes the consequences of the radical nature of the Good News. He is undoubtedly moved by the first proclamation of the Passion (Mark 8:31-38) and by Jesus' words: "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow me". Louis-Marie lived out this fundamental invitation from Christ. He refers to it explicitly in his writings, for example in no. 225 of Love of Eternal Wisdom (Mary's consecration to Jesus) and in nos. 59 and 154 of the Treatise on True Devotion. (5)



This can guide us at a time when we are being invited to live out the synodal approach: "The synodal dynamic implies that everyone should be listened to and involved, and invites us to pay particular attention to the poorest, the smallest and those on the periphery. It must encourage the participation of all and, in particular, give a voice to the voiceless. The ideas put forward for the synodal consultation invite us, for example, to ask ourselves: 'What place does the voice of minorities, the marginalised and the excluded occupy?'"

In 1684, Louis-Marie's precarious life as a seminarian did not seem to worry or preoccupy him. He was still guided by the words of Jesus: "Do not worry for your life about what you will eat or about your body..." (Mt 6:25-34). He has unconditional trust in God alone. He lives in "Providence". He accepts the conditions of his existence in peace and serenity. He invites us to do the same (cf n° 4 of his text "To the Associates of the Company of Mary" (SAM)). (7)

The Word of God at the heart of his missionary life: his preaching, his writings...

I'm just touching on the subject. I'll leave it to his biographers: "abandoned to Providence, carrying with him only the Holy Bible, his breviary, a crucifix, his rosary, an image of the Blessed Virgin and a staff in his hand" (Grandet p. 96, 478). Besnard describes the furniture in the rue du Pot-de-Fer in Paris as follows (Besnard T IV page 62): "a poor bunk, a vessel a breviary, a Bible, a crucifix, an image of the Blessed Virgin, a rosary...". This says it all, including the central place of the Bible, which he spent hours reading, praying and meditating on.

Louis-Marie would also put the Bible at the forefront of his life during his missions. At Villiers-en-Plaine, in February 1716, Besnard recounts that he "took the book of the Holy Bible, neatly bound, and had it carried under a canopy to the church in the place where the mission began that day". (Besnard T V, 138). In this bold way, he wanted to emphasise the "real presence" in the Word of God.

"real presence" in the Word. During the procession that accompanied the "renewal of the baptismal promises", he prominently displayed the book of the Holy Gospel, which was solemnly carried by a deacon, venerated by the faithful and which he himself took "on his knees, and having taken it on his breast after rising, he preached so patiently that all his listeners burst into tears" (Grandet, 411). This "liturgy" makes the preacher disappear, so to speak, behind the very Word of God!

A few figures on the extracts or references from the Bible in his writings: 30 books from the Old Testament and 21 from the New Testament are quoted. More than 440 extracts or references from the Old Testament, more than 600 from the New Testament. These may be a few words or entire passages. For example, in *L'Amour de la Sagesse Eternelle*, chapter 12 (n°133 to 152): "Les principaux oracles de la Sagesse incarnée qu'il faut croire et pratiquer pour être sauvés" (The principal oracles of Incarnate Wisdom that must be believed and practised in order to be saved) are only extracts from the New Testament.

Louis-Marie refers mainly to sapiential texts (The Book of Wisdom, Sirach, Proverbs, Song of Songs, Psalms, St John, etc.). These massive references reflect his desire to step back and give primacy to the Word of God.

He wanted to give people a taste for the Word of God. He respects the biblical texts but does not treat them in a static way. He feels the need to bring them up to date by putting them in dialogue with our current realities.

Louis-Marie's companionship with the Word of God made him a man of disproportion, the disproportion of love... A prophet, a praying man who let himself be shaped by the Word of God until he became a fiery missionary. Admirable, but not imitable, you might ask? Not so sure! Let's take more and more time to get to know him, as he draws us into the madness of God's love.

Let yourself be guided by the Word of God...

"But the words that divine Wisdom communicates are not common, natural, human words; they are divine words. They are strong, touching, penetrating words. They pierce more than a two-edged sword (Heb 4:12); they start from the heart of the person through whom they are spoken and go right to the heart of the listener". Love of Eternal Wisdom, n° 96

"But who will these slave servants and children of Mary be ? They will be clouds thundering and flying through the air at the slightest breath of the Holy Spirit, who, without holding on to anything, nor wondering about anything, nor worrying about anything, will pour out the rain of the Word of God and of eternal life; they will thunder against sin, they will roar against the world, they will strike down the devil and his minions, and they will pierce from side to side, for life or for death, with their two-edged sword of the Word of God, all those to whom they are sent from the Most High. " Treatise on True Devotion n° 57



Stained glass window by Jean de Chelles (1200-1265) and Pierre de Montreuil (1200-1267), Christ of the Apocalypse, Centre of the south rose window of Notre Dame de Paris, 1260 A great sharp two-edged sword comes from the mouth of Christ. The sword is the Word, the prophetic word that denounces evil and guides hearts.

Louis-Marie's way of life opens the pages of the Gospel to us. He was the Word of God for the people of his time, and he remains so for us. In turn, "We are the faces of God, reflections of his light. We are the faces of God, reflections of his love. (8)

There is so much more to say. I simply hope that this evocation will give you the desire to continue. You will realise more and more that to look at Montfort and to follow him is necessarily to be inhabited by the Word of God, to taste it, to enter into dialogue with it. It is an invitation to turn to Christ and let him enlighten our lives, transforming them by our adherence to the action of his Spirit.

Let's be aware that this is a strong challenge to our cultures, where all too often we refer to "ourselves" to judge, think and act.

My wish is that during this week you will be able to welcome this Word that comes from the heart and goes to the heart. Like the disciples on the road to Emmaus, may we say, "Was not our heart burning within us? Lk 24

Sr Anne Marie David, Daughter of Wisdom

[1] Madeleine Delbrel

[2] Montfortian Spirituality Dictionary, p. 384

[3] For example, the canticle 99

[4] St Louis Marie Grignion de Montfort by Louis Le Crom, p. 326s

[5] Montfortian Spirituality Dictionary, p.691

[6] [4] St Louis Marie Grignion de Montfort by Louis Le Crom, p. 102s

[7] Sr Nathalie Becquart, Xavière, Subsecretary to the Synod Secretariat

[8] Daniel Lachance Musique : Alpec