

# PROCEEDINGS OF THE SESSION

INTERNATIONAL MEETING OF THE ASSOCIATES of the Montfortian family

*Missionary Disciples in the Montfortian Family*

*“Go from all nations, make disciples” Mt (28:19)*



SAINT LAURENT-SUR-SÈVRE

from August 6 to 13, 2023

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## **PREPARATION TO LIVE THE INTERNATIONAL MEETING OF THE MONTFORTIAN ASSOCIATES**

### **“MISSIONARY DISCIPLES IN THE MONTFORTIAN FAMILY”**

You have been invited and you are registered and getting ready to participate in the INTERNATIONAL MEETING OF THE MONTFORTIAN ASSOCIATES. Thank you for your commitment which probably already requires a lot of personal investment and which will, for many of you, lead to a long journey, to discover and walk in the footsteps of Father de Montfort in the west of France.

The international meeting of the Montfortian Associates, in Saint-Laurent-Sur-Sèvre, during the year of the 350<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of Father de Montfort, on the initiative of the General Councils of the Company of Mary, of the Daughters of Wisdom and of the Brothers of St. Gabriel, responds to an expectation already expressed more than 20 years ago.

The universality and the presence of members of the Montfortian family in more than 50 countries in the world allow us to think that we all have reasons to hope that our differences will only be richness to be shared and developed. This will be all the more true if we cultivate our common heritage together: the spirituality of Father de Montfort, his life, his teachings, his strong accents, his writings, the mission entrusted to him and which he somehow bequeathed to us.

To best live the time of this encounter, unique and therefore initiatory, it is perhaps good to prepare ourselves in order to draw strength, hope, courage, audacity and confidence for the future. For this, we need to discover one another, to get to know one another, to recognize one another and to have a common time for formation or sharing on our roots linked to St. Louis-Marie de Montfort and Blessed Marie-Louise de Jésus, without forgetting Father Deshayes, whom we rediscover day after day.

We will have to share our experiences and create or cultivate links to be stronger in the mission of evangelization that is open to us. It is in the Church, priests, religious, consecrated and lay people that we are called to spread the spirituality that makes us live and makes us happy.

To help us share during the meeting, it seems useful to allow you to prepare yourself beforehand by giving you the possibility of noting important elements of your journey.

We suggest a few questions that can help you reread your experience and your convictions, wishes, expectations and thus enter naturally into the theme of the meeting.

- *How did I discover Saint Louis-Marie de Montfort and the Montfortian family?*

- *What attracted me and made me want to go further in the knowledge and life of Father de Montfort?*
- *What do I find important for my life in this Montfortian family?*
- *What would I put forward in the spirituality of Father de Montfort, to characterize him?*
- *In what way are Louis-Marie de Montfort, Marie-Louise of Jesus, Gabriel Deshayes, those who preceded us, useful to us today for our own life in a world so different from theirs?*
- *What ways do I see to move forward on the path that is mine and that of the world in which I live?*
- *What conviction can I share with others for today's mission wherever I am called to live?*

*(You can, if you wish, send to the Preparatory Committee some of your personal reflections, in brief of course).*     [clmarsaud@gmail.com](mailto:clmarsaud@gmail.com)

THANK YOU in advance for all you will do to take full advantage of this first International Meeting of the “Associates of the Montfortian Family.

May the prayer composed for this occasion nourish our own prayer and our spiritual life and bind us in communion of spirit before we get to know one another, at Saint-Laurent-Sur-Sèvre, the cradle of the Montfortian family.

Fraternally yours.

Saint-Laurent-Sur-Sèvre / 27 June 2023  
The Committee of Preparation

# COMPILATION OF THE RESPONSES TO THE QUESTIONNAIRE IN PREPARATION FOR THE INTERNATIONAL MEETING

*26 complete answers listed. All equally interesting.*

*What follows is not a synthesis nor an exhaustive presentation of the responses. It is only an overview of the extraordinary richness of the thoughts communicated in writing. THANKS to all of you, for who you are, and for what you have contributed through your texts, your words, your spontaneous sharing, your way of living universality, your inner life, ....*

## 1 - How did I discover Saint Louis-Marie de Montfort and the Montfortian family?

- A copy of the "TRUE DEVOTION".
- A meeting with a Daughter of Wisdom, a Montfort Missionary or a Brother of St Gabriel.
- An invitation to come and work in a school.
- The attraction of the life of the Sisters, Brothers and Missionaries, and the richness of their charism.
- Through the Legion of Mary and Father de Montfort's Consecration to Jesus through Mary.
- Through family prayer; we recited the prayer of consecration. I wanted to know more.
- Meeting Brothers and Sisters in schools or health centres.
- Through the Rosary recited in the family and in parishes.
- Through my work and access to archives.
- Through a friend who gave me a book entitled "Preparing for consecration in 33 days"....
- By reading "The Love of Eternal Wisdom".
- By visiting Montfortian places and meeting Montfortian communities.
- Through my wife who made her consecration to Jesus through Mary.
- At the Charity Home during military service.
- Through the "Totus Tuus" journey.

## 2 - What attracted me and inspired me to deepen my knowledge of the life of Father de Montfort?

- Joy, simplicity of life and the way of living as equals, followed by a reading of Montfort's works.
- Commitment to education and charism.
- Unshakeable faith in Eternal Wisdom, the missionary spirit and devotion to Mary.
- Attention to human needs, eagerness to proclaim the Incarnation and care for the poor.
- Love and devotion to the Blessed Virgin.
- His humility and sacrifice.
- Father Montfort's simple and detached lifestyle, serving the poor and the needy above all else, and educating.
- Father de Montfort's writings made a deep impression on me and I wanted to share them with my students. St. Louis captured me forever.
- His absolute trust in God, his dynamic vocation and his radical availability for the mission.
- True devotion to Mary.
- The character of Montfort, his personality, his writings, his actions.
- The love of the underprivileged, the love of God and the poor.
- Montfort's independence concerning what was said about him.

- His special relationship with Mary, the prayer of the Rosary, the Consecration.
- His humility in teaching the way to holiness.
- His devotion, his example, his dedication and the story of Marie-Louise.
- His genuine concern for the poor, his life of piety.
- Catchy quotes from Father de Montfort and the admiration and devotion of his followers today.

### 3 - What importance does Montfort have in my life?

- I spent 40 years of my life with the Montfortian family.
- The spirit of solidarity, simplicity and commitment to justice, peace and fraternity.
- Constant meditation, on the life, works and writings of Father de Montfort, inspires me to love, live and proclaim Wisdom, with confidence, optimism and Hope.
- I find strength and courage in sharing and praying with the Montfortian family.
- The way of living the messages left by Montfort: ardent desire - praying with perseverance - mortification, devotion to the Blessed Virgin.
- The Montfortian family has become an integral part of my life.
- Knowing Father de Montfort has enabled me to grow in my Faith and to enrich my capital of values.
- I take in and live the values of Father Montfort and I contribute to make his teachings known to many people in society.
- Montfort has forged my values and my way of acting in life.
- On the one hand, an opportunity for personal, human and Christian development and, on the other, a community of encounters that always places me in a deeply sincere spirituality, in dialogue with the Gospel and with the Church.
- It was through the Montfortian family that I came to understand the role of Mary in the Church and, personally, Mary gradually led me to her son Jesus.
- I was very impressed by the importance of the mission as preaching and evangelisation, but also in caring for those who need it most.
- The fraternal bond that I discovered within this family, as well as the call to make Jesus known through Mary and the joy of witnessing.
- I have always loved taking care of disadvantaged children.
- The Montfortian family is a spiritual support for me.
- It is my life! He has made me who I am and who I have chosen to be!

### 4 - What aspect of Montfortian spirituality could I highlight to characterise Father de Montfort?

*All the themes of Montfortian spirituality were expressed by the participants. A summary was drawn up and displayed at the International Meeting. (cf spirituality slideshow).*

### 5 - In what way do our predecessors (Montfort, Marie-Louise - Gabriel Deshayes and ...) inspire me for this world that is so different from theirs?

- They all lived trusting in Providence – They were people of charity, faith and hope.
- The mission of the human being is his own sanctification and that of the whole world; For this reason, we must go and meet True Wisdom, who will help us contradict the attitudes of the world, as Montfort was helped in his context.

- They teach us to entrust ourselves to Mary to live and proclaim the Love of Jesus Wisdom. To humanise the world, we must become human beings, ardent Christians like them, capable of feeling the pain of the world and caring for it as the Spirit leads us.
- They are models, guides and examples for fulfilling our mission.
- Their principles of faith, love and service, embodied by Louis-Marie de Montfort, Marie-Louise de Jésus and Gabriel Deshayes, are still relevant today. Their devotion to Mother Mary and their dedication to the poor and missionary life inspire and guide us in the challenges of our modern world.
- Their teachings and their lives were exemplary and it is very relevant, even in today's situation, to help and reach out to the peripheries and the needy of our society.
- The examples and teachings of our Founders are needed more than ever. The spirit that animated the three Founders: their trust in God's loving care, their initiative, their audacity, their risk-taking, their commitment to share the human condition, their concern for the individual and the needs of the times, their humility, their charity and kindness, their enterprising spirit, their boundless trust in God are attitudes that, even if they are not driven by a faith as firm as their own, are necessary to create a better, fairer and more fraternal world for all.
- True happiness is not having so many things or living an easy life; happiness is giving, happiness is feeling truly brothers in Christ.
- We are all called to holiness on the path that God leads us through, with the help of Mary and the Saints who are close to us. Walking with St. Louis-Marie is a call to surrender ourselves, like him, to Divine Providence through the hands of Mary, to be docile to the Holy Spirit and to allow ourselves to be guided along the path he shows us through the writings he left us.

#### 6 - What path can I envisage to move forward where I am and where I live?

- The path of Inclusion, Hospitality, Compassion, Love of the poor... Wisdom's values.
- Constancy in the exercises of piety, Faith testimony, commitment to the service of the most vulnerable...
- Living in communion with God, sharing with others, showing fraternity, solidarity, living with the poorest, the excluded, the rejected of humanity, like our Founders.
- Living my mission with the little ones, the poor, I draw my energy from reflection and prayer, and I try to examine the sapiential meaning of the human pilgrimage. Fraternal sharing helps me in difficult moments.
- Educating young children and young people. They live under all sorts of aggressions from society: poverty, ignorance, violence, manipulation, etc.
- I continue to deepen my consecration to Mother Mary and I intend to share her teachings and spirituality with others, spreading the message of love and devotion to God.
- I plan to move forward on my path by dedicating my life once again to serving the poor and needy by giving them an education that helps them out of their poverty through various projects.
- Working on my own interiority to leave as much space as possible for God; going out to meet others, especially those who need me; fighting for the common good with a radical hope in God and also in mankind.
- It's a question of making myself docile to the Holy Spirit in order to live according to Divine Will. For this, a life of prayer and the sacraments are indispensable. The Eucharist every day



or as often as possible, as well as prayer to be united with God and make myself available to what He inspires me to do. Then witnessing when I have the opportunity in my daily life, talking often about God and Mary to those around me, praying the rosary to meditate on the mysteries and remain united to Mary. To evangelise through catechesis by encouraging an intimate relationship with the Lord through prayer, and to help those who would like to pray but don't know how.

- To move forward, I need to: Seek to balance my life by linking the experience of Martha and Mary. Use material goods with discernment, create an atmosphere of peace where I live, cultivate humility and forgiveness in relationships. To get involved in charitable actions or social works that correspond to Montfortian values.

#### 7 - What convictions could I share for today's mission, wherever I am called?

- The message of universal love. We need to look at what unites us rather than what divides us and, therefore, seek unity.
- Work in networks, associations, partnerships, etc. Let ourselves be challenged by the ecclesial synodal spirit.
- The constant search for True Wisdom, with the spiritual nourishment of the Gospel and devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary; "by loving, living and proclaiming Wisdom" on an ongoing basis.
- I bring my poverty to the mission, I need to draw strength from the daily encounter with Jesus, with his Word and with his Holy Mother. Every day I need to become aware of my baptism by renewing my consecration and then go with confidence to those to whom I am sent.
- Embracing a life of self-giving and total surrender to God, as St. Louis-Marie de Montfort did, can transform our lives and the world around us. By imitating his humility and Marian devotion, we can become instruments of God's love and mercy, bringing hope and healing to a world in need.

- a) Total consecration to Mary
- b) Love and compassion
- c) Model of servant leadership
- d) Deep prayer life
- e) Joyful evangelisation
- f) Solidarity and collaboration
- g) Care for creation
- h) Preferential option for the poor.

- The conviction that the way we live and the way we are should challenge others with hope.
- Everything through Mary, with Mary, in Mary and for Mary.
- I would like my mission to be like this: to know how to listen, to be present, to give flavour and brightness to my family, my parish and my neighbourhood.
- The mission is possible wherever we are, even if we are isolated with few members of the Montfortian family nearby. It's important to stay in touch by phone or email and to meet at least once or twice a year to share what we're experiencing, to support one another and to persevere in the mission. That's what I'm doing presently with some members of the Montfortian Marial Fraternity. It also seems important to me to read the works of Father de Montfort regularly and to live, or at least try to live, his spirituality.

# PREPARATORY PRAYER BEFORE THE SESSION

## International Meeting of Montfortian Lay Associates



God our Father,  
you who created us and who loves us,  
we stand before you,  
coming for all continents.  
Through our Baptism,  
you made us Brothers and Sisters  
in Jesus Christ, your beloved Son.

Your Holy Spirit  
has opened our hearts to the Gospel,  
through the example and the words  
of St. Louis-Marie de Montfort.  
Thanks to him, we have discovered  
the true face of Jesus Christ,  
Wisdom Incarnated, through the “Yes” of Mary...

We are grateful to you  
for the richness of our experiences and of our commitment  
to the Montfortian Congregations, and we thank you  
for granting us -members of the Montfortian Family-  
the grace to participate  
in spreading the Good News of the Gospel.

As we look forward to our meeting,  
In order to deepen our Founders’ message  
and strengthen our Missionary Spirit,  
prepare our hearts, O Lord,  
to welcome one another and to listen to your Spirit.

As Missionary Disciples,  
we will go forward together,  
walking in your footsteps,  
with Mary, your humble servant.

Amen !



## INAUGURAL MESSAGE - SR. RANI KURIAN

Missionary disciples in the Montfortian family

Good morning to you all,

Today is a very special day in the history of the Montfortian family. The vision of Montfort is being realized in the world as the missionary disciples and members of the Montfortian family gather around the tomb of Father de Montfort to mark his 350<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary. First of all, on behalf of Father Yoseph Putra Dwi Darma WATUN, Superior General of the Company of Mary, and of Bro. John Kallarackal, Superior General of the Brothers of St. Gabriel, I welcome each and every one of you to this meeting of the Associates and Collaborators of the Montfortian Congregations.

You are at the Mother House of the Montfortian family and during these days you will take time to pray and deepen your call to be missionary disciples in the Montfortian family. Montfort lived for God alone and wanted to make God's love known to humanity. Confronted with many challenges and difficulties, he grew into a deeper union with God and let himself be guided by the Spirit with trust in Providence and total self-surrender. At the time of his death, in St. Laurent, in 1716, he had already sown the seed of the Congregation and initiated Marie-Louise and her disciples to work and journey together in the Church. In 1720, in creative fidelity to the Spirit of Father de Montfort, Marie-Louise arrived in St. Laurent and helped to give birth to the Montfortian family. At the beginning of the life of the Montfortian family, there are also lay persons who guided, supported and helped Marie-Louise to see the will of God in the continuation of the work left by Montfort. The presence of the tomb of the Marquis de Magnanne alongside those of Montfort and Marie-Louise is a testimony to the call to journey together in the Church. It was the same zeal and creative fidelity that animated Fr. Gabriel Deshayes and contributed to spreading this dynamic of "journeying together" in response to the call of working for the advent of the Kingdom of God.

As a Montfortian family, with all of you, we embrace the invitation of Pope Francis to move forward in Synodality. In journeying together, we will make Wisdom known under the guidance and protection of Mary, our Mother. I wish each and every one of you a very fruitful experience, and may it be the new beginning of a long experience of journeying together as disciples in the Montfortian family.

Have a blessed celebration.

Sister Rani Kurian  
Superior General of the Daughters of Wisdom



# MESSAGE OF THE SUPERIOR GENERAL OF THE MONTFORT MISSIONARIES

TO THE PARTICIPANTS

OF THE INTERNATIONAL GATHERING OF THE MONTFORTIAN ASSOCIATES (IGMA)

**SAINT LAURENT-SUR-SÈVRE, AUGUST 6-13, 2023**

Malang, Indonesia, August 6, 2023

Dear brothers and sisters participating in the gathering of the Montfortian Family,

From Indonesia, greetings of peace and love of Christ.

Happy Feast of the Transfiguration of Jesus. It is no coincidence that you begin your Montfortian family gathering at this precise moment. It is indeed a moment of grace. As St. Peter said in the story of the Transfiguration: «Lord, it is good that we are here...». I believe that the same feelings that I have felt are present in your meeting. This Montfortian family gathering reminds me of the prayer of our Founder, Saint Louis-Marie Grignon de Montfort. In his Prayer for Missionaries, No. 18, he says: «Lord, congrega nos de nationibus! Gather us, unite us, so that glory be given to your holy and mighty name». How beautiful it is that this Montfortian gathering echoes the desire that our Founder expressed in his prayer. By the tomb of our Founder and of Blessed Marie-Louise of Jesus, we can express what St. Peter expressed: «Lord, it is good that we are here...».

It is indeed wonderful to see people from different parts of the world, inspired by the same Montfortian spirit and charism, coming together as one family. In our world marked by war, division, sectarianism, socio-cultural discrimination, our Montfortian gathering becomes a sign of hope that could bring the spirit of renewal in today's world. It corresponds to the objective of our Founder in the accomplishment of the mission, namely, to renew the spirit of Christianity. For me, renewing the spirit of Christianity is nothing else than renewing the spirit of humanity.

I would like to express my deep gratitude to the three Congregations, to the lay Associates of the three Congregations, to the lay Collaborators, to all of you who are committed and who have worked very hard to make this International Montfortian Gathering possible.

Though I am not with you physically, I am with you spiritually. I pray for you and for the success of the gathering. I wish you all a meaningful and fruitful meeting and sharing. May the luminous face of Jesus, Wisdom Incarnate, illuminate our hearts and our souls so that we experience the renewal of our Christian spirit. May our Mother, Mary, accompany us with her maternal care and love to form us to become more and more like her Son, Jesus our Lord.

Good fraternal meeting and good sharing.

Per Mariam ad Jesus!

Fraternally,

Yoseph Putra Dwi Darma Watun, SMM - Superior General



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6<sup>th</sup> August, 2023

## MESSAGE OF THE SUPERIOR GENERAL OF THE BROTHERS OF ST. GABRIEL

**To all the Participants of the International Meeting of the Associates  
and Collaborators of the Montfortian Family, in Saint Laurent-sur-Sèvre, France.**

Dear brothers and sisters of the Montfortian Family,

It is a joy for me to greet you all from Rome, as you begin your week-long International Meeting of the Associates and Collaborators of the Montfortian Congregations. As Henry Ford so beautifully put it, *“Coming together is the beginning, staying together is progress, and working together is success”*. In the first place, we all have every reason to thank God for bringing the representatives of the Associates and Collaborators of the Montfortian Congregations as one united international family, with the common desire to follow the charism and spirituality of St. Louis-Marie de Montfort. The fact that St. Montfort continues to inspire and influence thousands of people the world over, is ample proof that what the saint preached and practiced three centuries ago, is relevant even today. Montfort’s motto, *“God Alone”*, his tender devotion to the Virgin Mary expressed in frequent recitation of the Holy Rosary, his love of the Cross, his preferential love for the poor, are all simple means he used to concretely live the values of the Gospel. These are values that can easily be practiced and propagated by every one of us in our milieu.

It is only common knowledge that, from the beginning of religious Life, men and women have associated themselves with religious Institutes. Lay Associates as a movement has developed organically in response to the desire of religious Institutes to share their mission and spirituality with the laity, in response to the call of Vatican II. The whole Montfortian Family has given a new impetus to this call of Vatican II, inspired by the powerful words of Pope John Paul II, addressed to the Montfortian Family in 1997: *“The Montfortian spirituality and charism are treasures of the Church. It is our responsibility with the whole Montfortian Family and others, to promote them”*.

Today, in the context of the Synod on Synodality initiated by Pope Francis, there is a need to re-read, revisit and rediscover the charism and spirituality of St. Montfort, through sharing and dialogue. For us, Montfortians, revisiting our charism implies living with the same enthusiasm, creativity and inventiveness as Saint Louis-Marie de Montfort, Blessed Marie-Louise Trichet, Father Gabriel Deshayes and all our pioneers; being faithful, not only to the tradition handed down, but also to traditions translated and adapted to the needs and challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. I hope and pray that the different programs like the input sessions, the testimonies from different groups, and the pilgrimages, will all help us achieve these objectives, through the synodal model of ‘participation’, ‘communion’ and ‘mission’, for the renewal of the Church.

With my congratulations to the organizers, and wishing the International Meeting all success,  
Fraternally yours,  
Bro. John Kallarackal, FSG - Superior General

**Monday, August 7, 2023**

## **OPENING MASS - HOMILY**

Dear friends,

How beautiful it is to recognize in the Eucharistic gesture of Jesus with the five loaves and the two fish, his life given and his Holy Spirit so that we may have "life in abundance" (cf. John 10:10)! We are inhabited by it and we say: *Thank you Lord for your Spirit, present in the Sacraments and in the life of the Church.*

How beautiful it is to recognize in the availability of the disciples who gave the crowd enough to eat until they were satisfied, the tireless vocation and mission of the Church, but also of Father de Montfort and, after him, of Marie-Louise, Mathurin Rangepard and then Gabriel Deshayes up to us, laity, religious, priests of the great Montfortian Family, called to be collaborators with the richness of God! We are confirmed and we say: *Thank you Lord for every vocation in the Church.*

How beautiful it is to recognize in the crowds seeking Jesus, the thirst for God present in the heart of every human being who, despite the attraction of false promises coming from the world, "is not restless until he rests in God" (cf. St. Augustine)! We are aware of this and we say: *Thank you Lord for always thirsting for our thirst.*

How beautiful it is to recognize in the twelve full baskets, the superabundance of all Christian spirituality which is available to be shared constantly! We are witnesses to this and we say: *Thank you Lord for having shared with us such great richness.*

Faced with such prodigies of God's goodness, how can we fail to hear the invitation that Wisdom has always addressed to beloved humanity: "*Come and eat!*" *It's for you!*

Dear Friends, let us enjoy living these Days of Montfortian spirituality, as a true response to the invitation of Wisdom. Let us not hesitate to draw with both hands from all that Wisdom has prepared for us. Let us be surprised by the delights of messages, meetings, exchanges, times of prayer, pilgrimages and providential experiences.

However, in all of this, let us not forget the final instruction of today's gospel: "*You yourselves give them something to eat.*". This command from Jesus to his disciples reminds us that we are not here only for ourselves.

We are representatives of so many groups and associates that rejoice in recharging their batteries in the Montfortian Family. We are also spokespersons for the great concern of our local and continental Churches to have assured paths of holiness for the life of the people of today.

So, as true children of Montfort, let us not hesitate to entrust this Meeting to the Virgin Mary, so that not a single crumb of her grace is lost or wasted and we can leave as messengers of the Good News that these days will not be missed to resound in each of us.

Let us therefore continue to pray and ask for prayers for this intention and a good Meeting to all.

F. Marco Pasinato

## SYNODALITY IN THE MONTFORTIAN FAMILY

The word Synod comes from 2 Greek words (sin) together, and (oidos) path. It is a path to be taken together. Therefore, to reflect on synodality in the Montfortian Spiritual Family means taking a look at the journey we have gone through together and considering what could make that journey easier or “more flowing” (using the language of the highway).

Synodality in the Montfortian family is first and foremost a questioning on the manner that you are Missionaries **together**. We know very well that the history of the Church has left us with a deficit in relationships between men and women, priests and non-priests.... Today, we call that clericalism and/or macho-culture. Synodality is, therefore, a way of imagining new ways of being together for the sake of the mission, by bringing together strengths and sensitivities/perceptions of the different members of the family. Synodality is about participation in decision-making, giving everyone a voice, discovering together new challenges of evangelisation, and taking common action. Engaging in a Synodal path means acknowledging that charism does not belong only to a few people. It belongs to all believers.

The society known by Louis-Marie Grignion de Montfort and Marie-Louise Trichet was not a very democratic one (Louis XIV), nor was it really any more so at the time of Gabriel Deshayes. Therefore, referring to that historical context, it is not possible for us to speak about synodality, but we are impressed by the desire of Louis-Marie and of Marie-Louise to involve all social groups in the missions, to create associations that lived their baptism together, in an original way, to involve lay people in missionary activities... There is, in the cultural and social context of the time, a desire to share the mission with others. This is developed, with concrete examples, in Fr. Luiz Stefani's Letter of May 2021, about Lay Associates. That letter also emphasises the mission to the poorest and the concern to proclaim the Good News to the humblest members of society. Fr. Luiz also insists on the team aspect of the mission. We could also mention the Congregation's Councils that exist in the different branches and which are internal places of synodality, as well as the inter-branch meetings of your spiritual family.

Synadality is a feature of the entire Church and not only a quest concerning the place of the laity. Synodality was mentioned in various Church documents (Christifideles laici, 1988...), but it remains, to some extent, absent in today's reality. Synodality is a way of mobilizing all Christians in a common effort. It consists in mobilizing all Christians, “the People of God”, as Vatican II said (Lumen Gentium). Synodality is a general mobilization to question ourselves and seek to become involved together in the mission. In the Encyclical "Ecclesiam suam" (August 1964) it is written: “It is in dialogue that believers build the Church”. Synodality is therefore a great movement to converse with one another, to dialogue, to share points of view based on different experiences, to imagine a Christian way of life that would be a testimony of hope for the whole humanity. This is what builds the Church and gives it its vitality.

This global movement imposes on the Montfortian family, not only to dialogue internally, based on its diversity of states of life and apostolic priorities, but also on its sensitivity concerning the way of being Christians within the Church and with other spiritual families. Be careful not to be closed little chapels ignorant of others... We know that the debate with others is not simple (traditionalists or even extreme classicists) and not won in advance, neither in the Church, nor outside the Church, in

our society as it is (not in our dreams), with its good and bad sides, with its atheism and its irrational beliefs. “Leave the sacristies” said Pope Francis, “reach out”.

The Montfortian charism is attractive and can help our world: the place of Mary, the Incarnation, the taste for the mission, the concern for the Kingdom... experienced in various ways by the Fathers of the Company of Mary, by the Montfort Brothers of St. Gabriel, by the Daughters of Wisdom and by the secular branches associated with these three groups, along with numerous small Marian organizations that recognize themselves in the consecration to Mary and in the spiritual intuitions of Louis-Marie and of Marie-Louise. However, the attractiveness of the Montfortian charism remains modest and little known in Europe, which suggests the need for a greater prophetic testimony on this continent, for a renewal arising from the pooling of sensitivities, innovations, and creative audacity, in order to give life to the charism.

During the Chapter of the Fathers of the Company of Mary, in Rome, in May of this year, the emphasis was placed on the mission TOGETHER (PE 18), which colours synodality in a concrete way. But the same concern runs through the whole Montfortian family.

TOGETHER, in a society that preaches individualism and makes it the key to dynamism. This is where synodality is prophetic: denunciation/annunciation/visitation to propose another way of being happy in today’s world, where rivalry and unbridled competition reign.

TOGETHER, not in a confusion between states of life that leads to the domination of the most powerful and the despotic triumph of one state over the others... Together in an organisation where the work is productive (cf. the associations founded by Montfort) and where, at a time when the Church is going through crises and the Catholic faith is declining (29%), there is a constant dialogue to adjust in a complementary way in view of the mission.

TOGETHER, in order to promote the common good and not only the good for the majority; in order to promote the general interest, with a universal dimension. The common good is the horizon of Christian life; it is the fruit of the work of the Holy Spirit and of the intelligence of each individual, which is deployed both in listening to the arguments of others and in discerning what serves everyone. It aims at the good of every individual AND of everyone and generates solutions and organizations leading to true happiness.

TOGETHER, to build the Church of Jesus-Christ, a place to offer a space where hope is not an illusion or a mystification to our contemporary world; a place of consolation (and therefore of listening) and of confidence in the strength of fraternity when confronted with evil and misfortune; a place to let oneself be touched by God, in truth, and to open oneself to more life.

MORE than being together; being a family... There is no single model of the family, especially today, but there are a few common elements: solidarity and concern for others, and a place where people can speak out in confidence (but also within known and protective frameworks).

Solidarity: becoming strong. This is the project of sharing the spiritual treasure, the charism, with everyone, in the diversity of cultures, with the opportunities and the challenges of internationality, an essential element in the face of identity-based divisions. This is the project of standing together to face adversity in all its forms:

- by showing concern for the happiness of others and for the development of their dignity, by rejecting indifference when confronted with other people’s sufferings, by including their unique journey in our own human adventure and in our daily choices and prayers.
- a place where words can be risked with the confidence that they will be understood (or, at least, received with kindness); a place where we can say what we think, what are our dreams, what helps us to go on... (what is, unfortunately, not fully implemented!); a place where fear is reduced (though never totally absent); a place that allows one to see others as they are, with their potential.



Therefore, synodality is more than a forum for discussion and more than a search for a common strategy or action. It is a genuine spiritual process that places the encounter with someone else at the centre of one's life, but does not try to make hold of him. It does not idealise the other or try to mould him to one's own image, but accepts differences, because it is enriching beyond difficulties, rejections and disagreements which cannot be dismissed in an angelic way.

The other who always escapes (mystery of being) what I would like him to be or think (like me), who fights in secret against all forms of "non-being" that invade him, who has his own freedom to flee from me or to love me, who doesn't always know who he is and what he really wants... and he, facing me, with a similar complexity. It is in this strange alchemy that the Christian and, more so, the Montfortian missionary, is called to situate himself concerning the call addressed to him by Jesus and concerning his search for personal happiness. To be a missionary, and therefore a Montfortian, is to respond to a conviction - we could call it a vocation - that the encounter with Christ and the encounter with others are inseparable (1 John 4 and/or Mark 12:28).

Synodality is therefore a proposal that goes far beyond an institutional reorganisation - which is certainly necessary but not sufficient if there is no spiritual dimension leading towards the other - and that aims to put the encounter at the heart of the life of faith: the encounter with the other and the encounter with God, a single movement, but two distinct and interconnected spaces. Synodality is not just a societal technique for meeting or debating to improve life together in the Church or in a spiritual family. It is also a moment that opens up through prayer for one another, through praise for what is beautiful in the relationships that are formed, through requests to God through the intercession of the Virgin Mary, and through shared contemplative silence. Contemplative silence to receive and perceive the word of God in today's world.

Exploring all these dimensions of synodality gives rise to many questions and to various aspects of transformation in our lives but, very often, the emphasis has remained centred on questions of ecclesial organisation and this is disappointing. Only a few believers got involved in Western Europe, anticipating the ineffectiveness of this global process, which is too vast to produce anything new. Perhaps we could go further in our spiritual families, for whom sharing and trust are already, to some extent, valuable habits....

Bro. Jean Claude Lavigne, O.P.

## TESTIMONIES

### MONTFORTIAN GABRIELITE ASSOCIATES

#### Trichy Province - Representing INDIA

*Remembering the past with gratitude,  
Living the present with enthusiasm,  
And looking forward to the future with confidence.*

In India, there are eight Provinces comprising approximately 600 Brothers and 180 Institutions. Here, we are going to talk about the foundation and the activities of the Montfortian Gabrielite Associates (MGA) of the Province of Trichy, representing INDIA.

The 29<sup>th</sup> General Chapter appreciated the dedicated services of the lay Associates and their wonderful collaboration, coordination and cooperation with the Brothers in the Institutions run by the Montfort Brothers of St. Gabriel. This encouragement and motivation paved the way to reflect upon the concept of the Lay Associates' Movement and to work out procedures for implementing it in the Province. This initiative was further strengthened and boosted by the orientation of the 30<sup>th</sup> General Chapter.

Under the inspiring guidance and encouragement of Rev. Bro. S. Dhanaraj (the then Provincial) and thanks to the great motivation and orientation of resource persons, Rev. Bro. A. Paulraj and Rev. Bro. M. Irudayam, preparatory procedures and pioneering work of the Montfort Associates' Movement (MAM) were started.

In 2005, MAM training camps were organized in 13 different places in the Province to effectively prepare the Associates to become members of MAM. On 21 September 2005, an orientation meeting for Montfort Associates was conducted at Campion School, Trichy. His Eminence, Cardinal Most Rev. Ivan Dias participated in that meeting, and encouraged everyone to be an inspiring Associate.

The inaugural function of the Montfort Associates' Movement (MAM) was held on 28 April 2006 (On the feast day of St. Montfort) at Campion School, Trichy. The late Bishop of Trichy Diocese, His Grace, Most Rev. Antony Devotta inaugurated MAM and blessed all the Associates. Rev. Bro. M. Irudayam was the first Convener of MAM, and contributed, by his dedicated services, to its development and growth right from the time of its foundation.

From the Generalate of the Montfort Brothers of St. Gabriel, Rome, Rev. Bro. Rene Delorme (the then Superior General) and Rev. Bro. John Kallarackal (the then Assistant General) participated in the MAM meeting held on 06 November 2006, at Campion School, Trichy. They encouraged and appreciated all the Montfortian Associates of Trichy Province for their active participation in MAM.

Rev. Bro. Rene Delorme released the MAM flag of Trichy Province and Rev. Bro. John Kallarackal released the book on the aim, purpose and statutes of the MAM of Trichy Province.

We extend our heartfelt thanks and gratitude to the following Conveners of MAM from its inception till date for their dedicated services, namely, Rev. Bro. Irudayam, Rev. Bro. Thomas Selvam, Rev. Bro. James Paulraj and Rev. Bro. John Xavier.

#### **Change of name MAM into MGA:**

Later the term 'MAM' was changed into 'MGA' (Montfortian Gabrielite Associates). From then on, this movement of Associates has been known and called as 'Montfortian Gabrielite Associates'. It was proposed that only Catholic staff members of Montfortian Institutions could be enrolled as Associates in the MGA movement.

## **Structure of MGA:**

### **a) Province Level:**

1. The President
2. The Convener
3. The Secretary
4. The Members
5. The Resource person.

### **b) Local Division Level:**

1. The Coordinator
2. The Spiritual guide (Brother)
3. The Members

## **Responsibilities**

1. Meeting of MGA members twice a year to plan out various activities and programmes.
2. Carrying out annual activities for members.
3. Organizing Inter Montfort Schools gatherings of Associates.
4. Publishing of MGA magazine thrice a year.

## **Suggested Activities:**

1. Enabling students to improve their knowledge and wisdom.
2. Promoting and strengthening values and skills for life.
3. Inculcating the spiritual and humanitarian values.
4. Training the mind to grow in wisdom and positive thinking.
5. Seeing the presence of God in human beings and in all of God's creations.
6. Becoming more compassionate towards People and Nature.

## **Activities of MGA in Institution level / Parish level:**

1. Organizing art and quiz competitions on St. Montfort.
2. Conducting prayers for Christian students, once a week.
3. Celebrating Montfortian week in the month of January, as a preparation to celebrate St. Montfort's Birthday (31<sup>st</sup> January).
4. Organizing Retreats and Pilgrimages for MGA members.
5. Celebrating Eucharist on every first Friday of the month for Catholics.
6. Celebrating Christmas in Homes for Aged people.
7. Teaching the devotional practices of St. Montfort to Catholic students.
8. Distributing copies of the Bible, free of cost, to Catholic students,
9. Encouraging the Catholic staff to take active part in their Parish activities.
10. Sharing of reflections among Associates on St. Montfort, his charism and spirituality.
11. Starting an MGA group for Catholic students.
12. Celebrating the Birthday and the Feast day of St. Montfort at the Institutional and Parish levels.
13. Visiting the family of every Associate and praying together.
14. Collaborating, every year, with the St. Vincent-de-Paul Society, at the Parish level, to distribute needed materials and new clothes to the poor and the needy during the Christmas celebration.

## **MGA Magazine:**

The MGA Magazine is being published thrice a year. In this magazine, the activities of MGA, reflections, texts and drawings on St. Montfort and his writings are being presented by the members of the MGA movement.

### **MGA Projects:**

- ❖ An inspiring pictorial story book was written in Tamil, on the life history of St. Montfort, in a simpler manner, for the benefit of the students.
- ❖ Devotional songs based on St. Montfort's writings were composed in Tamil and brought out in the form of AUDIO CD titled as 'Migavum Irakkamulla Thaaye' which means 'Oh Most Merciful Mother'.
- ❖ During the COVID period, online meetings, prayer services & orientation talks were organized for the Associates to meditate, pray and be united together.

### **Future Goals:**

- ❖ Taking efforts in establishing gender equality and justice.
- ❖ Enabling drop-out students to continue their studies.
- ❖ Making Institutions green.
- ❖ Providing agricultural experiences for students by taking them to farms run by the Province.
- ❖ Creating a website on the Province MGA.
- ❖ Bringing awareness on deterioration of culture.
- ❖ Making use of science and technological advanced tools, instruments and gadgets, for constructive needs, requirements and growth.
- ❖ Strengthening of relationship between family members of Associates through Biblical quotes.
- ❖ Standing for God Alone, like St. Montfort, in any circumstance and situation.

GRATITUDE AND PRAYERS FROM TRICHY PROVINCE  
MGA COMMISSION MEMBERS  
Bro. I. John Xavier, Bro. M. James William,  
Bro. C. Panneerselvam, Mr. L. Arokia Doss, Mr. A. Bosco &  
Mr. M. Asin Thangaraj.

**THANK YOU.**

**TESTIMONY OF MISS LUZ MARIA FUERTES, FRIEND OF WISDOM –**

**Peru - Delegation Maria Luisa (Argentina - Ecuador - Peru)**

My name is Luz Maria Fuertes Pinto, I live in Lima, and I am happy to share with you my life experience as a Friend of Wisdom living the charism of the "Daughters of Wisdom", today, in Peru.

My mother had a great devotion to the Virgin Mary and, as a teenager, I participated in a group of the Legion of Mary, in which I first heard the name of Saint Louis-Marie de Montfort.

Eight years ago, when I started working at the "Nuestra Señora de la Sabiduría School", in Ñaña - Lima, I really got to know Saint Louis-Marie de Montfort and Blessed Marie-Louise of Jesus, through the Sisters who, with their testimony of life, awakened in me the interest of knowing him. I was fascinated by their missionary work on behalf of all and by their concern, above all, for the poor. In addition, being able to trace the writings of Saint Louis-Marie through his inspiring books, such as *The Secret of Mary*, *The True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin* and *The Love of Eternal Wisdom*, has allowed me to strengthen my spirituality.

I currently participate in the "Maria Luisa" Delegation, which brings together the 9 groups of Friends of Wisdom of the three countries of the Delegation (Argentina 1, Ecuador 3 and Peru 5). This year we are carrying out activities to celebrate the 350<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of Father De Montfort, with meetings in presence of groups of each country, in addition to online training at the level of the Delegation group, the prayer of the rosary, pilgrimages, retreats, solidarity missions; thus, we share the spirituality and the charism of the "Daughters of Wisdom", who show us affection and hospitality. They accompany us and offer us space in the mission, to strengthen us as a group, to live and transmit spirituality in our families and in society.

We work as a team with Sr. Silvia Parra, who is in-charge of the Delegation Council, and with the Sisters who animate in the different countries. Let us keep in mind the motto of the mission: "Together we love, live and proclaim Wisdom".

In particular, during this first semester, all the groups reflected on the spirituality and identity of the Friends of Wisdom: where is Wisdom in today's world?

We find ourselves in changing, complex, difficult and demanding times and, in the face of this, I am aware that our task is to decide what to do and how to react. Taking on this task becomes a personal project, which is part of my life. In doing so, I write my personal story. I am a person who seeks an encounter with God and feels the ardent desire to seek Wisdom, to discover who I am and why I was created.

Knowing the writings and experiences of Saint Louis-Marie de Montfort and of Blessed Marie-Louise of Jesus incites me to share their missionary ideals and to adopt a missionary lifestyle.

This leads me to service and solidarity with others, especially with the neediest. Likewise, spirituality leads me to take care of creation and to respect it, collaborating in sustainable development.

Thus, in my family, my work and my community life, living the love of Jesus Wisdom is my great challenge; in fact, in the concrete circumstances of my life as a teacher at the "Nuestra Señora de la Sabiduría" of Ñaña - Lima, I wonder: what would Jesus Eternal and Incarnate Wisdom do if he were in my place? I can say that, when I ask myself this question, I am able to know what I should do and what I shouldn't do.

Therefore, my commitment as a Friend of Wisdom is to join the mission of evangelization of the Congregation of the Daughters of Wisdom. In my case, it is addressed to the entire educational community of the Scuola Nostra Signora della Sapienza. This mission takes an important place in my work with girls and teenagers, both in the educational field and in solidarity actions in all their forms.

With other teachers, I try to create healthy and safe places or environments, because only when people feel safe and respected can they effectively communicate the message that God loves them and invite them to open their hearts and to live the wisdom of the Gospel, which today, in Peru, means being generous and charitable with everyone.

As a Friend of Wisdom, I try to make known the Gospel of mercy, love and justice, making possible the Kingdom of God, in the manner of Saint Louis-Marie de Montfort and Blessed Marie-Louise of Jesus.

Saint Louis-Marie de Montfort tells us: "God has his Wisdom, and it is the only true Wisdom to be loved and sought after as a great treasure. But the perverse world also has its own, and this is to be condemned and hated as evil and pernicious" (LEW 74).

As a Friend of Wisdom in Peru, I want to collaborate with everyone in the search, contemplation and revelation of the true Wisdom that leads us to happiness; because we are all children of this century; therefore, what we do or don't do affects others. I try to welcome the times in which we live and to act in such a way that I can improve and transform them according to the spirituality of Wisdom.

Saint Louis-Marie de Montfort always encourages us by his testimony of life to show confidence, optimism and hope, even in the hardest and most difficult moments of the mission.

I cannot conclude without thanking the Daughters of Wisdom for having accompanied and encouraged us to spread the spirituality of Wisdom with unlimited trust in our Lord and in his Mother.

**Tuesday August, 8, 2023**

## **PRESENTATION OF SAINT-LAZARE**

### **1) Why is this place called Saint-Lazare?**

In the Middle Ages, a terrible disease spread in Brittany: leprosy, which was brought by the Crusaders returning from the Holy Land. Saint-Lazare was a leper colony. Lepers were treated there by the CHEVALIERS-HOSPITALIERS DE SAINT-LAZARE, (Hospitaller-Knights of St. Lazarus), hence the name given to this place.

Saint-Lazare was a dependency of the parish of Coulon, which is nearby. The church no longer exists.

**2) Leprosy disappeared.** This place was secularized and became a Priory which served as a stopover for pilgrims on their way to the Abbey of Saint-Méen, located about 18 kilometers from Montfort. It was managed by successive religious or lay Priors.

**From 1563 to 1756**, there were 15 priors. The one who was present during the presence of Saint Louis-Marie, the 13<sup>th</sup> Prior, was named **Jacques Bertrand**.

**3) THE CHAPEL** was very old, as evidenced by the tombstone of a benefactress, Estaiçe la Testue, daughter of an adviser in the Parliament of Brittany, shown here, dressed in a chain mail and a coat, her hands crossed on her chest.

The chapel was dedicated to St. Roch, Patron Saint of lepers.

The chapel was rebuilt, just like the Priory, in 1622.

### **4) 1707 - FATHER DE MONTFORT ARRIVES IN SAINT-LAZARE**

Dismissed in Moncontour, by Don Leduger, Saint Louis-Marie took refuge in Saint-Lazare accompanied by Brother Mathurin Rangeard. They were joined on the way by Jean.

A native of Montfort, living by his clerical title, Father de Montfort had full latitude to found his first Montfortian community. It was also his first experience of community life.

When Father de Montfort arrived, in 1707, there had been no resident chaplain for the last 18 years.

He cleaned the chapel to make it more suitable for divine worship. He celebrated the Mass. He brought his preferred devotions inside:

- A dove, symbol of the Holy Spirit,
- And, under that symbol, the Name of Jesus.
- He then installed the statue of Our Lady of Wisdom, which is now at Montfort's birthplace.

At the request of the Rector of the parish of Coulon, that statue was brought to Montfort Hospital, when the Sisters of Wisdom came to work there in 1773. One of the Sisters came to pick up the statue in Saint-Lazare.

- We also see, in the chapel, a very big Rosary, with grains the size of a walnut.

When the chapel was too small to contain the crowds, Saint Louis-Marie gathered the faithful in the meadow located near the large oak tree, under which he preached.

During his stay in his native region, Father de Montfort evangelized the parishes of Bréteil, Talensac, Landujan, Médréac, Bréal, Romillé, without forgetting, of course, Montfort-la-Cane.

**In the fall of 1708**, the Bishop of Saint-Malo expelled Father de Montfort, who was banned from any ministry in the diocese. The humble and docile Father de Montfort soon left Saint-Lazare, with a heavy heart. He did not come back to his native region. He only had 8 more years to live.

Before getting on the road for Nantes, he entrusted the chapel to a pious Christian lady, aged about 40 years, Guillemette Rouxel, originally from Talensac. For 20 years, she faithfully took care of the chapel, living on alms. She was buried nearby, in the cemetery of Coulon, of which only a few vestiges remain.

In the outer courtyard, we can see a statue of Father de Montfort. This statue has a particularity. In one of Montfort's hands, we see the Book of Songs.

The last window on the left of what is called the house of the Saint, is the window of the room that he occupied.

**5) In 1757, a hospital was set up in place of the Priory.** It was held by the Sisters of Providence of Saumur. (Jeanne Delanoue, whom Fr. de Montfort put to the test before comforting her in her charge, as Foundress). The sick came here for treatment. The sisters also visited sick people in their homes. They stayed here for about 40 years.

**6) in 1790**, the house was sold as national property. The Sisters left. The hospital was attached to that of Montfort.

**7) in 1900**, at the request of the priests of the Immaculate Conception, who had acquired Saint-Lazare for the formation of Brothers, 3 sisters of the Immaculate arrived from Saint-Méen.

**8) in 1906**, there was dissolution of the Congregation of the Priests of the Immaculate, according to the laws of 1901. The Sisters took over.

**9) in 1907**, the Sisters opened a school. They accommodated 51 student-boarders.

**10) then, there was the 14-18 war.** Wounded soldiers were housed in Saint-Lazare. Student-boarders were also present at the same time.

**11) in 1925**, the boarding school was transformed into a Juniorate, which received youth who wanted to enter religious life. It closed its doors in 1968. The Sisters stayed in Saint-Lazare till 2017.

**12) 1969** – Opening of a Medical-Educational Institute.



Wednesday, August 9, 2023

## SAINT LOUIS DE MONTFORT AND BAPTISM: OUR BAPTISMAL VOCATION AND OUR MISSIONARY COMMITMENT

### I. Montfort and Baptism:

Since I come from Rome, I suggest we begin this talk picturing ourselves as attending the speech of the young Priest, Louis-Marie, to Pope Clement XI, at the Quirinal Palace, in Rome, on 6 June 1706. The Pope granted him the title of “*Apostolic Missionary*” for France. *The Pope instructed him to teach the Christian doctrine to people and children and to help renew the spirit of Christianity, everywhere, through the renewal of the promises of baptism* (Grandet, Book III, Chap. 1). Coming back from Rome, on foot, Louis Marie had time to reflect on the instructions given by Pope Clement XI, and time to adhere fully to the Pope’s recommendations: *to renew the spirit of Christianity, everywhere, through the renewal of the promises of the Baptism*.

#### 1. His baptismal praxis

##### 1.1. The fruit of a personal conviction

We all know that the term “Montfort” comes from the little town of Montfort-sur-Meu, near to Rennes, in Brittany. A little town where, on 31<sup>st</sup> January 1673, was born the one who will become known as Saint Louis-Marie de Montfort. At the heart of that little town is his “Native House” and, in that house, there is a magnificent ceramic representing the scene of his baptism with the **Baptism Certificate** dated 1<sup>st</sup> February 1673. Louis-Marie did not stay long in his native village, this is why the artist, Alessandro LEIDI (SMM), has highlighted the event of his baptism.

As a young priest, in 1702, renouncing his civil identity, Louis-Marie changed his family name 'Grignon' to a new name 'de Montfort', thus **identifying himself with the name of the place of his baptism** and signifying the deeper identity he recognised for himself: that of a baptised man. His significant gesture of signing "**de Montfort**" expresses his awareness of the importance of his baptism, but also the surpassing of a new life that tends towards holiness.

Another gesture that confirms the importance that his baptism had in his life is that, around 1703, he restored the baptistery of Saint-Jean, near the Cathedral, in Poitiers. During that same period, his recommendations to the inhabitants of Montbernage (in the neighbourhood of Poitiers) to whom, in 1705, he entrusted the mission, show that baptism was already occupying an important place in his preaching: “[...] so, do not fail to faithfully fulfill and practice your baptismal promises [...]” (LM, 2).

Upon his return from Rome in 1707, Montfort joined the team of Jean LEUDUGER, director of the diocesan missions of Saint-Brieuc, in Brittany. During a dozen missions, Louis-Marie learned the methods and collaborated in the program of this great missionary. We know that during these missions, **a ceremony was held to renew the baptismal promises**, which everyone was invited to sign. Montfort was certainly enriched by that experience. He dreamt of a missionary adventure where he could be fully himself, according to his apostolic aspirations and according to the directives he had received from Clement XI.

##### 1.2 His method: parish missions ending with the renewal of baptismal promises

Montfort's Book of Sermons, in which the order of preaching for a mission is marked by several series of sermon outlines, shows that, during his missions, Saturday was usually devoted to teaching about the Blessed Virgin and to renewing the promises of holy baptism.

The book also contains a preaching outline entitled *Matter for Preaching a Mission or Retreat on the Baptismal Vows*. There are 24 topics that develop the formula: "*I renounce the devil and his works, and I unite myself to you, my Jesus*". For Montfort, baptism and renewal are not only included in the program of the mission, they become **its guiding idea and objective** which give it meaning and around which the program is structured, because they give meaning to the whole of Christian existence itself.

### 1.3. A public renewal ... by the hands of Mary

The high point of the mission was the ceremony of renewal of the baptismal promises, which preceded the planting of crosses and the final procession. Our missionary wanted to give it a **festive look and an exceptional amplitude**, in order to strike a chord in people's minds and engrave the memory in their hearts. A truly liturgical and popular celebration. The renovation took place in **four stages** (cf. Grandet, pp. 101 and 395):

I) At the end of a grand procession, all pass in front of the deacon who holds an open **Gospel** book ; everyone kneels and venerates the Book, saying: "*I firmly believe all the truths of the Gospel of Jesus Christ*".

II) Entering the church, they pass the **baptismal font**, where a priest receives them; kissing the font, each one renews the vows with the formula: "*I renew with all my heart the vows of my baptism and renounce forever the devil, the world and myself*".

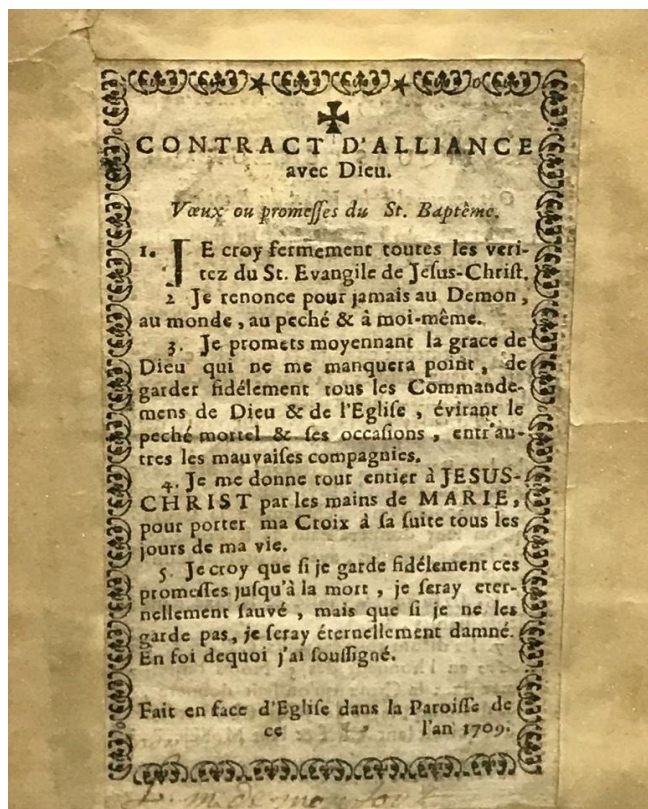
III) From there, they go to an altar, where Father de Montfort is standing, holding in his hands **his little statue of the Blessed Virgin**; each one venerates it, saying: "*I give myself entirely to Jesus Christ through the hands of Mary, to carry my cross after him all the days of my life*".

IV) Then everyone goes back to the baptistery to sing "the great Creed"; then, Montfort speaks again, commenting on the "practical commitments" to be observed by those who have made their renewal, according to the "**Covenant Contract**". That "Contract" bore the signature " of L.M. de Montfort", to which was to added that of the faithful themselves (cf. The Covenant Contract of Pontchâteau, 4 May 1709).

The renewal of the promises of Holy Baptism by the hands of Mary - the high point of Montfort's missions - thus expressed the solemn commitment, sealed in the CONTRACT OF ALLIANCE, to live as true Christians.

## 2. His teaching on Baptism

Through his writings, our missionary reveals at least 4 aspects which are characteristic of his teaching on Holy Baptism.



### 2.1. **Baptism and Christocentrism**

What first emerges of these texts and their context is Montfort's Christocentrism. The act of consecration, which is but a perfect renewal of the vows and promises of holy baptism (TD 120.126), is first addressed to Jesus, Eternal and Incarnate Wisdom (LEW 223) and leads to being conformed, united, and consecrated to Jesus-Christ (TD 120): *"I give myself entirely to Jesus-Christ"*. According to the spirit of the French School of Spirituality, the baptismal life is essentially the life of Jesus in us. Jesus is not only the teacher we listen to, but He is the very life of our life. This is the full application of St. Paul's phrase in Galatians 2:20: *"It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me"*, and this identification is achieved through the formation of Jesus in us (cf. Galatians 4:19) thanks to the work of the Holy Spirit and to the collaboration of the Virgin Mary.

Unfaithfulness to one's baptismal promises is unfaithfulness to Jesus Christ: *"Alas, ungrateful and unfaithful as I am, I have not kept the vows and promises which I made to you so solemnly at my baptism"* (LEW 223).

### 2.2. **Baptism and consecration**

What seems most characteristic of Montfort's teaching on baptism (and the renewal of baptismal commitments) is his insistence on speaking of it as a "consecration to Jesus Christ": **baptism "consecrates us to Jesus Christ"** (TD 129). In biblical terminology, "consecrated" means set apart and reserved (person or thing) for the worship of God and his service (= the service of his work in the world). In the Christian economy of salvation, consecration to God is only possible in union with Jesus-Christ and **within one's own consecration**. In fact, the highest act of consecration ever made among men to the glory of God is the one made by Jesus-Christ from the moment he entered this world (He 10:5-10). This consecration in union with Jesus Christ and his consecration to the Father is achieved sacramentally and fundamentally through baptism: by becoming a member of the Body of Christ through participation in his divine life, the newly baptised person is established in Jesus-Christ's filial belonging to God the Father and enters into the movement of his life entirely consecrated to the Father and ordered to his service... up to the obedience of the Cross. By consecrating us to Jesus Christ, baptism establishes us with Him in a relationship of belonging and dependence, for the accomplishment of God's will, in which our holiness consists.

### 2.3 **Baptism and Slavery of Love**

Montfort insists on the relationship of **belonging and dependence** that the sacrament establishes between Jesus and the baptised, using the term slave, which seems the most appropriate to define this relationship. *"From what Jesus-Christ is in regard to us we must conclude, as St. Paul says, that we belong not to ourselves but entirely to him as his members and his slaves"* (TD 68). By repeatedly drawing attention to this dependence, Montfort certainly wishes to emphasise the radical newness introduced into the being of the baptised person, but even more so the newness of the kind of life to which he has committed himself in following Christ, through obedience to his commandments. There is a reality before and after: *"Before baptism, we belonged to the devil as slaves, but baptism made us in very truth slaves of Jesus. We must therefore live, work and die for the sole purpose of bringing forth fruit for Him* (Ibid). The same affirmation. The same statement is repeated several times in the writings of the missionary (cf. TD 73, 126; SM 34). In justifying the wearing of chains as a sign of this dependence (in reference to the slaves' chains), Montfort writes: *"These little chains are a wonderful aid in recalling the bonds of sin and the slavery of the devil from which baptism has freed him. At the same time, they remind him of the dependence on Jesus promised at baptism and ratified when, by consecration, he renewed these promises"* (TD 238).

In using the term "slave" to express the total and devoted dependency, Louis-Marie refers to the application of the term to Christ and Mary, and to the use to which it is put by the Apostles, the Fathers of the Church, and the Councils (cf. TD 72, 126-130).

But Montfort carefully explains and specifies that this form of slavery is something quite different from slavery of nature or constraint and that **it is neither dehumanising nor dehumanised**. On the contrary, it is a state of dependence chosen out of love, in all clarity and responsibility. It is even the summit of freedom and love, for it is in freedom that we can give ourselves entirely to the beloved, as slaves of love: *"Voluntary slavery is the most perfect of all three states, for by it we give the greatest glory to God, who looks into the heart and wants it to be given to him"* (TD 70). *"We must belong to Jesus and serve him [...] as willing slaves who, moved by generous love, commit themselves to his service after the manner of slaves for the honour of belonging to him. [...] Our baptism made us the slaves of Jesus. Christians can only be slaves of the devil or slaves of Christ"* (TD 73; cf. SM 34. C 139? 32).

#### 2.4 Baptism and Fidelity

Father de Montfort knew from experience that **all the baptized persons are unfaithful** - to varying degrees, of course, but really - to the obligations contracted towards Jesus-Christ in Holy Baptism, and therefore to the love that should inspire them. (cf. TD 127.128).

Among the **causes of infidelity**, the missionary's attention seems to focus on two of them: **1) forgetfulness and ignorance** (cf. TD 127.128) in which most Christians find themselves with regard to the realities of baptism and the need to live its spirit in accordance with the promises made; **2) the difficulties inherent to our sinful nature**: tendencies to evil that remain in us, weakness in the face of the demands of baptismal life, as well as in the face of the temptations of the world and of the devil.

The great remedy against forgetting and ignorance can therefore only be **to enlighten Christians about the meaning, the greatness, and the demands of their baptism**, so that they *personally renew*, in all conscience and responsibility, "the promises and the vows". This is a personal, conscious, and voluntary renewal and ratification of the "Covenant Contract" previously concluded with God by the godparents (cf. TD 127; 129-131).

Like Father de Montfort, our ability to value Holy Baptism will be commensurate with our own conviction of the marvellous greatness and fundamental importance of this sacrament. We benefit from a theology of baptism that has been profoundly renewed by rediscovering the riches of tradition (biblical and historical research), and by welcoming the new contributions of the human sciences (pedagogy, the role of symbolic rites in all areas of social life). It would be unforgivable not to nourish our faith and our apostolate with them. The mission and the new evangelisation can only be based on a new awareness of the Christian identity engendered in baptism.



The second cause explaining the unfaithfulness of Christians to their commitments, and which particularly caught Montfort's attention, are the very difficulties arising from their tendencies to evil - even after baptism and the renewal of baptismal vows - and their weakness in the face of the good to be done as well as the temptations to be withstood against the world and the devil. In the face of these difficulties, which Montfort describes with insistence, he recalls and brings to light the particular role willed by God to Mary in our midst, **and the support we should get from her maternal help and powerful intercession.** The more we entrust ourselves to this spiritual Mother with complete confidence, the easier it will be for her to help us walk in fidelity and strive for perfection. This is the whole point of the first part of the True Devotion (cf. 117-118): *"Following her all the days of my life"*.

Holiness is our assured vocation (see SM 3) and this is the objective that Montfort proposes to those who renew their baptismal commitments. And to ensure their fidelity, despite weaknesses and difficulties, he invites them to take the incomparable means of true and perfect devotion to Mary (cf. TD 130). Indeed, *"the more a soul is devoted to Mary, the more it will be devoted to Jesus Christ. This is why perfect consecration to Jesus Christ is nothing other than a perfect and complete consecration of oneself to the Blessed Virgin, which is the devotion I teach; or else a perfect renewal of the vows and promises of Holy Baptism"* (TD 120).

## **II. Our Baptismal Vocation and Missionary Commitment**

For Montfort, being a perfect baptized person means *"being conformed, united, and consecrated to Jesus-Christ"* (TD 120). These three verbs reveal the "Montfortian way" of living our vocation as Missionary Disciples. The verb **"to conform"** sums up the whole process of conversion that characterises the life of the baptised person; it is a question of renouncing the slavery of Satan in order to live a new life in Jesus-Christ. In the verb **"to unite"** we recognise the call to live an authentic relationship of love with Jesus, and Holy Baptism is the very foundation of this privileged relationship. Finally, as we have just explained, the verb **"to consecrate oneself"** means to be set apart to fully serve Christ's mission in the world.

We fulfil our baptismal vocation when our identity is conformed to that of Jesus-Christ; but we are conformed only if, in the first place, we are united, and united because we have been consecrated to Him, like a branch grafted onto the vine (cf. TD 61). The branch is separated to be grafted onto the true vine or united to it, and this corresponds to the baptismal grace that opens our awareness of God's love: we are beloved children of the Father, living members of the Body of Christ, and temples of the Holy Spirit. This conscious union enables the grafted branch to live from the same humus of the vine, have the same inner sap, and have the same form by becoming one reality with the vine. Finally, the branch becomes perfect, that is, operative, and produces fruit for the vine, that is, the baptised person acts as another Christ.

### **OUR BAPTISMAL VOCATION**

Walking towards the fullness of the age of Jesus-Christ

Identification with Christ begins with baptism, but it often fails to grow or is slow to reach maturity that brings lasting and abounding fruits of "life according to the Spirit". As Montfort did not want maturity to remain the privilege of a few, he recommended a sure way, by revealing that he who gives himself to Mary conforms himself to Christ, because Mary, in collaboration with the Holy Spirit, *"christifies"* everything we offer her. In fact, just as Mary formed the Head, so she forms the Body, each member of that Body. Thus, no one, like Mary, can realise his full conformity to Christ her Son

who lives in Mary: by consecrating ourselves to Mary, we receive the same mind of Christ (cf. 1 Cor 2:15-16), his same feelings (cf. Phil 2:5ff), his heart, so that we can live and love like Him.

Mary leads the disciple to the "**fullness of the age of Jesus Christ**" on earth (cf. Eph 4:13), that is, to holiness. Montfort uses this expression nine times in his writings. Taking up the tradition of the French School of Spirituality and of the Fathers of the Church, he considered that Mary's mission was to form Christ in us, to the fullness of His age, which is manifested in the sacrifice of love on the Cross. By proposing thirty-three days of preparation for consecration, Montfort refers to Christ's age on earth, and thus, to his maturity reached by fully accomplishing the Father's work (cf. Jn 17:4). The aim of true devotion is to bring us to this maturity by putting into practice the "**evangelical counsels of holiness**", which Jesus never ceases to give to those who wish to grow and perfect themselves in charity. And Montfort concludes: *"Whoever then wishes to advance along the road to holiness and be sure of encountering the true Christ, without fear of the illusions which afflict many devout people, should take up with valiant heart and willing spirit this devotion to Mary which perhaps he had not previously heard about. Even if it is new to him, let him enter upon this excellent way which I am now revealing to him. "I will show you a more excellent way."*

Montfort describes how Mary takes care of our growth as an ongoing gestation process that will lead to our maturity for heaven: *"All the predestined people, while in the world, are hidden in the womb of the Blessed Virgin where they are protected, nourished, cared for and developed by this good Mother, until the day she brings them forth to a life of glory after death, which the Church calls the birthday of the just. This is indeed a mystery of grace unknown to the reprobate and little known even to the predestined people!"* (TD 33). Mary's action towards us is a work of transformation, to which she commits herself, in collaboration with the Holy Spirit, as if on a mission, from the moment we truly welcome her into our lives as our mother, model, and formator.

This is a mature spirituality that brings the grace of baptism to fruition. *"It was Mary's womb which encompassed and produced a perfect man. That same womb held the one whom the whole universe can neither encompass nor contain... It is in the bosom of Mary that people who are young grow mature in enlightenment, in holiness, in experience, and in wisdom, and in a short time reach the fullness of the age of Christ"* (TD 156).

This relationship to Mary helps to empty ourselves of our self-love or of the love of this world. If we are not emptied of the spirit of the world, we cannot be filled with the Spirit of Christ and, therefore, be conformed to him. To empty ourselves, we first need to know, in the light of the Holy Spirit, our weaknesses, our inability to do anything conducive to our salvation, our weaknesses in everything, our daily inconsistency, our lack of dignity of grace, and our iniquity in all places (cf. TD 79).

That knowledge of ourselves, in the light of the Holy Spirit, that is, in the Lord's eyes, is given to us by Mary. *"By the light which the Holy Spirit will give you through Mary, his faithful spouse, you will perceive the evil inclinations of your fallen nature and how incapable you are of any good apart from that which God produces in you as Author of nature and grace"* (TD 213). The true knowledge of ourselves allows us to *"die daily to ourselves. This involves our renouncing what the powers of the soul and the senses of the body incline us to do. We must see as if we did not see, hear as if we did not hear, and use the thing of this world as if we did not use them. This is what St. Paul calls "dying daily"* (TD 81). Mary's attitude, like Rebeca's, prepares our soul and body to please God, as Mary knows better than anyone what is pleasing to God.

Marie facilitates union with Jesus-Christ because her intercession attracts Jesus Christ, Divine Wisdom in us, like a powerful magnet that can attract Jesus wherever she is. Let us listen to this quotation that describes Mary's intercession as a sacred magnet: *"Mary is like a holy magnet attracting Eternal Wisdom to herself with such power that he cannot resist. This magnet drew him down to earth to save mankind, and continues to draw him every day into every person who possesses it. Once we possess Mary, we shall, through her intercession, easily and in a short time possess divine Wisdom"* (LEW 212).

Mary helps us to be truly consecrated to Jesus. The fourth interior practice consisting in doing everything for Mary aims at doing everything for Jesus, and giving glory to Him. The aim of the Montfortian consecration is to do everything for the glory of God Alone. To lose oneself in Mary, that is, to open oneself completely and lovingly to her effective influence, to become living copies of that woman who *"is entirely relative to God. She is relative only to God, because she exists uniquely in reference to him. She is an echo of God, speaking and repeating only God"* (TD 225). Therefore – as Fr. Gaffney wrote - to be one with the personal glory of God, Jesus, and through Him, by the power of the Spirit, to be one with the Father, God alone, who only wants the salvation of all through his Son, Jesus-Christ (cf. Jn 6:40).

## OUR MISSIONARY COMMITMENT

### Brave and valiant soldiers of Jesus and Mary

We conform ourselves to Christ in order to bear fruit, as Montfort said in TD 68: *"Before baptism, we belonged to the devil as slaves, but baptism made us in very truth slaves of Jesus. We must therefore live, work and die for the sole purpose of bringing forth the fruit for him, glorifying him in our body and letting him reign in our soul. We are his conquest, the people he has won, his heritage. It is for this reason that the Holy Spirit compares us: 1) to trees that are planted along the waters of grace in the field of the Church and which must bear their fruit when the time comes; 2) to branches of the vine of which Jesus is the stem, which must yield good grapes; 3) to a flock of sheep of which Jesus is the Shepherd, which must increase and give milk; 4) to good soil cultivated by God, where the seed will spread and produce crops up to thirty-fold, sixty-fold, or a hundred-fold"*.

What is the fruit of our identification to Christ, if not to establish his Kingdom in all hearts? This was Montfort's mission in the Church: to remind Christians of the greatness and of the exigencies of their baptism, which configures them to Christ and calls them to commit themselves for the service of his Kingdom.

#### 1. At the service of the Reign of Christ through Mary

Montfort ardently desired a mighty legion of brave and valiant soldiers of Jesus and Mary, both men and women who, filled with the Holy Spirit, would be instruments of the coming of the Reign of Christ (cf. VD 114). He calls them **apostles of the end of times** who **live the perfect baptismal consecration to Jesus-Christ** through the hands of Mary.

The Montfortian approach to consecration urges those who live it to build the Kingdom of Christ at any cost. Anyone who authentically lives his consecration is necessarily an apostle of the Reign of Christ. As Montfort insists, devotion to the Virgin Mary, and particularly the perfect consecration, is a prerequisite for these apostles. Not only does it keep them in the Reign of God, which aims at **communion** between God and humanity and communion between human beings, but it is the weapon that enables them to conquer Satan's empire, that is, all division. By the example of their lives and their apostolate, they will take part in this incursion into Satan's kingdom and plant *"the banner of victory of the Cross of Christ the King"* (cf. SD 59; EP 29): *"[Lord] that there may be one fold and one shepherd and that all may give glory to you in your temple"* (Fiery Prayer: FP 30). They must be filled with the spirit of Mary, spouse of the Holy Spirit; they must be **children of Mary**, and therefore apostles of her Son, who fearlessly extend his Kingdom of peace, justice, and love, especially in the hearts and among the poor, the voiceless, those rejected by society (cf. TD 47-48). The service of this Reign involves the **daily acceptance of the cross** by those who follow Jesus-Christ, Eternal Wisdom.

The Reign of Jesus-Christ does not refer to territory, country or domain, but - Montfort tells us - consists principally in the heart or interior of man - according to these words: *"The Reign of God is within you, just as the Kingdom of the Blessed Virgin is principally in the interior of man, that is to*

say, *his soul*" (TD 38; cf. TD 113). It is not that Saint Louis-Marie does not envisage the final and ultimate transformation of the universe. He speaks of a Kingdom that includes the reformation of the Church and the renewal of the face of the earth (FP 17), and also of great things that will take place "*in the world*" (SM 59), "*on earth*" (TD 272). However, this can happen only **by transforming people's hearts**. It is to this interior transformation of humanity - the result of the dynamic, profound, and effective domination of the love of Jesus-Christ by Mary - that Montfort devotes his entire life and his writings, so that an evident reform of the Church and a visible renewal of the face of the earth may truly take place.

Montfortian spirituality, therefore, envisages a revolution of love so that the Reign of Christ becomes effective. By overturning the values recognised in the world and replacing them with the radical demands of Jesus-Christ. The strength of this mission can only be felt by people of faith who, under the powerful influence of Mary, their Mother, and Queen, freely renounce themselves and commit themselves wholeheartedly into the life of a renewed and vigorous baptismal vocation.

## 2. Like the Beloved Disciple

Who is a concrete example of the disciple-missionary at the service of Christ's Kingdom if not the "Beloved Disciple"? With the invocation "make me a perfect disciple of Christ Wisdom", each consecrated person asks Mary to become like the "Beloved Disciple" of Jesus, the only disciple explicitly mentioned by Montfort in his writings. In two texts (cf. TD 179; 216), Montfort takes up the phrase with which the Fourth Gospel concludes the scene of Jesus on the cross with the Mother and the disciple whom Jesus loved: "And from that hour, the disciple took her into his home" (Jn 19:27). Twice, Montfort puts the phrase directly on the lips of the Beloved Disciple, emphasising that taking Mary into one's home is a personal decision that obeys Jesus' invitation. The baptised person who lives the Montfortian consecration makes this explicit choice, thus participating in the experience of the Beloved Disciple. By asking Mary to make us the Beloved Disciple, we implore the grace, but also the courage and perseverance to make this explicit choice to welcome Mary into our life and mission. What is the lived experience of the Beloved Disciple taking the Mother into his home?

Montfort says that it is above all an **experience of happiness**, because the disciple is rich in Mary, who is nothing other than "*the very treasure of God*". Montfort expresses the happiness of the one who has given everything to Mary, since being entirely to Mary, Mary is entirely to him: "*With David he can boldly say: Haec facta est mihi: Mary was created for me; or with the Beloved Disciple: Accepi eam in mea. I have taken her for all my own, or, with our Lord himself: Omnia mea tua sunt, et omnia tua mea sunt: All that is mine is yours and all that is yours is mine*" (TD 179). This is an allusion to three biblical references. The first and third ones do not refer to Mary, but to the law of God and to God the Father, phrases spoken by the psalmist and by Jesus. Montfort thus associates the joy of the psalmist for the law of God and the joy of Jesus who shares everything with his Father, with the experience of the one who gives everything to Mary, to invite us to taste the joy of the Beloved Disciple when he says: "*I have taken Mary for all my possessions*". This Beloved Disciple is, in fact, every baptised person who consecrates himself to Jesus through Mary. Happy is the disciple who is "*entirely to Mary*". He knows that Mary is his great treasure and that nothing will be lost in her. Indeed, everything is preserved, embellished, and valued.

Secondly, it is an **experience of peace**, since Mary fills the disciple with great confidence in God and in herself. Montfort says that the disciple can turn to Mary at any moment and say to her: "*I have taken you, Holy Mother, for all my possessions*". By inviting the baptized person to address Mary with these same words, Montfort underlines the great confidence that the disciple experiences as a marvellous fruit of his process of consecration (cf. TD 216). True devotion forms in us the same confidence that a child has towards his mother: "*It prompts us to go to her in every need of body and soul, with great simplicity, trust and affection. We implore our Mother's help always, everywhere, and for everything. We pray to be enlightened in our doubts, to be put back on the right path when we go astray, to be protected when we are tempted, to be strengthened when we are weakening, to*



*be lifted up when we fall into sin, to be encouraged when we are losing heart, to be rid of our scruples, to be consoled in the trials, crosses and disappointments of life. Finally, in all our afflictions of body and soul, we naturally turn to Mary for help, with never a fear of importuning her or displeasing our Lord” (TD 107). Like the Beloved Disciple, the disciple of Christ no longer lives without Mary, who then becomes his principal and constant resource; in fact, he lives everything with Her, through Her, in Her, and for Her, in union with Jesus, the Son of Mary.*

He who, like the Beloved Disciple, has truly taken Mary with him and perseveres in her, experiences the joy of the hundredfold graces of the infinite treasure he finds in Mary, and experiences at every moment the peace and confidence of always having Mary as Mother, model and fortress of his freedom. *“Liberos: true children of Mary, your holy Mother, begotten and conceived by her charity, carried in her womb, attached to her breasts, nourished by her milk, brought up by her care, sustained by her arm, and enriched by her graces” (FP 11).*

### **Conclusion**

In this journey concerning Holy Baptism, we have discovered how Montfort proposes the process of consecration as an effective way for those who wish to live fruitfully their baptismal vocation and mission. This proposal is the fruit of the heart of a missionary and master of spiritual life, as was Saint Louis-Marie, who, faced with the mystery of God's love communicated to us in Jesus-Christ, drew up a synthesis of the best theological and spiritual tradition to offer us an easy, short, perfect and sure path (cf. TD 168) which conforms us, unites us and consecrates us to Jesus-Christ, for the glory of God alone and the salvation of souls.

Fr. Marco Pasinato

Saint Laurent-sur-Sèvre, 9 August 2023

## **Workshop (on Wednesday 9 August 2023)**

I note what touched me in Father Marco's talk.

I note what is new for me.

I note what I perceive as calls from the Holy Spirit for my life.

**"Go and make disciples of all nations!" Mt 28:19**

Montfortian Associates, Daughters of Wisdom, Montfort Missionaries, Brothers of St. Gabriel,  
\* called together to become more missionary disciples in the Montfortian Family:

1. How do the lives of our Founders, their writings, their missionary commitment call me/call us to live my baptism more intensely and truly?
2. To what creative audacity are they calling me/calling us?

### **Methodology:**

You have 45 minutes in group:

- Appoint a moderator and a secretary.
- Take 5 minutes personally to start answering the questions.
- You then have 35 minutes for sharing.
- During the last 5 minutes, write collective answers to the last 2 questions.

## **HOMILY FOR THE FEAST OF ST. TERESA OF THE CROSS**



My brothers and sisters,

Our Christian life needs nourishment. Faithfulness to Christ means taking care of our spiritual life.

Gathered here, we just listened to the Word of God. Through his Word, the Lord wants to lead us into the desert, to speak to our hearts as we have just heard in the first reading. *I will lead him into the desert, and I will speak to him heart to heart.*

We are here, then, for a loving encounter with the bridegroom of our souls. We are here for this encounter with the Eternal and Incarnate Wisdom, Jesus, who wants to renew the covenant of love with us.

According to the intuition of St. Louis de Montfort, Wisdom is for man and man for Wisdom.

The Eucharist is the event, the most important moment, when Wisdom is given to us as nourishment.

Wishing, on the one hand, to show his love for man to the point of dying in his place in order to save him, and unable, on the other hand, to resign himself to leave man, Christ finds an admirable way for dying and living at the same time, and remaining with man until the end of time: it is the loving invention of the Eucharist.

Today, the liturgical calendar invites us to celebrate St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross, one of the Patron Saints of Europe. The biblical texts proposed for this celebration truly invite us to a life of communion with God Alone, as proposed by St. Louis de Montfort.

Jesus tells us in the Gospel: *"Be vigilant, for you know neither the day nor the hour..."*. The parable of the wise and foolish virgins is a call to realism in our lives, a call to the radical awareness that is appropriate, a call to live in truth the fact that each of our lives is summed up in its ultimate act: death. We were born for death. Yet, we live as if we were never going to die.

The wisdom proposed by Montfort is that of the wise virgins. The wisdom of the world is that of the foolish virgins, who live according to the world.

Edith was born a Jew (on 12 October 1891 in Breslau, Prussia) and, very soon, she left her Jewish faith to devote herself to psychology and philosophy. Mysteriously, through this search to know human nature, Edith Stein opened herself to transcendence.

Her keen intelligence and her knowledge of the philosophy of the times enabled her to perceive, better than anyone else, the terrible drama that was about to hit Europe, starting with her own people. God is dead, man has gone mad. Anything is possible to turn man against man.

A woman praying alone in a church and a chance reading of the life of the great St. Teresa of Avila disturbed the young Jewish philosopher. Suddenly, in the life of that intellectual woman, the absolute of God appeared. For Edith Stein, the Jewish woman, the mystery of the Cross of Jesus-Christ was revealed in the double face of these two women of prayer, against all the philosophic-scientific evidence of her time. She was about to join another great Jewish thinker of her time when, faced with the silence of God at Auschwitz, she cried out in response to the question of where God was: He is there, she said, pointing to a young man hanged in the camp by some Nazi executioners. God is at the end of the rope of all those hanged in the history of human cruelty.

Here he is, the God-man, Jesus-Christ, who took on the death of man in order to shatter its absurdity. Here he is, illuminating the life of that Jewish philosopher. Here is the Wisdom of the Cross.

The bridegroom arrived. Those who were ready went with him into the wedding hall, and the door was shut.

Jesus portrays ten virgins who experienced much the same thing. But some of them had taken enough oil from the start. This oil in our lives is the quality of our love for him. It is the decision to love that lies at the heart of the freedom that drives our lives.

The present times invite us to be faithful to the gift we have received. Jesus describes the attitude of faithfulness in waiting which will make it possible to enter the Kingdom. It is a question of being present and available at the desired moment, which is unforeseeable. Jesus looks at every one of us and asks: Will you remain faithful? *"Taking sides with Christ can cost your life,"* said Edith Stein.

In her quest for light, Teresa Benedicta of the Cross was well aware that only a real search for the truth could lead to the happiness she hoped for.

Be vigilant, for you know neither the day nor the hour. *"Since union with Christ is our happiness and progress towards that union is our blessing on this earth, love of the Cross in no way contradicts the joy of being a child of God. Helping to carry the Cross of Christ gives pure and profound joy. Those who are given this opportunity and strength - the builders of the Kingdom of God - are the most authentic children of God,"* says Teresa Benedicta. She recognised Jesus and grasped this truth within herself, placing it in her heart. Jesus became the expectation and the goal of her life.

Edith Stein let herself be led deep in her heart to encounter God, the God of her fathers in the faith of Israel, and the God of Jesus-Christ. She let Christ take her as a spouse. Sister Teresa Benedicta wanted to continue to search for the truth about man in the Word of God, and not only in philosophy, in order to acquire the wisdom which leads to eternal marriage. She understood that she had to embrace, like her Lord, the fate of her people and of all humanity, leaving to God the surprise of the moment of her death, whatever be the terms. Since Jesus, her Lord, made himself master of death, every death henceforth lived in him becomes the birth in heaven of what we lived for on earth.

The spirituality of Father de Montfort leads us along the path where we are invited to die to ourselves, in order to live in communion with Jesus, in love.

The Virgin Mary, the wise Virgin, helps us to always seek her Son and to live, as He did, the life and mission that God the Father entrusted to Him and entrusts to each one of us today.

Saint Laurent-sur-Sèvre Fr. Delfim Afonso

## PRAYER VIGIL - TRIBUTE TO THE MARTYRS OF THE MONTFORTIAN FAMILY

### SR. SHIGI CHACKO THACHECHERIL, DW, THE COVID WARRIOR

My daughters, said Mother Marie-Louise, to all who followed her, and to all who would follow her in the generations to come. Sr. Shigi too was her daughter, who followed the legacy of Mother Marie-Louise: *"If I were a piece of cloth, I would clothe the poor."* At the time of the pandemic, all the sick who came to Mandar Hospital, in a remote village of Ranchi, experienced the care and compassion of Sr. Shigi, the daughter of Mother Marie-Louise Trichet.

Sr. Shigi was born on 16<sup>th</sup> May 1984, in Kerala, the southern part of India. She was the youngest daughter of her family. Sr. Shigi lived a very short time, but she fully lived her commitment. She was a professional nurse. In 2021, she treated many COVID patients during the wave that claimed several lives in India. She too was affected by COVID while she was treating the sick, and died on 1<sup>st</sup> June 2021.



Sr. Shigi's memory, that we cherish even today, knew how to bring laughter and joy wherever she went.

Sr. Shigi was a straightforward person. Therefore, she was considered as having a strong personality. But all those who were close to her knew that she was a gentle and kind-hearted person. She worked hard in all missions that were entrusted to her. Be it in her studies, in the mission fields or in her personal life, her aim was to reach for the stars. She often said: "Who knows how long we will live, therefore, let me make the best of my life". Such was her wonderful expression!

Prayer life was her first priority, whether the others were in the chapel or not, but she was with the Lord on time for personal prayer and for community prayer. As she moved from one community to another, she accepted her mission wholeheartedly and with full commitment. In Kalghatgi, she learned an unknown language to work for the school dropouts. In Diviya Karunya, she was attentive to the well-being of men having emotional problems. She taught them personal cleanliness and guided them to take care of the creation. It was not easy to live with unstable men, but Shigi was prudent enough to protect herself from unexpected dangers. Though they were differently-abled men, we saw tears in their eyes when they heard that Sr. Shigi was no more.

When Sr. Shigi received her obedience to Mariam Nivas, in Ranchi, the style of life and the culture were totally different, but she adapted herself to the situation and she was appointed as the one in-charge of the nurses. She was passionate in teaching, she taught the students to widen their knowledge in the medical field. She taught them to learn with eagerness. She was attentive to the weakest and to the financially less-privileged students. She cared for them with tenderness. She challenged young nursing students to learn English and to do well in their academic performances.

As a nurse-superintendent, she never compromised concerning cleanliness. People appreciated Sr. Shigi's way of dealing with illiterate people, teaching them the importance of cleanliness. Therefore, every nook and corner of the hospital was clean. This was one of the reasons why the Daughters of

Wisdom were invited to manage the hospital, because it had not been well managed by the previous administration. Sr. Shigi proved that she was the right person for the Mandar Hospital. She was also a mediator between the Director and the Staff. She was clear concerning her role and she spoke for the rights of the Staff. She requested to increase their wages. She could organize and manage difficult problems with tact and, even today, the doctors and Staff remember her for her discretion.

Mandar Hospital was not a well-equipped hospital, but it was on the way to improvement. It was not equipped to face the pandemic. The hospital Director was affected by COVID-19. It was then, a major challenge for Sr. Shigi, who encouraged the nurses, doctors and other Staff to protect themselves so as to be able to take care of the numerous patients who came to the hospital. There were no more beds, no more place to accommodate the sick in the hospital yet, like Montfort, Sr. Shigi found ways and means to welcome them and care for them as this was the only hospital meant for the poor and the ordinary people of Ranchi. With her lively talk, Sr. Shigi stood by the tired nurses and doctors, caring for all those who came in, until she, herself, collapsed, infected with COVID. During the dark days of the pandemic, Sr. Shigi stood as a torch bearer, welcoming the sick and caring for them, as Mother Marie-Louise Trichet did for the poor in the hospital of Poitiers.

Thank you, Sr. Shigi, for the love you shared with all those who entered Mandar Hospital. Thank you for the gentle and soothing hands, with which you cared for the sick and the suffering, till your last breath. You were a God-sent Angel, at the crucial moment of the pandemic. Thank you for the many lives that you saved and for the testimony that you leave us: to always care for the poor, like our Founders, Father de Montfort, and Mother Marie-Louise of Jesus.

Sr. Lydia, DW

### **TRIBUTE TO OUR MARTYRED SISTERS – DAUGHTERS OF WISDOM**

My name is Pierrette Bwamba. I am a Daughter of Wisdom from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). I am currently on mission in Paris, France, as General Councillor and member of the Leadership Team of our Congregation.

In the history of our Congregation, many Sisters have experienced martyrdom though they have not been officially recognised by the Church as martyrs. The most famous cases are the following:

In France, during the French Revolution (1789-1800), several Sisters were guillotined for their faith and their love of Christ - the Incarnate Word/Christ-Wisdom.

In DRC, during the rebellion of 1964, two Sisters were murdered along with Montfort Fathers and Montfort Brothers of St. Gabriel.

Recently, during the Covid-19 pandemic, many of our Sisters died of COVID. Among them, an Indian Sister, a dedicated nurse who gave her life to save Covid patients.

The song of Robert Lebel, a Canadian Priest, supports my testimony concerning two Sisters who were murdered during the 1964 rebellion. *"They are many, the Blessed men and women / the martyrs in memory of my Father. They are many, the Blessed men and women / the martyrs whom we never talked about, who did not leave any image of themselves..."*

Today, we celebrate the memory of our Sisters who, among those numerous martyrs, loved the Lord and served their brothers and sisters to the point of sacrificing their lives.

**Sr. Anne-Françoise (from Belgium) and Sr. Marie-Antoinette (from the US)**

These two Daughters of Wisdom, missionaries in Congo, served the poorest people in the villages of Isangi diocese, in the North-East of the DRC. One was a primary school teacher and the other took care of poor children.


The two Sisters were arrested along with other missionaries who served in the same diocese (Fathers, Brothers, Sisters, Bishop, Montfort Missionaries, and Daughters of Wisdom). Similarly, in another diocese of the same Region, and in the same context of rebellion, in Buta, the Brothers of St. Gabriel were also arrested and suffered martyrdom.

The missionaries were falsely accused and arrested because they were foreigners. People pretended to "protect them", but in reality, they accused them of "being spies", and suspected them of passing information about the political situation in Congo to their native countries.

It was in this troubled context that our two Sisters died in Zaire. Their deaths came after several days of torture and mistreatments that made them look like the suffering Christ on the way to Calvary. Sister Anne-Françoise was put to death because she refused to be the wife of the leader of the rebellion. And Sister Marie-Antoinette was killed because she was an American, suspected of passing on news of the rebellion to the American government. Both were courageous to the end, accepting to die for their faith in Christ, the Incarnate Wisdom.

I conclude this tribute with the same song of Robert Lebel, which goes on to say: *"They are many, the Blessed men and women, martyrs in memory of my Father. All those men and women who, through the ages, have ceaselessly loved their brothers just as they loved their God. And when one of them leaves the earth to go to the Father's house, a star is born in heaven..."*

**Sr. Pierrette Bwamba, Daughter of Wisdom**

 <p>R. Fr. Clemens</p>	<p>†</p> <p><b>DIOCESE D'ISANGI</b></p> <p><b>Famille Montfortaine</b></p> <p>29 ans de vie missionnaire au Congo Décédé 10-10-1964 Basoko-Congo</p>	 <p>R. P. Ammerlaan</p>
<p>S<sup>r</sup> <b>Mary-Antoinette</b></p> <p>3 ans de vie missionnaire au Congo Décédée 19-11-1964 Isangi-Congo</p>	 	<p>S<sup>r</sup> <b>Anne-Françoise</b></p> <p>5 ans de vie missionnaire au Congo Décédée 19-11-1964 Isangi-Congo</p>

## THE BROTHERS OF ST GABRIEL PRESUMED MARTYRS

None of these presumed martyrs has been beatified, at least for the time being. However, for the first of these martyrs, the beatification process is underway, in Rome, and it is progressing well.

### **1) In 1936 - 49 BROTHERS VICTIMS OF RELIGIOUS PERSECUTION IN SPAIN**

In 1936, civil war broke out in Spain. Society was divided because a Republican regime with Soviet leanings was in power since 1930, and was threatening the Church in particular. The members of that regime were known as "the Reds". General Franco fought without mercy to restore peace, winning back province after province. The fighting was fierce, especially from 1936 onwards. 7,500 Priests, Sisters, Brothers, Seminarians, and Novices were killed in Spain over a 6-year period.

Among those, 49 Spanish Brothers of St. Gabriel and their Chaplain were shot and thrown into collective graves, all between July and November 1936, in Catalonia. Only 7 of the 50 bodies were identified.

They all died, without trial, without records, without leaving any trace. Although we know them all, we had to conduct a great deal of research to find out, as accurately as possible, the details of their assassinations.

It is clear that they died because of their faith and because of their enemies' hatred of it. As already mentioned, their cause for beatification is underway, at the Dicastery for the Cause of Saints, in Vatican, and it is progressing rapidly. The historical background has already been acknowledged, which is very important in such a context.

### **2) 30 May 1965 - 7 BROTHERS ARE MASSACRED BY THE "SIMBAS", IN BUTA, CONGO - KINSHASA (ex-Zaire)**

This very large country became independent from Belgium in 1960. The struggle for power began immediately after the declaration of independence. In 1964-1965, half the country was in the hands of the SIMBAS rebels, especially in the North of the country, where 7 Belgian Brothers were based in BONDO. The young Colonel MOBUTU and his army set out to conquer the rebel provinces. The Simbas were reduced to little, except in the district of BONDO, where they resisted by taking famous hostages. 7 Brothers were held as hostages, along with 14 other missionaries.

Seven months later, the rebels were hidden in BUTA and decided to leave. But, misfortune! They executed all their hostages with machetes before leaving, and threw the bodies into the Rubi River. Of our 7 victims, only one body was found, that of Bro. Laurent BOSMANS.

These 7 confreres remained faithful to the end, patient and charitable, to the point of giving French lessons to their jailers. They were as innocent as on the day of their baptism. They were rather victims of their missionary commitment... and of a great political disorder, which does nothing to diminish their merits.

### **3) 8 APRIL 2008 - BROTHER JOSEPH DOUET, MURDERED IN KATACO, GUINEA-CONAKRY**

Brother Joseph DOUET, who had been a missionary in Senegal since 1974, and a Provincial Superior of Senegal, became the promoter of our Gabrielite establishments in Guinea: Ourous, Katoko, Katakodi.

It was there, in Katoko, where he was the Founder-Director of a college which, today, bears his name, that Brother Joseph DOUET was assassinated, strangled by the hands of three young men. These young men were probably sponsored by the old leaders of the village and of the parish, who had lost their harmful influence because of the school. It was probably a crime of jealousy, but the circumstances of the assassination were never properly clarified: a cloak of silence and shame immediately set in.

Brother Joseph was killed while reciting Vespers in the shadow of the threshold of the house. He was alone that evening.

The 4 Brothers of Katako knew they were under threat for the last 7 or 8 years, but they remained in the mission like elder brothers among children, with the aim of forming a new generation of Christians. And it still goes on today.

We can say that Brother Joseph is a martyr for the TRUTH, because he had denounced the evil powers of the traditional leaders of the village and the parish.

The Bishop closed the church and excommunicated the village for a year. Pope Benedict XVI praised the courage of Brother Joseph Douet, whose memory is honored by his family, at Le Pin-en-Mauges, 30 kilometers from here.

*"Do not fear those who kill the body, but rather fear those who can kill the soul" (Mat 10, 25).*

### **TESTIMONY ABOUT THE MONTFORT MISSIONARIES MURDERED IN THE GARDENS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, ON 1<sup>st</sup> FEBRUARY 1794**

In the turmoil of the Revolution of 1789, the Superior General of the Montfort Missionaries, Father Micquignon, was worrying about the anti-religious tendencies that were beginning to emerge. In February of 1790, he wrote a warning to all the communities of the Congregation. He recommended that they keep their faith pure, intact and courageous: "... *We would rather lose everything,*" he told them, *"our possessions, our health, even our state, rather than lose the treasure of our faith...."*. Events proved him right. In January 1791, parish priests were required to take the constitutional oath.

The Montfort Missionaries were very active, enlightening the people's conscience. In the form of maxims, they listed out the duties of the *"faithful in a time of schism and persecution"*.

- *"Thou shalt profess one faith: that of Rome alone.*
- *.... Thou shalt submit to the Pope, and likewise to the Bishops. ...*
- *..... Thou shalt show an inviolable attachment to true Pastors..."*

The activity of the Mulotians - as the Montfortians were called after their first Superior General, Father Mulot - worried the representatives of the Republic.

In 1793, the revolutionary government banned the Montfortian Institutes, and the infernal columns ravaged the West of France and the Montfortian Mother Houses. War broke out. Saint-Laurent became the hospital centre for the royalist army: the missionaries' house, the Mother House of Wisdom, and the presbytery were filled with wounded patients.

In the village, people were shot and beheaded, women raped, children massacred, the elderly and infirm tortured and killed. The Daughters of Wisdom and the Montfort Missionaries were not spared. Three Montfort Brothers were tortured and murdered in the gardens of the Holy Spirit for having remained faithful to their faith:

- Bro. BOUCHER, 60 years old
- Bro. Jean, 30 years old
- Bro. Olivier, 30 years old

A commemorative monument was erected in the gardens of the Holy Spirit.



## FATHER SAMUEL MALO

Testimony of Brother Jean-Pierre CALVEZ and Homily of Father Jacques ARROUET

29<sup>th</sup> March 1994

So, what happened on the evening of 29<sup>th</sup> March? – 29<sup>th</sup> March is the day we remember the 1947 revolution.

After our rosary, we went our separate ways. Father Samuel Malo, 64, from Loire Atlantique, who had been on mission in Madagascar for 35 years, was brutally murdered on the night of 29<sup>th</sup> to 30<sup>th</sup> March. Perfectly integrated, loved and respected by the Malagasy people, he was in charge of a rural family training centre in Antsiramandroso, near Tamatave. The Roger Riou Association and an Association in his native place, "*Amitié-Solidarité-Espoir avec Madagascar*" (Friendship-Solidarity-Hope with Madagascar) actively supported his work. Promoting all men and every man at the same time, taking into account their ways of thinking and their differences, was his profound conviction.

*J.P. Calvez*

Samuel, on Tuesday 29<sup>th</sup> March, you were in your home, in Antsiramandroso, which is a rural family training centre. A number of people in this assembly visited that centre with you. Tired after a busy day, you were sleeping... At 11:00 p.m., three young men asked for help. Someone was injured, fourteen kilometers away, They wanted a car to go and get him. In agreement with Brother Jean-Pierre Calvez, who lived with you in the centre, you accompanied them, on foot, to the Daughters of Wisdom's house, so that the Sisters could show them how to make a tourniquet.

Halfway between the house and the dispensary, the drama began. You had just enough time to shout: "*Help! Thieves!*" Brother Jean-Pierre ran to help you, and workers who also heard you arrived on the scene. In your last breath, you said: "*They beat me up and dragged me on the road. Go and get the car...*".

You fainted and you were already on the way to the other world. You made the great passage. You gave your life to the very end, while being of service.

*J. Arrouet*

Who was Samuel Malo?

He was a Montfortian as Father de Montfort wanted him to be: in the Fiery Prayer, in every sentence, we could say: Sam wanted to be that, and he was. He made me love Father de Montfort by his life and his words... He was a man of conviction and a coach: "*Alone we can do nothing, together we can do everything*"; and he carried out what had been decided as a group. He encouraged everyone so well that many were coming and seeing.

We were fifteen in the church at Antsiramandroso on the first Sunday, in November 1979, when he presided the Eucharistic celebration. Twenty-five years later, we were more than two hundred, even when there was no priest to preside the Eucharist. His teaching had something to do with it. He took the needed time to prepare catechumens for the sacraments. He encouraged responsible villagers to engage in public life, selflessly and justly.

**He loved people** and wanted them to be happy. So many of them rediscovered a taste for their work and for their family life. While it was a custom to leave everything to the woman, the parents helped each other, and the children were called by their first name, instead of calling them 'so-and-so's child', as if they were objects?

**He loved his Congregation** and the other Montfortian Congregations: How deep was his grief at the sudden death of the only Malagasy Montfortian Father: Pascal Lahady! He helped his family as much as he could. What joy he felt at the opening of the Madagascan Montfortian Novitiate!

**And, in his rosary**, he reminded us of the intention for vocations! What joy he had at the happy events of the Daughters of Wisdom (the beatification of Marie-Louise Trichet), and the events of the Brothers of St. Gabriel (the reopening of the Novitiate). He also shared in the sorrows: the deaths and illnesses of others.

**He loved Mary:** he could not avoid talking about her in his sermons and catechism classes. In Antsiramandroso, Mary was the model for the mothers. So many activities were organised on Marian feasts and during the month of Mary!

**He was faithful in his friendships:** so many e-mails and testimonial letters were received from all over the world when he died: his friends from la Grigonnais, who created ASEM (Amitié, Solidarité, Entraide Madagascar), from France, Italy, Germany, Belgium, and from the bush! So many of us attended the mass of remembrance a year later, at the place where he died. Some said there were more than two thousand people from the bush, from the city, from everywhere: people of all colours living in Madagascar were there.

He was a missionary because a baptised person, a consecrated person, a religious-priest cannot fail to proclaim the Good News, at all times, and in a simple, understandable, and credible way, within the reach of those he spoke to.

We can say with Paul VI: *"Men have a greater need of witnesses than teachers, and if they listen to their teachers, it is because these are, first and foremost, witnesses"*.

*J.P. Calvez*

## **FATHER OLIVIER MAIRE**

*Second anniversary of his death*



When we were young, didn't we build magnificent sandcastles by the sea? The waves quickly erased all traces of them. Yes, the wear and tear of time always takes its toll.

In Saint Laurent-sur-Sèvre, time has also passed! It has already been two years since our dear Father Olivier left us. But, faithful, we are here together to tell him and to tell ourselves, that we loved him, that we want to listen to him beyond his departure, that we want to integrate his influence into our spiritual life.

Where do we stand?

Judicial officials are responsible for answering the important questions raised by his death: where, when, how, why?

Everyone is waiting, and our thoughts, today, are with his parents, his blood brothers, his brothers in the priesthood, not forgetting all those who were close to him, with affection and gratitude.

Father Olivier's sixty years on earth have produced a fruitfulness that goes far beyond the investigations of the justice system. It is up to us to *"dig, dig, dig, a treasure that is hidden inside"*, as Jean de la Fontaine said. By revisiting every period of Father Olivier's life, we can get to know him better: his humility, his discretion, his capacity to listen, the difficulties he faced, his deep faith, his trust in Mary to lead him to Jesus, and his fidelity to his Congregation.

Little by little, in a humble way, Father Olivier, like the wise Virgins, increased the oil in his lamp to prepare for the surprise coming of the Bridegroom, on 9<sup>th</sup> August 2021.

As we all know, Olivier Maire had an extremely discreet pen for writing. How many times did I tell him: *"When you will no longer be here, we are going to need so much what you are telling us today. Write! It's important!"*.

Well, he responded to this desire in another way than by writing books. He gave us his testament, visibly inspired by the Holy Spirit, who touches us all for our spiritual good. I am referring to his last homily. He offered us "in extremis" what was the finest flower of his life, of his spirituality, of his reason for being a priest: the Eucharist, the Bread of Life,...

Let me explain:

You all know the little miracle of the telephone placed next to a loudspeaker in the basilica? A hearing-impaired person recorded the last homily delivered by Father Olivier, on 8<sup>th</sup> August 2021, enabling us to write it down. It is available to everyone, and everyone should meditate on its depth and its many surprising insights.

Allow me to make a bold comparison:

- A few hours before his death, thanks to the Evangelist St. John, we have Jesus' final conversation with his disciples after the Last Supper. That was his testament, on Maundy Thursday evening, summing up the essence of his message.

- A few hours before his death, St. Louis-Marie, here itself, in front of his Bishop, during his final homily, spoke of the love of God and of his infinite mercy. That was his testament.

- A few hours before his death, Father Olivier, here itself, during his last homily on the Bread of Life, talked about the Eucharist and the gift, by anticipation, of his own life. This was his testament, his profession of faith, the fulfilment of the way he celebrated Mass every day. *"By receiving his Body, we commit ourselves to do the same. May our lives be also given to Christ for the life of the world, in our midst, and among ourselves"*.

This last homily represents a treasure signed with his blood. Do we have the right to forget him? If Father Olivier has sown the seed, it is so that, now, we ourselves become the soil that allows the *Mysterium Fidei* of the Eucharist to grow in us and around us.

Listening to this testament, publicly proclaimed in our basilica, no one, dear friends, can claim the right to ask for silence. Our tears and condolences can only be sincere if we accept these last words of Father Olivier. This is not a sermon for "politically-thinking minds"! Just a few hours before his departure for heaven, he mentioned the implacable and trenchant logic of the Gospel. His conclusion is a prophecy about the blood he shed on the following night, and an call to be ready to do the same: *"We must give ourselves to Christ. This is what Saint Louis-Marie Grignion de Montfort called*

*Consecration. Since Jesus gave Himself to us, we must give ourselves to Him by becoming the Body of Christ”.*

So, dear friends, the last words of a deceased person always have a special resonance that challenges us and can change our lives. So be it!

*Bertrand Lemaire*

**Thursday, August 10, 2023**

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

### **Introduction**

Poitiers, at the time of Father de Montfort and of 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 religious men and women.

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 for 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 formation". It was in that city that everything began, the commitment for the poor, the missions, the preaching, the spiritual guidance, but also 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 take a look at the way 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, wherever we are.

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

- Madame 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 Association of the 'elite' students of the Jesuit College
- Jacques Goudeau
- The inhabitants of Montbernage

Five individuals, and four groups of people.

**The mysterious and deeply human ways of Providence**

## Madame De Montespan

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. That letter was written **"by order of Madame de Montespan"**, asking him to "come to Fontevraud immediately to attend the ceremony of the Sisters who were receiving the veil/the habit. The ceremony was to take place on the following Tuesday. Montfort specifies in his letter addressed to Mr. Leschassier, Superior of the Seminary of Saint-Sulpice, in Paris: "I, therefore, left, on foot, the same day. I arrived in Fontevraud on Wednesday morning, on the day after my sister took the habit".

In his letter, Mr. Grignon goes on to say: "During the two days that I stayed in Fontevraud, I had the honour of having several private conversations with **Madame de Montespan**. She questioned me on 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 that I have) of working for the salvation of the poor, my brothers. She told me that she approved the plan that I had, especially as she knew from experience that the instruction of the poor was much neglected, and she added that, if I wished, she would give me a canonry. 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, to tell him of 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 **Madame de Montespan** 1640-1707 (Website of the Château de Versailles)*

### An Influential Favourite of Louis XIV

*Mistress of Louis XIV in 1667, the Marquise de Montespan arrived at the Court thanks to Anne of Austria. This dazzlingly beautiful woman, feared by the courtiers, because of 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 an apartment close to his, before she was driven out by Madame de Maintenon, around 1680, and left Versailles for good in 1691.*

Mr. Grignon was still a seminarian when he met **Madame de Montespan** for the first time, some time between 1695 and 1697. She then offered him to take care of the future of two of his sisters. From Paris, where the girls had joined her, **Madame de Montespan** "had them taken, a few days later, to Fontevraud. Madame de Rochechouart, her sister, who was the 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 in 1677) and Françoise-Marguerite (born in 1679). The latter left the monastery. Sylvie took the habit on 26<sup>th</sup> April 1701, and died in Fontevraud in 1743. A little further in that same letter, Montfort 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."**

*What can we retain, today, from this episode of the meeting between Madame de Montespan and Father de Montfort ?*

*Since Madame 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 during 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 conversations with Madame de Montespan".*

*Finally, he accepted Madame 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 solely looked upon.*

*Father de Montfort, therefore, recognised that God/Holy Spirit was speaking to him through this meeting with Madame 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 ceased 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 do I listen to people who, at first sight, 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**

*In 1701, de Montfort wrote: "I arrived in Poitiers on the eve of the feast of St. James and St. Philip, and I was obliged to wait there for Monseigneur de Poitiers for four days, who was about to return from Niort.*

*During that time, I made a little retreat in a small room, where I was locked up in the middle of a large city 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 a very short time to me. **However, it seemed very long 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 them to give me alms; some gave more, others less, the poorest a penny, the richest a sol.** All of this happened without my knowing it. I finally came out of the church to ask at what time the supper was, and to ask permission to serve the poor at table. But I was disappointed, having learned that they did not eat in community, and surprised, having learned that **they wanted to give me alms** and that the doorman 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 it is.***

*In 1704, while Father de Montfort was in Paris, he received a petition from the poor of the General Hospital of Poitiers, which was 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 send 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 him around them, and organised a collection to give him alms.*
- *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 their souls.

"Inside the hospital, he had organised a humble association of girls, which he wanted to dedicate to the Wisdom of the Incarnate Word in order to confound the false wisdom of the world". From among the women boarders and the 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*, where he erected a cross. These women met, according to a set of rules, for exercises of piety, meditation, and to pray 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 when she entered into the service of the poor of 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 he chose, not according to the usual criteria we would spontaneously think of, that is, physical, intellectual, or organisational criteria. On the contrary, he chose women who were "poor", but, without any doubt, rich inside. This was Wisdom's folly according to God. And he did all of this to improve the material and spiritual atmosphere of the hospital, and thus, "humanize" that place of confinement for people "neglected by the world".*

*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, Elisabeth, Marie Louise's sister, went to the church of St. Augustine. When she came back, she was very enthusiastic about the sermon she had heard from the preacher. That preacher was Grignon de Montfort. "She was greatly touched by the sermon of this man of God, and, as soon as she returned home, she was eager to tell her sister what she had heard. 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 tell him of her desire to become a religious.

*Thus, it was thanks to her sister that Marie-Louise met Father de Montfort. All of this because she was deeply touched by the words of that 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**

After the enthusiastic information given by her sister Elisabeth, Marie-Louise decided to go and see the "great preacher" the very next day. "She found him in the confessional, as she hoped for. She prepared herself for the sacrament and she introduced herself: what a surprise when the confessor, before going into the details of her conscience, asked her who was the person who talked 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 that young priest. She attended the retreats he preached in the hospital or in the neighbourhoods of Poitiers. She kept in touch with the small association of young girls, "La Sagesse" (Wisdom), which Father de Montfort had set up in the hospital.

Preoccupied by God's call to commit herself to religious life, Marie-Louise insisted that Father de Montfort should help her. She repeatedly expressed to him her desire to become a religious. She wanted him to tell her where her 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 then decided to take the necessary steps and spoke to Father de Montfort before asking for the approval of the new Bishop. Montfort spoke to the hospital office. His request was refused. Marie-Louise insisted, asking the Bishop's help: "Well, Monseigneur, these gentlemen do not want to receive me as a Governess, perhaps they will not refuse to receive me as a poor woman, and if, out of kindness, you accept to give me 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 knowledge and know-how in the field of treasury and hospital organisation. Father de Montfort integrated her into the small "Wisdom" 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<sup>nd</sup> 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 the 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 who was then only 19 years old.

*Marie Louise, a young laywoman, under the guidance of Father de Montfort, made the courageous choice to commit herself to the particular mission of caring for the poor. She took the initiative and made her choice to become a religious. She was not alone, despite the 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 particularly touches me in that experience?

### **Mathurin Rangeard**

#### **An Encounter, a Call, and a Response**

In 1705, 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 intentions, he asked him to stay with him and help him in his missions. For nearly 15 years, Mathurin taught catechism, other school subjects to children, giving them blessings and singing hymns. Father de Montfort did not speak to him in any other language than that used by the Saviour to call his Apostles: "Segue 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 in an unexpected way. For Mathurin, God's call came through the encounter and the request of Father de Montfort: "Follow me". Father de Montfort spoke like Jesus when he called Matthew. Matthew did not expect this; he had another project in mind; but he answered as a free man, without any hesitation.*

#### **For me today**

- What reflections do Mathurin's call and his response inspire in me?
- I look at the story of my life and remember the calls I have heard and that have been decisive in my commitments.
- I thank 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 to follow you, you continue to call whoever you want to follow you, like our Brother Mathurin. I give you thanks for all the lay Associates who respond to your calls today. Give us the audacity and the faith of Fr. de Montfort and of Bro. Mathurin, so that we, in turn, may dare to call 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 of Jesus your Son, Wisdom Incarnate. Amen!

## Jacques Goudeau – Montbernage, Poitiers

In the year 1705, the mission was ending in Montbernage (a neighbourhood of the city of Poitiers). As always, Father de Montfort gave some simple means for the mission to continue producing fruit after his departure. In the barn of the Sheepfold, transformed into a chapel, in front of the statue of Mary Queen of All Hearts, the prayer of the rosary was already well in place, But who was going to provide this service from now on? So, he asked: "If someone agrees to recite the rosary, here, on Sundays and feast days, and to sing the little crown at noon, I will leave the image of my good Mother here". It was then that Jacques Goudeau, a master weaver, offered to fulfil this mission. He would be faithful to that commitment for 40 years!

Thus, thanks to this "yes" to Father de Montfort's request, Christians in that neighbourhood that had a poor reputation, remained faithful to prayer. Father de Montfort could leave without worrying.

After the death of Father de Montfort, when Sister Marie-Louise came back from La Rochelle and was thinking of setting up the community of the Daughters of Wisdom in Poitiers, it was Jacques Goudeau who suggested that, in Saint Laurent-sur-Sèvre, where the tomb of Father de Montfort was located, Madame de Bouillé could help her to find a house 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 away 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 the help of someone who had just lived the mission, and who had publicly lived the act of renewing the promises of his baptism in front of the Christian community. He trusted this layman, Jacques Goudeau, a simple craftsman, to make sure the prayer of the rosary would go on. Thanks to him, the mysteries of Jesus' life continued to be contemplated with Mary. The mission continued, with the Virgin Mary leading 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, wherever I am involved as a lay Associate?
- What place is given to the prayer of the rosary, as a simple means of helping one another, and of growing in the knowledge and love of Jesus-Wisdom?

### **Prayer**

Lord, your servant, St. 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, in his neighbourhood, by agreeing to ensure the service of praying the rosary.

Virgin Mary, "Queen of All 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 All 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 All Hearts", full of grace, the Lord is with you, you are blessed among all women, and Jesus, who puts his confidence in 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

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

Note from the Complete Works, p. 36: "The college of the Jesuit Fathers. The students of the Collège Sainte-Marthe were joined by students of the University. Mr. Grignon brought them all together in a "Congregation" (as one of them put it), with its own rules and daily exercises.... (Souvenirs of 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 meditation, spiritual reading, reception of the sacraments, and apostolate with their "most undisciplined companions". 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 for his talks. 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 Tribunal 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 one's 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 in favour of those whom society neglects?
- Father de Montfort took care of the poor, but also of those who could have a positive influence on others because of 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, La 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 in Poitiers and in 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 them, 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 that 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 their 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 that 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 lay men 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 in 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 calls us to do, even today.

F. Maurice Hérault

**Note:** the extracts from the texts quoted come largely 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.

## HOMILY IN POITIERS

On May 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2023, I sent to Mgr Pascal WINTZER, Bishop of Poitiers, the letter of Father Luizinho, Superior General of the Montfort Missionaries, on behalf of the Montfortian family. Its content was to inform the Bishop of Poitiers that, today, August 10, the participants of the RIAM (International Meeting of Montfortian Associates) would make a pilgrimage to the city of Poitiers.

The next day, May 3<sup>rd</sup>, Bishop Pascal WINTZER wrote to me: "Father, can you express my gratitude to Father General for his letter. I hope that the day in Poitiers goes well. Unfortunately, I will not be able to be present: at that time, I will be in Lourdes with the diocesan pilgrimage of Poitiers; I regret not being able to welcome and greet you. Very fraternally and respectfully, Archbishop Pascal WINTZER".

I read that letter at the beginning of this homily so that we feel at home when we make our pilgrimage here, because, here, we are known and recognized by a father, the Pastor of this diocese, Mgr. Wintzer. We also thank Father Claudie, priest in-charge of the Marie-Louise de Poitiers parish, for welcoming us and being with us at this celebration.

In this diocese, Father de Montfort has known two Bishops. He was received by Bishop Antoine Girard de la Bournat. On March 8, 1702, Bishop Girard died. On April 15, 1702, he was replaced by Bishop Jean-Claude de La Poype (February 9, 1655 - February 3, 1732). So, let us pray for the Bishop of this diocese; let us pray for this diocese of Poitiers.

Today's readings invite us to follow Jesus. It is in following him that we serve him. Following him, we become his servants. "If anyone wants to serve me, let him follow me... if anyone serves me, my Father will honour him". And there are many ways to follow and serve Jesus. Our pilgrimage to Poitiers can help us discover or rediscover how we follow Jesus and how we serve him. In link with the context in which I live and work, I have a particular response to the call of Jesus. It is a gift of the Holy Spirit, it is a charism.

In link with Montfort, it is here, in this city, that he developed his special charism, his special place in the Church. What is this? The special charism of Louis-Marie was to be a missionary, who has particular characteristics summarized in a few words: the poor, villages or towns, catechism. Father de Montfort had a clear understanding of his place in the Church. In his letters, he spoke of his "attraction" (L 5,6,32) or "inclination" (L 5,6,9[3x],11): teaching catechism to the poor, in villages or towns.

As a result, Louis-Marie accepted the mission of chaplaincy in the General Hospital of Poitiers, because he wished, from that place, to expand his services to the poor of the city of Poitiers and of its neighbourhoods. Louis had no desire to "lock himself up" in the General Hospital. Because, according to him, "Catechism for the poor of the city and of the countryside is in his nature" (cf. L 9). It is his charism. This is what he did. In Letter 11, addressed to Father Leschassier and written from Poitiers, July 4, 1702, Louis wrote that "his own inclination has always been and still is for the missions". This is why, in 1705, with the agreement of Mgr de la Poype, he formally resigned from the "General Hospital" to undertake missions in the neighbourhoods of Poitiers, such as in Montbernage.

So, what is your particular charism for building the Church? How do you serve Jesus in the context in which you live?

F. Arnold Suhardi



Friday, August 11, 2023

## THE CALVARY OF PONTCHÂTEAU

### PERSPECTIVES FOR BETTER COLLABORATION BETWEEN THE PARISH OF PONTCHÂTEAU AND THE CALVARY

"The project to make Pontchâteau a radiant Centre for evangelisation is the fruit of an alliance initiated by the Montfort Missionaries and the Diocese of Nantes. This pastoral project has now the support of two other Congregations: the Daughters of Wisdom and the Brothers of St. Gabriel. As the project concerns both, The Calvary and the Parish of Pontchâteau, the parishioners are also involved in the project.

#### Parish & Sanctuary

**Sainte-Croix de Montfort Parish:** comprising 6 different churches: Pontchâteau, Saint-Guillaume, Saint-Roch, Missillac, Besné, and Sainte-Anne sur Brivet.

#### **Calvary Sanctuary of Pontchâteau**

#### Observation

"A Parish community is born of the Eucharist".

- We have noticed that the Eucharistic celebrations in the 6 churches that compose our Parish have a hard time to survive, and lack dynamism, especially for attracting young people. Therefore, if we want to give a boost to our parish, we have to find a way to revive our Sunday celebrations.
- Close to our parish is The Calvary, animated by the Montfort Missionaries, the Brothers of St. Gabriel, and the Daughters of Wisdom. Nowadays, that sanctuary attracts many people for various devotions, including Sunday mass. The Calvary represents the nucleus of the "radiant Centre", which could become the centre of the parish, and of a larger, more attractive and more fraternal Christian community...

#### The project

Based on this observation, we suggest:

- at first, to submit the proposal to have one parish (whose boundaries are to be redefined), centred on The Calvary, and including the other churches. The church of Pontchâteau would be the main church.
- in the long term, the only parish Mass on Sunday mornings would be celebrated at The Calvary, the heart of the parish and the gathering place for the entire parish community. This lively Sunday gathering and attractive Eucharist could be a visible sign of the desired radiant Centre.
- of course, there should be some intermediary steps: once a month, having one Sunday Mass, either in Pontchâteau or on The Calvary. We could then go further, inspired by our experience.
- we could imagine three parish days a year, with a Eucharist, followed by a shared lunch, and a convivial event: concert, conference, fair, etc.
- catechesis could take place before certain Sunday Masses.

- special efforts would be made to make this Mass unique and attractive: liturgy, welcoming children, conviviality...

**For the project to be a success, we are committed to meeting all the requirements in terms of:**

- **Human resources:** by setting up a motivated team to implement the project, counting on people who are already involved and/or not yet involved (newcomers, young couples, musicians, etc.).
- **Material conditions:** to have this unique Sunday Eucharist at The Calvary, and to welcome groups of children and young people, we first need to create the conditions to accommodate between 600 and 800 people on Sundays. Eventually, we could envisage a new church that would meet the needs of all the Centres - including the parish Centre, with all its activities (welcoming children, formation sessions, etc.).

But, to begin with, the existing facilities will have to be adapted to accommodate Sunday gatherings of 600 to 800 people, even in winter.

#### **Actions foreseen, for one year, in order to initiate the Sanctuary/Parish rapprochement**

It is clear that, before realizing these projects, they must be approved by the Parish Pastoral Team and by the Montfortian Community of The Calvary.

In order to unify the places of worship, Sunday Masses will gradually be alternated between Pontchâteau and The Calvary, starting with the family Mass. This is already done for the Parish feast in September (which, this year, was on September 10).

By alternation, we mean that, when there is Sunday Mass at The Calvary, there is no Mass in Pontchâteau. The Saturday evening Mass is, of course held, in the other "chapels".

Until the end of 2023, the current programme will remain the same, except that the family Mass will be held every month (see the dates for the school holidays).

From January 2024, the family Mass will be held alternately every other month in Pontchâteau and in The Calvary, which will be a first step in familiarising parishioners with this change.

From January 2024, the times for Mass will be unified, at 10.30 am, for both places (which is more practical if you want to create a moment of social gathering at the end of the Mass).

The family mass will therefore be followed by a "potluck" (a small team will be set up to organise and manage these potlucks, which is currently not the case).

This development should provide an opportunity for the animation teams of The Calvary and of the parish to "work" together; this will multiply the competencies and create cooperation between people.

When these developments will be made, particularly by the Parish Pastoral Team, information will be given to the parishioners, both, by oral announcements at the end of the Masses, and by inserting the information on the hymn sheets and on parish bulletins. A text will be drawn up to that effect.

By Father Hervé, SMM

## FROM 1709 TO THE PRESENT DAY, GENERATIONS OF MEN AND WOMEN AT THE SERVICE OF FATHER DE MONTFORT'S WORKS AT THE CALVARY OF PONT-CHÂTEAU

(M. André MARTIN)

### Presentation

Nearly 150 years ago, on 30 May 1874, the *Semaine religieuse du diocèse de Nantes* (*Weekly Catholic Journal of the Diocese of Nantes*) published a five-page article entitled "A Visit to the Calvary of Pontchâteau". The columnist reported that pilgrims and visitors were "pleasantly surprised at the considerable changes" that the monument had undergone in its surroundings. An "avenue 420 meters long and 20 meters wide" has been opened up and planted with trees. The moats around Calvary Hill have been repaired. "How could such a huge job be done? The answer came quickly: "As in the past, when Father de Montfort called, the people responded to the voice of the priests of Pontchâteau, and they set to work with eagerness, in the same spirit reminiscent of that of fifty years earlier; old men who had worked then, and who came to give a hand, are pleased to say so."

Thus, in December 1873, the Parish Priest of Pont-Château rallied "two hundred and forty men" to plant a string of trees around the hill.

In January 1874, 216 men from Campbon Parish began to build the avenue we mentioned earlier. On the following day, 214 men "came from Sainte-Anne-de-Campbon". Then, 220 men came from Crossac, followed by 130 men from Saint-Gildas-des-Bois. There were also "large numbers from even more remote parishes". One day, when the men from Pont-Château were called up, there were 540 of them on-site".

The author of the article of the *Semaine religieuse* (*Weekly Catholic Journal*) goes on to describe a typical day's work: "In the morning, these good people would arrive with their their lunch and their tools, picks and shovels, and would gather in the church square in Pont-Château. After kneeling at the altar of the One to whom they were dedicating their day, they would line up, cross the town while singing hymns, and head for the Calvary [...]. Once they reached the Calvary, everyone left his dinner on the ground; they gathered in the chapel to attend Holy Mass, and then, the work began. [...] You could admire the enthusiasm and unity with which all these men set to work straight away, and the speed with which they carried out the considerable earthworks, thanks much more to their good will than to the skill of the directions they were following, since the engineers were the vicars of the parish of Pont-Château [...]. At midday, the bell, ringing the Angelus, announced that it was time for lunch, and, an hour later, it marked the return to work. The day ended with the Way of the Cross [...]. Then, everyone would walk back through the town of Pont-Château, marching in good order and singing pious songs, as they had done in the morning. When they left those who had convened them, they waved goodbye in the hope of being called again very soon. Reading these pages, you'd feel like you were back in 1709, 1747, 1820 or in the years 1880 to 1910. The parish priest of Pont-Château, Abbé Nicol, in 1873 and 1874 was just reproducing exactly what his predecessors had done and what his successors would do, be they parish priests or Montfort Fathers.

The present appearance of the Calvary of Father de Montfort in Pont-Château is therefore the result of the many efforts of parishioners (men and women) over more than 300 years.

Although the era of major works came to an end in 1939, volunteers are still hard at work maintaining the grounds, restoring the statues and buildings, and preparing the special events organised on the site.

Father de Montfort not only started the Pont-Château Calvary, but he also initiated a practice that has been perpetuated to this day: the participation of volunteer workers (men and women), without whom nothing would exist today.

## 1) What did the first biographers of Father de Montfort say about the workers' mobilisation?

In 1724, Joseph Grandet wrote: "No sooner had he made known his plan to [erect a Calvary], that all the people eagerly offered to help him carry it out. For fifteen months they came from all sides, from twelve to fifteen leagues [that is, from 48 to 60 kilometers] to work on it, men, women, boys and girls, more than three hundred in number, each bringing provisions and tools to do the work." The example set by Father de Montfort encouraged these first workers on this Calvary initiative: "what greatly increased their fervour," Grandet continued, "and made them want to get on with the work, was that they saw Mr. de Montfort at their head tilling the earth, moving large stones and carrying them". The work was also stimulated by hymn singing and devout conversations.

The same year, Jean-Baptiste Blain also mentions this mobilization: Father de Montfort "called, as I have been told, peasants and workers, from ten and twelve leagues around and even from further away, to work there; and these poor people came, at his call, with a zeal animated by his, by troops and thousands, to give their day, their sweat and their pains to a man who had no salary nor other reward than heaven to offer them. I was told that more than twenty thousand men have worked there. »

According to Charles Besnard, around 1770, it was the insistence of the parishioners that led Father de Montfort to envisage a more grandiose work than he had initially planned: "One day after his exhortation, he talked about his plan to the priests and the assembled people. He showed them the great advantages that this Calvary would produce. They all understood and promised to work on it. On the first free day, he went to the middle of the land, accompanied by several of the inhabitants, designated the site, and gave the first shot, with a spike, to make a ditch to prevent animals from approaching the cross that he wanted to plant there. That seemed to be the extent of his plans. But God, who wanted to give him both, the merit of a greater undertaking and a very concrete disgrace, allowed the people of Pont-Château and the neighbouring parishes to show him so much eagerness to speed up this good work, that he improved his first project and gave it extraordinary scope and magnificence. He took a chalk line and drew a first enclosure four hundred feet in circumference; the second one was about fifty feet. The mountain, made from the earth removed from the moat, was one hundred and thirty-three feet wide. The entire moat was fifteen feet wide. No doubt, a lot of people were needed for such a job. So, there were a lot of them there every day, and especially on days off during the mission, when as many as four or five hundred people would gather. Some were spading the earth, others carrying it in sacks to the land that was to form the mountain". While continuing his missions, Father de Montfort returned regularly to Pont-Château to motivate the workers: "He gave orders and made all the appropriate arrangements for his project. His presence stimulated everyone; everyone worked with incredible zeal, young and old, rich and poor, men and women, men of distinction, ladies, and even some priests; they all made it a religious exercise to carry the earth and it seemed as if this work, however tiring it was, cost them nothing.

In his book published in 1785, Pierre-Joseph Picot de Clorivière confirms Besnard's version of the influence of the parishioners on the missionary's project: "The enthusiasm with which he saw that we were going to work gave rise to a much more magnificent idea". The biographer praises the courage of the workers in their great diversity: "The people worked with unbeatable courage. There were sometimes as many as 500 persons at work. Everyone worked without distinction, gentlemen, ladies, priests. "There were workers who came from very far away, bringing with them all the materials and tools they needed. Their primary motivation was religious: "Piety, which alone brought them to work, seemed to increase their natural strength and made them do things they would not have thought possible on any other occasion".

Dalin, in 1839, noted that "the faithful" were "perfectly disposed" to work for Father de Montfort's project. He launched the work: "Montfort, setting an example, grabbed a digging spade and gave the first blow. Immediately, everyone lined up, and the work began: enthusiasm was at its peak". Dalin repeats the information given by the previous biographers, sometimes word for word, adding that: "The workmen themselves said that they would never have been able to do so much, whatever be the salary".

In 1875, Abbé Pauvert gave a few technical details to highlight the achievement of the workers: "It is easy to imagine the gigantic task. Some 8,000 cubic meters of clay and sandstone had to be extracted, and 2,400,000 kilograms of rubble had to be carried in baskets or hoods". He also points out that the work was entirely voluntary: "There were always between two hundred and five hundred workers who, without receiving anything, brought their food and their tools, their carts and their oxen, and worked tirelessly [...]. The women were equally enthusiastic.

As we know, all these efforts ended in failure, with the monument being forbidden to be blessed and ordered to be demolished. The demolition was probably incomplete, as suggested by Mr. Olivier, in 1721: "We spent three months without being able to remove half the mountain, even though a large number of people were forced to work on it. It seems that the men had arms of steel to build it, and arms of wool to destroy it. Even today, we can still see the mountain and the nearly entire ditches".

## 2) A first attempt of restoration (1747-1748)

In 1747, at the request of the parish priest of Pont-Château, Vincent Naël, Fathers Mulot and Audubon, attempted the first restoration of the monument. As in Father de Montfort's day, the inhabitants of the neighbouring villages "abandoned their fields and their agricultural work" and came, in great number, to rebuild the hill. Many men had worked 38 years earlier under the direction of Father de Montfort. The project failed again, due to the hostility of the local authorities.

## 3) Rebuilding after the Revolution (1818-1874)

Having just been appointed parish priest of Pont-Château, in 1818, François Gouray, a native of the neighbouring parish of Sainte-Reine, planned to re-establish the Calvary Hill. Unlike his predecessors, he first obtained authorisation from the civil and episcopal authorities, before recruiting hundreds of volunteer workers. Most of them were descendants of those who had worked with Father de Montfort and with Father Audubon. François Gouray composed a hymn to motivate the 500 day laborers who came from Pont-Château and from the surrounding parishes, as in 1709-1710: Missillac, La Chapelle-des-Marais, Sainte-Reine, Crossac, Saint-Joachim, Besné, Drefféac, Prinquiau, Campbon, Saint-Gildas-des-Bois, Donges, and Saint-Dolay. The parish priest of Pont-Château was also responsible for building the chapel at the foot of the hill, again with the help of voluntary workers.

This reconstruction was part of the movement launched by the Catholic Church after the French Revolution (1789-1799) in order to "reconquer" minds and space. This reconquest was supported by the monarchy under the Restoration period, between 1815 and 1830. Thus, it was the sub-prefect of Savenay, Mr. Dufeugray, who laid the foundation stone for the chapel, on 1<sup>st</sup> March 1821. In addition, three fleurs-de-lis, symbols of royalty, adorn the main cross of the new Calvary.

In 1857, François Gouray's successor, Abbé Pierre Retière, seemed to lose interest in the Calvary. He was at the head of the parish of Pont-Château for only seven years, compared to the 39 years that François Gouray was there.

The parish archives do not show any mobilization of parishioners before 1873. In the meantime, in 1865, the Montfort Fathers had come to establish themselves at the Calvary. Their main concerns

were to gain acceptance from the local clergy, to organize the material aspects of their installation, and to manage the site on a day-to-day basis. As was previously mentioned, it was not until 1873-1874 that new mobilizations took place.

#### 4) Transforming the Calvary into a "Holy Land in Brittany" (1888-1939)

1888 was a pivotal year. On 22<sup>nd</sup> January, in Rome, Father de Montfort was beatified by Pope Leo XIII. That same year, Father Jacques Barré came back to the Pont-Château Calvary as the new Director of the pilgrimage.

Jacques Barré wanted to transform the site by rebuilding a new hill, and turning the surrounding 14 hectares into a "Jerusalem in Brittany", with a monumental Way of the Cross and shrines linked to the Rosary.

He was assisted in his task by Alfred Gerbaud. Originally from Legé, a village in the south of the Loire-Inférieure region. In 1862, Alfred Gerbaud joined the Pontifical Zouaves regiment to defend the Papal States against Italian patriots. He then travelled to the Orient as a customs officer and visited Jerusalem. From the end of 1891, he came to the Calvary very often and became a sort of site manager. He drew "a panorama of the Pilgrimage", which presented the entire development project.

Like Father de Montfort, Jacques Barré recruited thousands of men and women, mainly farmers, to carry out work on an unprecedented scale. These volunteers came from the south-east of the diocese of Vannes and the west of the diocese of Nantes. As in 1709-1710, the daily work was first and foremost a pilgrimage. That's why the workers came dressed in their finest clothes, even though they had to move huge blocks of stone, carry impressive quantities of earth in baskets or wield a spade for long hours. Nearly 700 days of work were done over a period of 25 years.

In 1902, Jacques Barré recounted: "We appealed to the people of Brittany, inviting them to come and help us, first to transport the materials for the Praetorium, and then, the following year, to extract and place the huge blocks for the Grotto of Gethsemane and to dig up the Kidron torrent. It was only a trial run. Forty parishes sent us their men. We had 300 to 400 volunteer workers every day. The women claimed the honour of making the Way of the Cross: a considerable task, carried out with admirable faith and enthusiasm! But all of this was only a preparation for the work on the Calvary itself. For five years, 120 parishes came to offer us their help. We can estimate that more than 120,000 days were donated, free of charge, by 80,000 different people. On some days, we had as many as 1,200 workers at a time. Many of them walked 6 leagues or more. One day, some poor women who didn't have enough money to pay for the railway came on foot from 12 leagues away. They had left the day before. The furthest ones usually left at midnight, sometimes at ten o'clock in the evening, to be here at 5 o'clock in the morning. One day, a special train brought us 800 workers. Another day, it brought 600 of them. Some of these workers had walked 4 leagues to get to the railway station. They had to set off at midnight. They had spent 4 francs on their railway ticket. After working all day, they left happy to have contributed to a work designed to make Jesus-Christ better known and loved, happy to have thereby shared in the glory and happiness of the Apostles. Often, they could not return home before midnight. That was the whole day. But the more tired they were, the more joy there was, because there was more merit.

We also know that the pupils of the apostolic school gave a few hours, as Jacques Barré recounted in 1896: "Today, Saturday, which is usually a day of unemployment, we can see from our window that there is action on the Calvary site, much action. The workers are little ones rather than big ones. But how intrepid they seem at work! There is no doubt about it, they are children from the apostolic school. We knew that, throughout the week, they had been busy with long exam sessions, which is, for everyone, teachers and pupils alike, an occasion of much tension. Obviously, the idea is to relax

a little; the exams are over. And, without knowing it, we could say that the exams were satisfactory. Today's favour of working on the Calvary is highly prized; valued more than any walk or holiday. So, the brave children are having a field day! The carriages are loaded and unloaded, going up and down with uncommon speed and, it has to be said, with much regularity. There is much animation. It seems that the youngest children do not want to do less than their elders. In any case, everyone is at his assigned post: train driver, team leader, pointsman, loader. The embankment they are working on is rapidly advancing along the hillside.

In 1913, Jacques Barré left Pont-Château, and then, the First World War broke out. This brought the work to a halt. The results were impressive: the Praetorium, the Scala Sancta, the monumental Stations of the Cross, the caves of Gethsemane and Bethlehem, the house of Nazareth, the Visitation and the Ascension had all been built.

These transformations took place in a very tense political context. It was the time of the "discordat", that is to say the conflict between the French Republic and the Catholic Church concerning education, the presence of religious symbols in public buildings, and processions in the public space. The mobilization of thousands of volunteer workers, the organization of mass gatherings during the blessings of new monuments and pilgrimages were all opportunities to assert the power of the Church in the face of its adversaries. The remarks made during the sermons and teachings are unequivocal. The Calvary of Pont-Château was the living manifestation of the triumph of faith.

Subsequently, in the 1920s and 1930s, working days were fewer. It was more difficult to mobilize volunteers. The war of 1914-1918 brought death in all the parishes which sent labour, particularly among the agricultural world. The Mill of Father de Montfort, the Assumption, the Sacred-Heart, the Temple, the Cenacle and the new Visitation were built. Montfort Fathers would mostly call on professional craftsmen to do the work.

### 5) A particular form of mobilisation: subscriptions

Even if the mobilisation of workers (men and women) cost nothing to the Montfort Fathers, they had to face up to unavoidable expenses, in particular the work of craftsmen and sculptors. This is why, in the spring of 1893, a lottery was organized to finance four statues for the future monumental Way of the Cross. Tickets were sold for 25 centimes each. The prizes were donated by parishioners and included statuettes of Our Lady of Lourdes, trinkets, various items of children's clothing and a tea set.

Parishioners were also invited to donate money. Between 1895 and 1897, the parish of Crossac was the most generous one.

Between 1930 and 1940, Father Daniel also appealed to the generosity of the faithful, particularly to that of the readers of *L'Ami de la Croix* (the Friend of the Cross), the monthly pilgrimage magazine. Donations poured in from Loire-Inférieure, and from other Breton departments : Maine-et-Loire, Vendée and Mayenne. Donations were also sent from abroad, including Belgium, the United States and Vietnam.

### 6) Preparing and managing special events

The archives are virtually silent on the involvement of volunteers in preparing events such as parish, diocesan and inter-diocesan pilgrimages, which increased in number between 1888 and the 1980s. The reports published in *L'Ami de la Croix* and in the local press insist on the number and geographical origin of the pilgrims, and on the program of those days.

We should not forget the women who made the costumes for the open-air Passion plays in the early 1930s. These costumes were made by parishioners from Pont-Château, Crossac and the area around the Calvary. The roles were played by almost 200 pupils from the Calvary apostolic school. All of this under the initiative and direction of Father Henri Daniel, who also wrote the texts.

The most popular pilgrimage took place during the montfortian celebrations, on 10, 11, 12 and 13 June 1948, which brought together 200,000 pilgrims to celebrate the canonisation of Father de Montfort. The parish priest of Pont-Château said nothing about these days, but he mentioned that "so as not to give the impression that the parish was left out of the preparations for these festivities, I will simply remind you that thirty teams were formed by the parish clergy, including the entire population of the countryside, and that these teams magnificently decorated four kilometres of the route, while the urban population decorated the streets of the town and the church square where midnight mass was celebrated".

The municipality of Pont-Château, led by Maurice Sambron, played an active role in the preparation and running of these days. As early as 14 June, a municipal poster thanked the population.

## Conclusion

More than 300 years after Father de Montfort's attempted to build a monumental Calvary on the Madeleine moors, 200 years after the first successful restoration under the direction of François Gouray, and more than a century after the metamorphosis of the site undertaken by Jacques Barré, many volunteers are now the heirs to the thousands of men and women who gave their time and energy to make the Calvary what it is today.

Today, around a hundred volunteers are responsible for the upkeep of the site, the flowering of the chapels, welcoming pilgrims and tourists, the readings at Masses, Montfortian hospitality, etc.

These men and women are the heirs and continuators of a centuries-old history.

## PRESENTATION OF THE PROJECT LAUDATO SI'

The Project Laudato Si is a space open to all, particularly to the poor.

We are privileged to be on a site of 14 hectares which offers a plethora of environmental and artistic opportunities, and which is open to all: pilgrims and tourists.

### 1 - Our project

We wish to create:

**A lively abode, a vibrant place connected to nature and spirituality.** A place where selflessness, gratitude, beauty, listening, sharing, love, and togetherness prevail.



**A place of natural beauty, of artistic expression (manual work, creativity),** to welcome, comfort, and restore joy and the zest for life into the human body, for victims of trauma, of abuse..., but also for any human being in a state of fragility, or in need of renewal, in quest of meaning.

**A place of creation and 'living together'** that brings people to life.

**2 - To achieve this objective, we have chosen 3 aspects focusing on different themes:** gratuity, beauty, sharing, fraternity and altruism.

A- the human aspect: respecting life - welcoming fragility.

B- the environmental aspect, in all its biodiversity: caring for our common home.

C- the cultural aspect: arts and training workshops.

“hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor.” (Laudato Si, No. 49)

**3 - Concrete projects planned for each group:**

These projects will be realized over time depending on human and financial resources.

**A) THE HUMAN ASPECT:** Respecting life and welcoming fragilities.

- The "St. Joseph Village" of the Calvary, "Le Sycomore", is there since March 2019. The couple that runs the house welcomes around ten vulnerable people to help them get back on their feet, through a family-friendly life, manual activities, and times of prayer. This village is at the very heart of the Calvary of Pontchâteau and aims to continue the preference that Father de Montfort gave to the poor.

- In collaboration with the Association "Mère de Miséricorde", a "Way of Consolation" will be officially inaugurated on 24 September 2023. This initiative aims to help couples who have lost an unborn child and who wish to be reconciled with God and with the child. The couple is invited to name the child, whose name will then be inscribed on a mosaic plaque and placed on the walls of the podium in the courtyard of the Temple. On the signs that mark out that route, we find biblical words, as well as Father de Montfort's thoughts taken from his hymns.

- As an extension of the "Via Crucis", (the Way of the Cross), we would like to build a "Via Lucis": a path of light and resurrection.

**B) THE ENVIRONMENTAL ASPECT, BIODIVERSITY:** caring for our common home.

- We want to develop biodiversity, in partnership with the Natural Regional Park Brière.

- We are gradually planning to set up an arboretum, an educational trail, a conservatory orchard, and a spiritual labyrinth.

- We will be launching workshops to raise awareness of the need to preserve our common home (climate fresco, biodiversity, permaculture, understanding living things, etc.) and retreat sessions on Laudato Si.

- We will make sure that our developments and new buildings comply with environmental standards.

**C) THE CULTURAL ASPECT:** arts and training workshops.

- We plan to create an open-air theatre on the Calvary site in order to host shows linked to the Calvary project.
- We will be working on enhancing, maintaining, and restoring all the works of art located on the site or to be housed there: paintings, mural frescoes, statues, marquetry, etc. The mural describing Father de Montfort's life, which is in the chapel at the foot of the Calvary, will soon be restored.
- We are already organising guided tours, in collaboration with the local Tourism Office. In the future, we wish to open training workshops in Arts and Culture, in partnership with people involved on the site and in the local area.

*Bro. Jean Friant – FSG*

## **PROSPECTS FOR CHILDREN & YOUTH GROUP AT THE CALVARY OF PONTCHÂTEAU**

Dear Montfortian Associates,

I was entrusted with the mission of leading the prospecting group for the future Pontchâteau Youth Centre.

Our reflection team comprises a Montfortian Missionary (Father Willy - from Indonesia), a Brother of St. Gabriel (Brother Michel - from Senegal), and lay people who have at heart youth evangelization in today's world, and who are already involved in such a mission.

We hope that our **PASTORAL ORIENTATION**, which is the basis of the **YOUTH GROUP**, "will enable every young person to encounter the Lord and experience His presence, so as to be nourished and transformed as witnesses, disciples, and missionaries contributing to the development of Montfortian spirituality".

Pope Francis encourages missionary evangelisation among young people, and often reminds us that pastoral work with this group requires us to abandon the comfortable criterion of "we've always done it this way" in favour of "daring to make bold, concrete proposals" with the zeal, creativity and intuition so characteristic of Father de Montfort.

This is why our reflection was challenged to organise special events for young people, especially the most vulnerable, who were particularly loved by Father de Montfort and Marie-Louise Trichet.

### **These events could take the following form:**

- Leading worship evenings with teachings adapted to young people and coloured by Montfortian spirituality, which would take up various forms, according to the liturgical calendar and times...
- Laudato Si evenings, in nature, with stargazing and contemplative meditation.
- Walks/pilgrimages/sport and spiritual events around the Sanctuary.
- Proposals for some young people to prepare and animate a Mass for young people, once in three months, at the shrine and in the parish.
- Some innovative ideas, such as "Christian Top Chef", based on a famous reality TV show - In other words, cooking sessions, bringing together persons of different generations (young

people, lay people and consecrated members of the Montfortian family) through cooking competitions and moments of spiritual meditation.

- And many other ideas to come...

Young people being visually sensitive, we will try to make our proposals ever more "attractive", that would allow them "to be God's witnesses" and "to reveal Christ-Wisdom", through art, music, entertainment, dance and carefully designed settings...

We are fortunate to have in our team lay people who are sensitive to communicating with young people via social networks.

We are conscious that the Pontchâteau sanctuary is a magnificent place steeped in history, and we are keen to make it known to young people, by passing on to them the spiritual heritage that was bequeathed to us by our Founders.

Thus, we count on your prayers to help us face the challenges that await us as we implement this vast evangelisation project for the future Pontchâteau Youth Centre.

Sister Christine Pichery - Daughter of Wisdom

On behalf of the Youth & Children Prospecting Group

Friday, August 10, 2023

## THE WAY OF THE CROSS

We slowly make the sign of the cross: In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen**

### 1<sup>st</sup> Station: Jesus is Condemned to Death

#### From the Gospel according to St. John

When Pilate heard these words he brought Jesus out and sat down on the judge's bench in a place called "Stone Pavement", in Hebrew, Gabbatha. It was preparation day for Passover, and it was about noon. And he said to the Jews, "Behold, your king!" They cried out, "Take him away, take him away! Crucify him!" Pilate said to them, "Shall I crucify your king?" The chief priests answered, "We have no king but Caesar."

#### Reflection

Jesus gave everything, he offered everything. He preached love, healed the sick, and comforted countless broken hearts. His first priority was the little ones, the poor, the foreigners, the sick. Today, it could be the exiled, the illegal immigrants, the jobless, the homeless.

**Let us pray with Montfort so that, like him, we may discover the incredible love of Jesus.**

Merciful Father, in your immense love, we pray to you for all those who are unlawfully condemned by the injustices of men, those condemned by sickness..., Grant them your help and your grace. May all peoples live together in solidarity.

**Our Father / Hail Mary / Glory be to the Father...**

**Song :** *Pitié, Seigneur, car nous avons péché.*

*Lord, have mercy, because we have sinned.*

### 2<sup>nd</sup> Station: Jesus Carries his Cross

#### From the Gospel according to St. John

Then, he handed him over to them to be crucified. And, carrying the cross, he went out to what is called the "Place of the Skull", in Hebrew, Golgotha.

#### Reflection

Our crosses are heavy on our shoulders, our daily crosses planted by life in our hearts and bodies. It is long, the road to overcome our trials and accept the cross! Let's walk step by step and place our crosses on the Cross of Jesus; they will become like a tree of life.

**Let us pray to the Father, with Montfort, so that, like him, we understand the place and meaning of the cross in our lives.**

Lord, since no one can be your disciple and share in your Kingdom unless they take up their cross and follow you, help us take up our crosses with both arms and walk, day after day, in the hope of finding rest and life with you.

**Our Father / Hail Mary / Glory be to the Father...**

**Song :** *Si l'espérance t'a fait marcher plus loin que la peur, (bis)  
tu auras les yeux levés.  
Alors tu pourras tenir jusqu'au soleil de Dieu.*

*If hope has made you go beyond your fear, (bis)  
You will look up,  
And walk in the light of the Lord.*

### 3<sup>rd</sup> Station: Jesus Falls for the First Time

**From the Book of Isaiah**

Who believed what was announced? He was spurned and avoided by men, a man of suffering, knowing pain. Yet it was our pain that he bore, our sufferings he endured. By his wounds, we were healed.

#### Reflection

Jesus, you fall from exhaustion, you fall under the weight of the Cross and of men's cruelty. You're weak, you're a man of pain, lying on the floor. You generously give up your strength because of your love for us, and this weakness of love causes you to fall. Today, so many people fall: succumbing to anxiety about their future, and to depression; so many men and women feel invaded by despair, anguish, sadness, and loneliness.

**Let us pray with Father de Montfort so that, like him, we may love Jesus' Cross.**

*Merciful Father, your son experienced humiliation, rejection, mockery for us. We thank you for loving us to the end. When we fall, help us to get up, in spite of everything, with our eyes fixed on you, in confidence.*

**Our Father / Hail Mary / Glory be to the Father...**

**Song :** *Vous qui ployez sous le fardeau, vous qui cherchez le vrai repos.  
Ne craignez pas pour votre corps, ne craignez pas devant la mort,  
Levez les yeux vers le Seigneur, criez vers lui sans perdre cœur.*

*You who bend under the burden, you who seek true rest.  
Do not fear for your body, do not fear before death,  
Lift up your eyes to the Lord, cry out to him without losing heart.*

### 4<sup>th</sup> Station : Jesus Meets His Afflicted Mother

**From the Gospel according to St. John**

Standing by the Cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother's sister, Mary, the wife of Clopas, and Mary of Magdala. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved, he said to his mother, "Woman, behold, your son." Then he said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother." And from that hour the disciple took her into his home.

### Reflection

Lord Jesus, your mother Mary is present in every moment of your life, just as she is in ours. She is a mother who contemplates her son's physical and moral suffering. Helpless, her heart is pierced by that suffering.

**With Montfort, let us pray to the Lord to grant us the grace to participate with Mary in the salvation of the world.**

Lord, we entrust to you all the mothers of the world who mourn the loss of their children, their husbands, or their loved ones. We pray that all those who suffer may find consolation in Mary's loving gaze and the strength to rise again.

**Our Father / Hail Mary / Glory be to the father...**

## 5<sup>th</sup> Station: Simon of Cyrene Helps Jesus Carry His Cross

### From the Gospel according to St. Luke

As they led him away, they took hold of a certain Simon, a Cyrenian, who was coming from the fields; and after laying the Cross on him, they made him carry it behind Jesus. Lk 23, 26

### Reflection

Very often, the weight of the cross on my brother's or sister's shoulder depends on me. When I refuse the outstretched hand, when I turn a deaf ear to the call of the sick, when I leave my friend in solitude, I add some weight on the crosses of my neighbours. It's enough to be there, like Simon of Cyrene, to have a compassionate heart to relieve those who are bowing under their cross. My own cross becomes lighter when I help my brother carry his...

**Let us pray with Father de Montfort, so that, like Simon of Cyrene we may help our neighbours carry their crosses with courage.**

Lord, through Simon of Cyrene's example, you have shown us an example of compassion and participation in your suffering. Grant that we should know how to be attentive to all those who need help to carry their cross. Let us pray for those who devote themselves to the service of the sick.

**Our Father / Hail Mary / Glory be to the Father...**

**Song :** *Si tu dénonces le mal qui brise l'homme, si tu soutiens ton frère abandonné,*

*La nuit de ton appel sera lumière de midi (bis)*

*Alors, de tes yeux pourra luire une étoile, l'étoile qui annonce la terre de demain,*

*L'étoile qui annonce la terre de Dieu.*

*If you denounce the evil that breaks man, if you support your abandoned brother,*

*Night will be changed into light (bis)*

*Then, from your eyes, a star will shine, a star that announces tomorrow's land,*

*A star that announces the land of God.*

## 6<sup>th</sup> Station: Veronica Wipes the Face of Jesus

### From Psalm 27

“Come,” says my heart, “seek his face”;  
Your face, LORD, do I seek!  
Do not hide your face from me;  
Do not repel your servant in anger. You are my salvation;  
Do not cast me off; do not forsake me, God, my Saviour!

### Reflection

Veronica looked for Jesus in the middle of the crowd. She looked for him and finally found him. She wanted to soothe him by wiping his face with a towel. A simple gesture, but it expressed her love for him and her faith in him. This gesture reminds us that Jesus is present in everyone who walks the road to Golgotha and that we must look for Him in all those who suffer.

**Let us pray to the Lord so that, like Father de Montfort, we may see Jesus in our brothers and sisters, especially in the neediest:**

Lord, you teach us that an injured and forgotten person does not lose her value nor her dignity, and that she remains a sign of your hidden presence in the world. Help us wipe out the traces of poverty and injustice on her face, so that your image be present and shining on it. Let us pray for all those who look for your face and find it in the face of the sick, the dying, the poor, the migrants, the forgotten, and of all those who are rejected by the world...

### Our Father / Hail Mary / Glory be to the Father...

*Song : Je cherche le visage, le visage du Seigneur,  
Je cherche son image tout au fond de vos cœurs.  
Vous êtes le corps du Christ, Vous êtes le sang du Christ,  
Vous êtes l'amour du Christ,  
Alors ? ...Qu'avez-vous fait de lui ?*

*I seek the face, the face of the Lord,  
I seek his image deep in your hearts.  
You are the body of Christ, You are the blood of Christ,  
You are the love of Christ,  
So ? ...What did you do to him?*

## 7<sup>th</sup> Station : Jesus falls a Second Time

### From the Book of Isaiah

Though harshly treated, he submitted and did not open his mouth; Like a lamb led to slaughter or a sheep silent before shearers, he did not open his mouth.

### Reflection

Jesus' falls are proofs that God, out of love, became like human beings. He took our weaknesses upon himself to help us understand that weakness and poverty are paths that lead to God. There are so

many people exiled because of war or threatened because of their faith. So many men and women feel crushed down by their burdens, they know unemployment, they fear for their future, or simply for tomorrow... When we fall, we forget that Jesus is with us, at our side.

**Let us pray to the Father to grant us the same grace as Montfort: never to consider the Cross without Jesus, nor Jesus without the Cross:**

Lord, send us your Spirit to console and comfort us. When we are in despair or even in anger, grant that we listen to your call to rise up and join all those who dedicate themselves to the service of others, of freedom, and of respect for life.

**Our Father / Hail Mary / Glory be to the Father...**

**Song :** *Si la souffrance t'a fait pleurer des larmes de sang (bis),*

*Tu auras les yeux lavés.*

*Alors tu pourras prier avec ton frère en croix.*

*If suffering made you cry tears of blood (bis),*

*Your eyes will be washed.*

*Then, you can pray, with your brother on the cross.*

## **8<sup>th</sup> Station: Jesus Speaks to the Women of Jerusalem**

**From the Gospel according to St. Luke**

A large crowd of people followed Jesus, including many women who mourned and lamented over him. Jesus turned to them and said, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep instead for yourselves and for your children".

### **Reflection**

By consoling these women, Jesus wants to console all the women of the world, all those who mourn a loved one who could not accompany them to the end of the road, all those who fight for respect for human rights and justice.

**Let us pray to the Father that, like Father de Montfort, we may become more aware of our sins, which continue to make Jesus' body suffer:**

*Merciful Father, you told us, through your Son: "Blessed are those who weep, for they will be comforted". These women who are there when they are needed are happy. Look at those who weep, their tears are priceless to you. Look at the women who express tenderness: they know how to invent gestures of love, and they know how to speak words of peace that give confidence and hope.*

**Our Father / Hail Mary / Glory be to the Father...**

**Song :** *N'aie pas peur, Laisse-toi regarder par le Christ,*

*Laisse-toi regarder car il t'aime. (bis)*

*Do not be afraid, let yourself be looked at by Christ,*

*Let yourself be looked at because He loves you. (bis)*



## 9<sup>th</sup> Station : Jesus Falls for a Third Time

### From the Gospel according to St. Matthew

“Come to me, all you who labour and are burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart; and you will find rest for yourselves.”

#### Reflection

Once again Jesus falls. But he needs to be lifted up so that he can continue to the execution site. He could have escaped arrest in the Garden of Olives, but he went all the way so that he could show us how much he loves us.

**Let us pray for the grace of "giving love for love", because, as Montfort says, "love is paid for by love" (Hymns, 44.2)**

God our Father, your Son has fallen again and again; we entrust to you all our brothers and sisters who fall; let us learn to understand that we can only stand with others. Your Son, out of love for us, took upon himself all our sins; remove our fears, break our hearts of stone, and open our hearts to the presence of your love.

#### Our Father / Hail Mary / Glory be to the Father...

**Song** : *Tu sais combien les hommes ignorent ce qu'ils font.*

*Tu n'as jugé personne, tu donnes ton pardon ;  
Partout des pauvres pleurent, partout on fait souffrir ;  
Pitié pour ceux qui meurent et ceux qui font mourir.*

*You know how much men do not know what they are doing.  
You have not judged anyone, you give your forgiveness;  
Everywhere the poor cry, everywhere people make people suffer;  
Have mercy on those who die and on those who cause death.*

## 10<sup>th</sup> Station: Jesus is Stripped of His Garments

### From the Gospel according to St. John

The soldiers also took his tunic, but the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from the top down. So, they said to one another, “Let’s not tear it, but cast lots for it to see whose it will be,” in order that the passage of the scripture might be fulfilled: “They divided my garments among them, and for my vesture they cast lots.”

#### Reflection

Jesus' Way of the Cross comes to an end. He has now reached the summit of the Calvary, and the ultimate humiliation has been inflicted on him: he is subjected to public laughter.

**Let us pray to the Lord to grant us the grace of detachment like Montfort.**

Lord Jesus, you who allowed yourself to be undressed to teach us true abandonment, give us the opportunity to seek the essential values of life and the concern to defend the inviolable dignity of every human being.

**Our Father / Hail Mary / Glory be to the Father...**

**Song :** *Regardez l'humilité de Dieu,  
Regardez l'humilité de Dieu,  
Regardez l'humilité de Dieu,  
Et faites-lui l'hommage de vos cœurs.*

*Look at the humility of God,  
Look at the humility of God,  
Look at the humility of God,  
And pay him homage with your hearts.*

## 11<sup>th</sup> Station: Jesus is Nailed to the Cross

**From the Gospel according to St. Luke**

When they came to the place called "the Skull", they crucified him and the criminals there, one on his right, the other on his left. [...] Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, they know not what they do."

**Reflection**

So many people are confined to hospital beds! Let's also think of their families who are worried. Let us pray for the victims of natural disasters and wars, the disabled, the sick, and the elderly. Let's also think of those who have been wounded in love, those who are divorced, separated...

**With Montfort, let us pray for the contrition of our sins.**

Lord Jesus, at the moment when the nails tear your flesh, let us contemplate you on the Cross with gratitude for the gift of your life. You who are the Way, the Truth and the Life, be the light of those who walk by night, and the hope of the humiliated and crucified of this world. Teach us to welcome your love so that we can live with you.

**Our Father / Hail Mary / Glory be to the Father...**

**Song :** *Mon Père, mon Père, je m'abandonne à toi.  
Fais de moi ce qu'il te plaira.  
Quoi que tu fasses, je te remercie,  
Je suis prêt à tout, j'accepte tout,  
Car tu es mon Père, je m'abandonne à toi,  
Car tu es mon Père, je me confie en toi.*

*Father, my Father, I surrender myself to you.  
Do with me what you please.  
Whatever you do, I thank you,  
I am ready for anything, I accept everything,  
For you are my Father, I surrender myself to you,  
For you are my Father, I trust in you.*

## 12<sup>th</sup> Station: Jesus Dies on the Cross

### From the Gospel according to St. John

After this, aware that everything was now finished, in order that the Sripture might be fulfilled, Jesus said, "I thirst." There was a vessel filled with vinegar. So, they put a sponge soaked in vinegar on a sprig of hyssop and put it up to his mouth. When Jesus had taken the vinegar, he said, "It is finished." And bowing his head, he handed over the spirit.

### Reflection

Lord, everything is said, everything is finished, and everything is accomplished. No other word is needed to understand your love for the men and women of this world. Lifted up on the Cross, you died for me, for my brothers and sisters, and for the whole world. It is now for me, today and every day, to say: "Into your hands, I commend my spirit".

### With Montfort, let us pray to the Father for all those who are drawing near to death:

Lord Jesus, you died for our sins and our salvation. You died for all men. From now on, we will no longer be able to look at any man with indifference. Each one has immense value to you since you gave your life for each one of us. Give us the opportunity to see in every person we meet, not just a human being, but a brother or a sister.

### Our Father / Hail Mary / Glory be to the Father...

*Song : Quand Jésus mourait au calvaire  
Rejeté par toute la terre,  
Debout, la Vierge, sa mère,  
Souffrait, souffrait auprès de lui.*

*When Jesus died on the Calvary  
Rejected by the world,  
Standing, the Virgin, his Mother,  
Suffered, suffered near him.*

## 13<sup>th</sup> Station: Jesus is Taken Down from the Cross

### From the Gospel according to St. John

Standing by the Cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother's sister, Mary, the wife of Clopas, and Mary of Magdala. [...] Joseph of Arimathea, secretly a disciple of Jesus for fear of the Jews, asked Pilate if he could remove the body of Jesus. And Pilate permitted it. So, he came and took his body.

It seems that nothing can eliminate disease, terrorism, violence against the weak, exploitation of the weak, murder and hatred. By the Cross on which your son stretched out his immaculate hands for our salvation, O Mary, intercede for us.

### Reflection

**With Montfort, let us pray to the Lord to grant us to be always attentive to the suffering of our brothers and sisters.**

Mary, like you, we want to be transformed by the Holy Spirit and to live faithfully the way of the Cross. Mary, Mother of God and of men, pray that we may have the courage of faith, the desire for poverty, and the strength of love. Mary, pray for us, now, and at the hour of our death.

**Our Father / Hail Mary / Glory be to the Father...**

*Song : La première en chemin pour suivre au Golgotha  
Le Fils de ton amour que tous ont condamné,  
Tu te tiens là, debout, au plus près de la croix,  
Pour recueillir la vie de son cœur transpercé.  
Marche avec nous, Marie, sur nos chemins de croix,  
Ils sont chemins vers Dieu, ils sont chemins vers Dieu.*

*The first on the way to Golgotha  
The Son of your love, whom all have condemned,  
You stand there, closest to the Cross,  
To collect the life of his pierced heart.  
Walk with us, Mary, on our stations of the Cross,  
They are paths to God, they are paths to God.*

## 14<sup>th</sup> Station : Jesus is Laid in the Tomb

**From the Gospel according to St. John**

They took the body of Jesus and bound it with burial cloths along with the spices, according to the Jewish burial custom. Now, in the place where he had been crucified, there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb, in which no one had yet been buried. So, they laid Jesus there because of the Jewish preparation day; for the tomb was close by.

### Reflection

That's the end of it. Christ is dead, hope is dead. A heavy stone closes the tomb. It is cold, it is dark. What a complete waste! "We had believed..." say the disciples on the road to Emmaus. We too are often like that. We have believed, we have hoped... But when doubt overtakes faith, when our prayers have no effect, when God seems so far away, we are tempted to believe in the victory of the tomb; a heavy stone crushes hope.

But who can believe that life remains enclosed in a tomb, that God's light does not pierce the night, and that death prevails over love?

The tomb is already cracking, like a bud ready to burst open under the immense thrust of Life...

**With Montfort, let us pray to Mary for the grace to carry our daily crosses, and for the love of Jesus-Christ, to keep the Faith.**

Lord Jesus, you have conquered death once and for all. Already, we have risen with you... Give us the gift of learning to live in hope, confident in the arrival of the New Dawn that you have inaugurated for us in those days.

**Our Father / Hail Mary / Glory be to the Father...**

*Song : Victoire, tu régneras ! Ô Croix, tu nous sauveras !*

*Rassemble tous nos frères, À l'ombre de tes grands bras.  
Par toi, Dieu notre Père, Au ciel nous accueillera.  
Victoire, tu régneras ! Ô Croix, tu nous sauveras !*

*Victory, you will reign! O Cross, you will save us!  
Gather all our brothers, In the shadow of your arms.  
Through you, God our Father, In heaven will welcome us.  
Victory, you will reign! O Cross, you will save us!*

## 15<sup>th</sup> Station: Jesus, Rises from the Dead

### From the Gospel according to St. John

“You are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. But he has risen! He is not here! See the place where they had put him. Go! Tell his disciples and Peter....

“Go to my brothers and tell them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’”

### Reflection

As Christians, we are all called to announce the joy of the Gospel and of the Risen Christ. It is a right for others to hear the message of the Gospel as it is a duty for us to bring that message. Such a project requires sincere collaboration from all: Lay Associates, Montfort Missionaries, Daughters of Wisdom, Brothers of St. Gabriel, and all people that share our spirituality. As we “journey together” in a synodal Church, let us open up our hearts and minds for better collaboration among the Montfortian Family for the benefit of the whole Church.

**With Montfort, let us ask the Lord to grant us the grace of unity and collaboration in spreading the Gospel of Jesus.**

Let us give thanks to God for having called men and women to walk on Montfort’s footsteps, and to participate, in a concrete way, in the proclamation of the Gospel.

Lord Jesus, grant us to continue the work of St. Louis-Marie, like Jacques Goudou. May we imitate Marie-Louise in helping the poor and the sick. Give us the audacity of the Marquis de Magnan and the ingenuity of Gabriel Deshayes, to perpetuate the work of Montfort. May we collaborate harmoniously in spreading the Gospel.

**Our Father / Hail Mary / Glory be to the Father...**

**Song :** *Victoire, tu régneras ! Ô Croix, tu nous sauveras !*

*Victory, you will reign! O Cross, you will save us!*

Saturday, August 12, 2023

## SAINT LOUIS-MARIE AND THE BIBLE

### The Word of God at the Heart of Life



How did the Bible accompany Louis-Marie? I will give some elements of an answer to that question.

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, wherever we are, nourish and guide us, pacify and energise us, challenge us... so that, together, we can live better as disciples in our Montfortian Family.

- ✓ It was the year 1701, in Poitiers. It was the first time that Louis-Marie met Marie-Louise Trichet, who came for confession. Naturally, he asked her :

"Who referred you to me?

- Father, it is my sister.
- You're wrong, my daughter, it is not your sister, it is the Blessed Virgin!"

Louis-Marie invites us to go beyond the concrete, immediate aspects of an 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...". LEW 32.

It is the same thing concerning the Bible. After reading the Bible and listening to the Word of God, Louis-Marie invites me to:

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

*"It is in our lives that, from morning to night, the Word flows on our houses, our streets, our encounters; that is where the Word of God wants to dwell.*

*It is in our spirit... through 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 while travelling by subway, or between two chores, or in bed at night, should never leave us.*

*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 react when feeling pain, the way we blossom in joy.*

*It wants to be at home wherever we are at home.*

*It wants to be ourselves wherever we are ourselves. (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 from whom we must learn,  
our only Lord on whom we should depend,  
our only Leader to whom we should be united,  
our only Model that we should imitate,  
our only Doctor that can heal us,  
our only Shepherd that can feed us,  
our only Way that can lead us,  
our only Truth that we can believe,  
our only Life that can animate us,  
He alone can satisfy all our desires". TD 61*

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

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

*"You're wrong, my daughter, it is not your sister, it is 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 this or that, 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 Pot-de-Fer Street, in Paris, in 1703. He is distraught. Having just been rejected from the Salpêtrière Hospital, he took refuge under the stairs in the Pot-de-Fer Street. He lives there very poorly. The sisters give him one meal a day. He is young and full of missionary zeal but, in the eyes of men, he is going from one failure to another, and his future is 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 a poor Christ who reaches out to him, the Christ who has experienced what he is experiencing. He experiences the loving presence of Christ, who tenderly reveals 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 Love of Eternal Wisdom (from No. 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 expectations. 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 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. Listening to the Word of God and the desire to live it are at the centre of his life. It is 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 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, in past and present times.

For Louis-Marie, Christ is the Eternal and Incarnate Wisdom. 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, Incarnate Wisdom. The Church invites us, Montfortian men and women, to highlight this Wisdom characteristic of the face of Christ, to reread the whole mystery of Jesus, the entire Scripture, in the light of its reality as Wisdom of God.

### The Word of God and the Life of Louis-Marie

- ✓ In 1714, near Rouen, Louis-Marie meets his great friend Blain, canon of the Rouen Cathedral. (4) Blain suffers because of his friend's bad reputation. He is well aware of the rejection that Montfort has suffered and is still suffering. He is critical of his friend's attitudes and ways of acting. He reproaches him and tells him that, if he continues in this way, he will never have the companions he desires. I can imagine Louis-Marie's incomprehension in the face of such reproaches. Our Founder shows him his New Testament and tells him that he is simply following Jesus Christ by living as He did and by what He practised and taught... And he challenges 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 on how to live. This contemplation gradually transforms him. Like Christ, he is moved by the Holy Spirit.

#### To go further :

- I invite you to take time to compare 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 lives out this fundamental invitation from Christ. He refers to it explicitly in his writings, for example in no. 225 of *Love of Eternal Wisdom* (Consecration to Jesus through the hands of Mary) and in nos. 59 and 154 of the *Treatise on True Devotion*. (5)

This is a strong emphasis on the mystery of Incarnation, knowing that the mystery of the Cross is inscribed in that of the Incarnation.





**There are two inseparable aspects in Louis-Marie's life: his commitment to follow Christ and his passion for proclaiming the Gospel to the poor. Father Olivier Maire, in a talk he gave to the Friends of Wisdom in 2003, said that it was the poor who revealed his mission to him.**

This can guide us at a time when we are 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 at 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 does not seem to worry or preoccupy him. He is 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 with peace and serenity. He invites us to do the same (cf no. 4 of his text "To the Associates of the Company of Mary" (ACM). (7)

### **The Word of God at the Heart of his Missionary Life: his Preaching, his Writings...**

I'm just touching this theme. I leave it to his biographers to say more: *"abandoned to Providence, carrying 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 Pot-de-Fer Street, in Paris, in the following terms (Besnard, T IV, p. 62): *"a poor bunk, a vessel, a breviary, **a Bible**, a crucifix, an image of the Blessed Virgin, a rosary bead..."*. This says it all, including the central place of the Bible, which he spent hours reading, praying and meditating upon.

Louis-Marie 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. During the procession that accompanied the *"renewal of the baptismal promises, he prominently displayed the book of the Holy Gospel, solemnly carried by a deacon and venerated by the faithful. He then received it, kneeling, and took it to his breast, preaching so patiently that all the listeners burst into tears"* (Grandet, 411). Such "liturgy" makes the preacher disappear, so to speak, behind the very Word of God!

A few figures concerning the quotations or references from the Bible in Montfort's 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 and more than 600 from the New Testament. These can range from a few words to entire passages. For example, in *Love of Eternal Wisdom*, chapter 12 (nos. 133 to 152): *"The main oracles of the Incarnate Wisdom that must be believed and practised in order to be saved"* are all extracts from the New Testament.

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

He wants 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 current realities.

Louis-Marie's companionship with the Word of God made him a man of excess, the excess of love... A prophet, a prayerful man who let himself be shaped by the Word of God till he became a fiery missionary. Admirable, but not imitable, you might say? 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, no. 96.

*"But, what will they be like, these servants, these slaves, these children of Mary? 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 of True Devotion to Mary, no. 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 big 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 visages of God, reflections of his light. We are visages of God, reflections of his love".* (8)

There would be so much more to say. I simply hope that this evocation will give you the desire to go further. 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 conscious 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 may 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] Saint Louis-Marie Grignion de Montfort, by Louis Le Crom, p. 326s

[5] Montfortian Spirituality Dictionary, p. 691

[6] [4] Saint 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

# MISSIONARY DISCIPLES AND SYNODALITY

## *Experience of the Province of Spain*

The aim of our testimony is to express, not only our experience of synodality between lay people and the Brothers of St. Gabriel, but also to express our conviction that the joint mission between religious and lay people is not only an option or a necessity, but an enrichment which we must promote in order to make possible the Kingdom of God through our Montfortian-Gabrielite charism.

In this sense, independently of what each entity needs to be able to carry out its mission (since realities are different within the same Congregation), walking together (consecrated and lay people) is a sign of the times that we are called to live fully and joyfully.

We are going to explain our experience, according to the following aspects:

- A) Global view of the Shared Gabrielite Mission in the Province of Spain
- B) What has brought us here? What are the objectives and what is the context of what we see?
- C) How is it lived? What do we emphasise?

### **A) Global View of the Shared Gabrielite Mission in the Province of Spain**

Who we are?

At present, the Province of Spain comprises 26 Brothers, living in 6 school communities (there are 2 more schools without a religious community); 450 teachers, out of whom some 35 are Associates (they collaborate more closely with the Brothers, and share spiritual formation with them) and 60 other Associates who are not educators, although some are linked to the Institution through the educational centres.

There are only 3 Brothers who are members of the “Titularité” (Leadership Team) in 3 schools, and only one other Brother is a teacher. For several years now, it has been lay people who have held the positions of management and who are also members of the Leadership Team.

The Associates are present in two regions of the Province according to geographical proximity: the central zone and the zone of Catalonia.

What do we do?

The 35 associated Collaborators (teachers) explicitly share the mission of evangelising through education. They also share these activities with the Brothers:

- 2 Saturday mornings: a formation meeting on Montfortian spirituality, history...
- 2 weekends of joint formation with the Brothers of the Province.
- 1 day of sharing at the end of the school year.
- other times of shared mission and life: meetings in the summer.

The other 60 non-teaching associates:

- They deepen the charism and Montfortian-Gabrielite spirituality, as well as ecclesial themes.
- Formation meetings once a month, and moments of sharing by Brothers or trained lay people.
- Annual pilgrimage to Lourdes.
- Prayer of the rosary.
- Participation in the Grignon de Montfort Society.
- Collaboration in solidarity campaigns within and outside the Province.
- Some of its members have made the Consecration to Jesus through Mary.

## **B) What has brought us here? What are the objectives and what is the context of what we see?**

Circumstances that have led to the Shared Mission in the Province of Spain:

1. The very nature of the Institution: Collaboration with the laity has been part of our history from the very beginning. Just as Montfort developed his apostolic mission with the help of the laity, so too, the Brothers of St. Gabriel have worked with the laity throughout their history.
2. The theology of the Second Vatican Council and subsequent ecclesial reflections on synodality, which underlined that the evangelising mission of the Church is unique and shared by all baptised Christians (religious and non-religious). The conviction that an authentic shared mission includes sharing the charism.
3. The express invitation made by the Brothers to the laity and their response to share – everyone in his own environment and according to his own vocation – the Montfortian charism according to what is specific to the Brothers of St. Gabriel.
4. The need for collaboration, due to the decrease in the number of Brothers (at first, due to the fact that many religious left religious life in the 70s and 80s) and then, due to the lack of vocations and the increase of the average age of our Brothers. This caused the process of shared mission in the Province of Spain to accelerate.

Since the celebration of the 29<sup>th</sup> General Chapter, in 2000 (which explicitly promoted collaboration between Brothers and lay people) the process, as in other Provinces, has been slow and not without difficulties. On the part of some Brothers, the fear of lay interference in their religious life and identity and, on the part of the laity, who thought that sharing the mission would mean adding some tasks to those they were already carrying out.

In spite of that, the Brothers invited lay people with whom they had established bonds of friendship to become involved in a more committed way in the mission inspired by Montfortian spirituality.

When, due to the departure of some religious and to the increase in retirements among the Brothers, the process of collaboration began to accelerate, the Institution offered leadership sessions for Catholic educational centres. The formation was given by the Foundation of Christian Schools, so that some teachers could take up management posts. But such general formation lacked something very important: formation according to the Identity of our Institution. If we wanted a good transmission of the Montfortian-Gabrielite charism, we had to pay much attention to the selected persons and we had to accompany them in the process of formation in the identity and leadership of our educational centres.

On the occasion of the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Canonisation of St. Louis-Marie de Montfort, the invitation to visit the Montfortian-Gabrielite sites was made to people linked to the Brothers by friendship or collaboration in various activities. This led to the creation of three groups of people who, accompanied by Brothers, went deeper in their understanding of the charism and spirituality of the Founder. Today these groups are well consolidated.

In a subsequent pilgrimage (2012), which was exclusively offered to the collaborators of our educational communities, two more groups emerged, ready to go on in their commitment to the mission and willing to be formed in Montfortian-Gabrielite identity and spirituality.

Encouraged by the Titularity Team of our centres, Brothers and lay people worked on the document "General Orientations of March 2009" and, together, we better defined and clarified our objectives and aims. This is when we became more conscious that we had to walk together, in synodality. Finally, in 2019, we drew up Statutes for the Associates that we now want to revise to align them on the AMG Charter published in 2019.

### **C) How is it lived? What do we emphasise?**

This process has led to the evolution of what we call shared mission. That is to say, not only have structures changed, but also the way of understanding collaboration between Brothers and lay people:

- Lay people, from being the recipients of the mission carried out by the Brothers, have also become energizers of that mission.
- Collaboration has become the co-responsibility of all, Brothers and lay people.

We are together in the Pastoral Teams for schools and youth, in the elaboration of the Institutional Educational Project, in the Team for the management of all the schools, in the Team for the formation in the shared mission... We take part in the Provincial Chapter for a day.

*It has to be said that lay people are not all involved in the shared mission, but some of them have understood that such a transformation is necessary to extend the mission and transmit the charism.*

Determined to go on with the mission in our Province, we put the emphasis on:

- Discerning together concerning the mission and its future in Spain.
- Welcoming Brothers from other Provinces in order to enrich our own presence in our Province.
- Accompanying one another, Brothers and lay people: The Brothers accompany us as teachers of life and mission. For our part, we, lay people, make a lay reading of the charism and share it with the religious. In addition, we accompany one another in certain aspects of daily life, according to the needs that arise. By helping one another, we create bonds.
- Spreading the Montfortian charism and the Gabrielite values.
- Giving formation according to the Montfortian-Gabrielite identity.

With the aim of transmitting the Montfortian charism and the Gabrielite style, we have given priority to the formation of Associates, Collaborators and Leaders of the educational communities. To this

end, the Brothers have opted to give full-time or part-time opportunity to some lay people so that they can be trained as formators.

The formation programmes are developed according to the different target groups:

1. For teaching and non-teaching Associates: We deal with topics on our Montfortian history and spirituality already unified by our International Partnership Commission.
2. For those Teachers who hold positions of responsibility, we carry out a training of six seminars (two per year), provided by the Province of France, and adapted to our reality, with the aim of forming Montfortian Gabrielite leaders.
3. For all the Collaborators: We have implemented a formation for the mission within the hours set aside for pedagogical formation according to their contract provisions. There are 4 areas: **Personal growth, Transformation of the world** (justice, peace, integral ecology), **Christian Spirituality, Gabrielite Legacy**. Each of these areas corresponds to one or more aspects that we believe are necessary for teachers to become more aware that we are all working for the same mission, even if our beliefs are different. The service staff, despite the fact that their contract does not provide for training, attend a two-and-a-half hour session a year on the history and style of our educational tradition.
4. For the Brothers: Joint formation. The formation sessions that they used to attend alone, are now held with the laity and they are usually prepared by the Formation Team consisting of Brothers and lay people. We have dealt with topics such as work in synodality, shared mission structures, justice and peace in our institutions...

Challenges that energize us:

- Promoting, among the Associates, the Consecration to Jesus through Mary.
- Sharing regularly more time for prayer and meditation.
- Having ongoing formation sessions for Brothers, Collaborators and Associates.
- Making room, in the institution, for personnel who are retiring and who wish to continue in the mission.
- Working more for young people's vocations.
- Giving better accompaniment to new teachers in order to integrate them in our mission.
- Identifying new fields of action: immigrants, vulnerable people, etc.

If consecrated and lay people do not walk together, in synodality, we are depriving our Congregation of an essential aspect to carry out its mission. Because, wherever a mission brings us together, the gift of the Spirit that consecrated and lay people have received in baptism always acts over and above our different vocations.

## **INTERNATIONAL MONTFORTIAN MEETING - NOTES ON THE NATIONAL GROUPS DISCUSSION (ASIA)**

**12 August 2023**

**The following objectives were shared and agreed upon:**

1. Give formation sessions to people (church, schools, beneficiaries, communities, congregations, associates etc.) on Montfort and Marie-Louise as persons, and on their spirituality.
2. Improve the collaboration between the three Congregations and between the Associates.
3. Make a holistic and appropriate Montfortian Spirituality Formation available and accessible for Congregations, Associates and Collaborators in Asia.
4. Bring to consciousness that our Congregations and Associates belong to one Montfortian Charismatic Family.

To facilitate the implementation of the objectives in the spirit of collaboration manifested in Pontchâteau, the assembly proposed to create a platform using an existing one initiated by Fr. Arnold Suhardi called “Montfortian Synodality: Montfortian Family in Southeast Asia”.

**The proposed name of the platform would be “Montfortian Disciples of Asia” and it would look into the following aspects:**

1. Formation for formators at the national, regional and continental levels.
2. Providing resource persons, materials and pedagogy at the national, regional and continental levels:
  - a. Monthly Montfortian Synodality Sessions (online and in-person);
  - b. Mission Teams for formation (one resource person from each Congregation at the national, regional and continental levels).
3. Organising a continental level meeting once in two/three years.



# **NOTES ON THE MEETING OF THE DELEGATES OF THE BROTHERS OF ST. GABRIEL**

**International Montfortian Meeting  
9 August 2023  
International Community House, St. Laurent-sur-Sèvre**

39 members were present

9 members were absent with apologies for visa problems

Bro. Dionigi welcomed the members and invited them to take this opportunity to get to know one another. The members introduced themselves, giving their name, province, and mission.

Bro. Dionigi conveyed the greetings of the Superior General, Bro. John Kallarackal, and those of the General Council. He added that it was a great privilege to have a gathering like this one, as a Montfortian Gabrielite family.

The members were invited to share their feedback on their experience of participation in the International Montfortian Meeting. The following points were raised:

- It was an honour to meet the lay Associates of the three Congregations who are doing the same type of work in collaboration with the religious of the three Congregations. This gathering should be an impetus to make the MGA (Montfortian Gabrielite Associates) vibrant and active in our respective Provinces and context (North-East Province).
- This gathering is a wonderful way of learning from the strengths and best practices of other Associates in the other Congregations. It is very encouraging to see young participants taking the lead in their respective countries and Provinces. One suggestion was to organise a meeting at a continent or country level for all three Congregations to further discuss and develop plans for implementation. Bro. Dionigi clarified that there would be such a meeting on Saturday (11 August) (Hyderabad Province).
- One suggestion was to have an ice breaker at the start of the event so that the participants would be able to interact and get to know one another at a more personal level. Participants from countries who have more experience and dynamism in their MGA could be invited to share their experiences.
- In 2022, parents and students were invited to live according to the spirituality of Montfort and to experience the Consecration to Jesus through Mary. Finally, this was done after many years since the beginning of the Associates (Ranchi Province).
- There is a good family spirit in this gathering, with everyone interested in the spirituality of Montfort. The Brothers have been united in the promotion of lay Associates in their respective schools (Bengaluru Province).
- One participant said that it was challenging to leave her family for this meeting, but that it was a wonderful experience and an excellent way to inspire and motivate her to do more as an MGA in her school.
- The Chennai MGA began in 2007 with an animation that was mostly spiritual, but more activities can be organized for the MGA.
- The experience in France was spiritually profound and enriching.
- I am happy to be here and to meet the other Congregations. It is an invitation to share educational and pastoral materials and experiences in relation to Montfortian spirituality on the Website.

Bro. Dionigi recommended the following:

- Members should try to meet the members of the other Congregations and learn from them.
- Share what you have received from your experience.
- Share, with Bro. Dionigi, events and articles concerning the Associates and the Congregation.
- The Brothers are invited to give a voice to the lay Associates of their Provinces in the upcoming General Chapter, in 2024.
- Pray for one another and for the coming General Chapter.

## CELEBRATION OF THE MASS TO SEND IN MISSION

### MGR. JACOLIN, BISHOP OF VENDÉE – HOMELY

Dear brothers and sisters, here you are at the end of this international Meeting of the Montfortian Associates, with the objective of becoming ever more *"Missionary disciples in the Montfortian family"*.

The expression *"Missionary Disciples"* comes from Pope Francis who, in his Inaugural Letter *"Evangelii Gaudium"* (*The Joy of the Gospel*), presents it as a program for the life of every baptized person.

In this Sunday's Gospel, Jesus encourages his fearful disciples: *"Be trustful! It's me; do not be afraid any longer!"*

Then Peter, after starting to walk on the water at the call of Jesus, is overcome by fear, and starts sinking. He then cried out, *"Lord save me!"*

Jesus then took him by the hand to save him from drowning, saying to him: *"O man of little faith, why did you doubt?"*

So, living as a disciple is, first, living with trust in Jesus, the Son of God, our Saviour. Indeed, by receiving, at our baptism, the Holy Spirit who makes us children of God, we move from a life dominated by fear to a life led by a relationship of filial trust, as St. Paul recalls in Chapter 8 of his Letter to the Romans:

**Because we are his children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, prompting us to call out, "Abba, Father." Now you are no longer a slave but God's own child.**

Let us also remember the words of St. John-Paul II, in his first speech after his election: **"Have no fear! Open wide the door to Jesus Christ and His saving power."**

At the beginning of this session, you renewed the vows of your baptism according to the invitation that St. Louis-Marie Grignon de Montfort did to those who followed his popular missions.

But when Pope John Paul II came to this Basilica, in 1996, to pray at the tomb of St. Grignon de Montfort, who so strongly inspired him in his spiritual and pastoral life, during the service of Vespers, he emphasized the meaning of baptism that he celebrated in the Basilica. Here is an excerpt:

**Christ knows that His coming into the world and, in particular, His passion, Death and Resurrection have to reveal their vocation to men: a vocation which is inscribed by the Father in the mystery of His Son's Incarnation. So, conscious of this, Christ, at the end of his earthly mission, addresses the following exhortation to his Apostles:**

**Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey all that I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, even to the end of the time."**

**From century to century, the successors of the Apostles and many disciples have worked to fulfil this mission entrusted by the Lord. In your region, St. Louis-Marie Grignon de Montfort was one of the most remarkable ones.**

**Today... I would like to emphasize the fact that, in the spirit of St. Louis-Marie, all spiritual life derives directly from the sacrament of Holy Baptism.**

Thus we see how the great missionary figures of St. Paul, St. Louis-Marie Grignon de Montfort and St. John Paul II have worked to achieve the mission that the Risen Jesus entrusted to his Apostles: to make disciples of all nations, baptizing them and teaching them to keep all his commandments.

Each one of them, in his own style, exhorts us not to be afraid of Christ the Savior who comes to us to save us and to follow Him with the confidence of the children of God that we have become by our baptism in water and in the Holy Spirit.

We admire these giant missionaries, but let's not forget that, through our baptism, we too are sent to be witnesses of the joy of the Gospel in the world, as Pope Francis likes to remind us.

*"Let's get on the road for the mission!"* is the theme that you talked about in your national groups at the beginning of this afternoon.

St. John Paul II invited us not to be afraid to personally open wide the doors to Christ and to his saving power.

In this Mass sending us on the road for the mission, I would like to remind you of the rest of his invitation, which has been less remembered:

**Open up, open up the State borders, the political and economic systems, and the immense fields of culture, development and civilisation. Do not be afraid!**

Yes, as you will leave to all parts of the world, in the diversity of your peoples, your languages and your cultures, listen to the message of St. Paul, St. Louis-Grignon de Monfort, St. John Paul II and, above all, of the Risen Christ Himself: **Do not be afraid! In the strength of the Holy Spirit, be courageous and radiant witnesses to the joy of the Gospel in all areas of human life.**

## WORDS OF THANKS TO THE RIAM 2023 COMMITTEE

Very Reverend Bishop Jacolin,

In the name of all the participants in the International Meeting of Associates of the Montfortian Family, and in the name of the General and Provincial Administrations of the three Montfortian Congregations, I would like to thank you warmly for your presence among us on the occasion of this celebration of sending. On your part, it is a very strong sign of your closeness and your affection for the whole Montfortian family.

At the end of this extraordinary and beautiful week, it is right to express, on behalf of all the participants and of the 3 General Administrations, a big thank you to those who made it all possible. I am of course talking about the Organizing Committee.

Mr. Eric Joyeau - coordinator  
Mr. Claude Tignon  
Mrs. Marie-Line Tignon  
Mrs. Véronique Frinault  
Mrs. Sylvie Abraham  
Sr. Marie-Laure Paillet - DW

Sr. Dorothee Harushimana  
Fr. Eric Manirakiza, SMM  
Bro. Claude Marsaud, FSG  
Bro. Maurice Hérault, FSG  
Bro. Guy Bertrand, FSG

Dear friends of the Committee, when, more than a year ago, the three General Administrations decided to launch this project, Sister Pierrette, Father Arnold and myself were confronted with an important question: will we be able to find someone willing to collaborate in the organization of this big and difficult project? We began asking who, within our Congregations and Associates, would be available. Well, everyone we asked, following the example of the Virgin Mary, said yes with a faith and enthusiasm that surprised us. Although aware of the immense task that awaited you, and despite your many commitments, you did not hesitate to respond positively... and when, sometimes, the three of us, Delegates of the Central Administrations, were a little hesitant and almost discouraged in the face of difficulties encountered, you have been a source of encouragement.

Dear friends of the Committee, you made possible what we thought almost impossible, thanks to your deep faith, to your will and to the qualities of each of you placed at the service of God, of the Church and of the Montfortian Family.

By your courage, your perseverance, your generosity, you have shown that you are worthy disciples of Montfort and Marie-Louise Trichet, and for all those who participated in this session, you have been true witnesses of what it means to be at the service of one's neighbour with humility and gratuitousness. For all of us, Associates, Collaborators and Consecrated persons, you have been a model of service and a point of reference at every moment of this session.

Thanks on behalf of everyone, thanks for all you have done for us, and thanks for the way you have done it. The entire Montfortian family is grateful to you for having realized this precious gift: the RIAM 2023. May the Lord reward you for your generosity and for the many sacrifices you have made during these months.

I would also like to invite Brother Daniel Busnel and Brother Michel Mendy to come closer. Through their translations and interpretations, they made communication between all the participants possible. Thanks for your precious help.

As a token of thanks, on behalf of all the participants in this meeting, we would like to offer you a small but meaningful present: it is a recently published book, whose author, Elisabeth de Badoüin, was here two days ago, and which is entitled: *The folly of Totus Tuus*. What more appropriate title for this "folly" that the three General Administrations have asked you to achieve? What you have accomplished is folly, but a concrete sign of your *Totus tuus* to Jesus Christ through the hands of Mary.

(presentation of the gifts)

We know well, however, that you have not been alone in accomplishing all of this... with you, so many lay volunteers and men and women religious, here in Saint-Laurent, as well as in Montfort sur Meu, Poitiers and Pontchâteau, have collaborated at various times and in various ways. I invite those who are here to come closer in front of the assembly to receive our thanks and those of all the participants in the meeting. Thank you for your valuable help and your collaboration in the various services that have been requested of you. I invite everyone to give them a warm applause as a sign of gratitude.

Thank also to those who have welcomed us these days. Thanks to the parish community of Saint Laurent-sur-Sèvre and to its parish priest, Fr. Ronel Charelus; Thanks to the Director of Saint-Gabriel and Saint-Michel School and to all the Staff. Thanks for welcoming us so warmly and fraternally.

Friends of the Committee and Volunteers: on behalf of the three General Administrations represented here, on behalf of all the participants in the International Meeting of the Associates of the Montfortian Family, a huge thank you to all, for allowing us, during this beautiful week, to feel that we are members of a great and extraordinary family: the Montfortian Family. And, for the gift of all of you, we give thanks and praise to God and to our Founders.

Bro. Dionigi Taffarello, Vicar General, FSG,  
on behalf of the participants in the RIAM 2023,  
and of the three Central Administrations of the Montfortian Family.

### **BEING SENT FOR THE MISSION**

Dear Associates, the time has come for you to leave Saint Laurent-sur-Sèvre after these rich and wonderful days of Christian faith revival and Montfortian spirituality sharing.

Let the world see your joy of being Christians (baptized), let people feel your joy of being members of the Montfortian Family! And, what about singing a few tunes of Father de Montfort's Canticles, translated into all your languages and cultures, or learned during these days?

**"Let us bless the Lord forever for his goodness".**

But if you are not yet blessed with a singing grace, at least, keep in your heart the spirit of the Canticles and transform in thanksgiving all you are as Montfortian Associates.

**"Let us bless the Lord forever for his goodness".**

All your feelings, your resolutions, your plans for the future ... Don't leave anything on the Basilica square, but bring everything and express it in thanksgiving and in "hopeful action". Yes, because in Montfortian spirituality, hope is there, and, usually, with it, there is courage and joy. May the God of hope be with you on your journey back home. A hope that is sure that God is a "wonderful" Father, and that you are on the right path indicated by God himself "to Jesus through Mary".

**"Let us bless the Lord forever for his goodness".**

Pray to Him boldly for yourself, for your groups, for your mission, and for every man and woman the Lord places in your path. Be audacious and daring to ask God like the Virgin Mary at Cana, like Father de Montfort in his Fiery Prayer, like Marie-Louise de Jésus, Brother Mathurin, the Marquis de Magnanne, Gabriel Deshayes: all of them, together, instruments of Providence, like the many friends who have preceded us in this beautiful history of the Montfortian Family.

**"Let us bless the Lord forever for his goodness".**

Be daring also with your spiritual Directors and Assistants. Last Wednesday, after my talk, I had so many questions about how to "live the Baptism by Mary" that - I said to myself - our Associates need to ask their guides for more time for spiritual resourcing and deepening. So, dear friends, having come physically to the spiritual source, here, in Saint Laurent-sur-Sèvre, continue, together, to draw from this source, through more systematic and committed ongoing formation, and do so for yourselves and for the people of God of which we are a part.

May the Lord's blessing, which you will now receive through the intercession of all the "saints of Saint-Laurent-sur-Sèvre", may go on, and may God be with you!

Fr. Marco Pasinato

**COUNTRIES REPRESENTED**  
**AT THE INTERNATIONAL MEETING**  
**of the MONTFORTIAN ASSOCIATES**



<b>Europe</b>	<b>America</b>	<b>Africa and Indian Ocean</b>	<b>Asia and Oceania</b>
England	Canada	Burundi	India
Germany	USA	Congo	Indonesia
Belgium	Haiti	Kenya	Papua New Guinea
Croatia	Equador	Malawi	Philippines
Denmark	Argentina	Uganda	Singapore
Spain	Brazil	Dem. Republic of Congo	Thailand
France	Colombia	Rwanda	
Holland	Mexico	Senegal	
Ireland	Peru	Madagascar	
Italy			
Poland			
Portugal			



## YouTube links

All the live streams are visible on the channel

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCY7TCfZ8C2xG5a4UhOPmfeA>

Any person, community, having a channel, can integrate these live streams into their channel

### August 7

11 a.m. Mass

<https://youtube.com/live/Jm7eNBXUIbo?feature=share>

3 p.m. Teaching

<https://youtube.com/live/HjmJTOP-Xgg?feature=share>

4:45 p.m. Testimonies

<https://youtube.com/live/OisrIPahFJg?feature=share>

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### August 9

8:30 a.m. Prayer

9:00 a.m. Teaching

<https://youtube.com/live/ACqCibum3xA?feature=share>

11 a.m. mass

<https://youtube.com/live/FCZrnS8bpDk?feature=share>

8:30 p.m. Vigil

<https://youtube.com/live/MdC7el3-rxY?feature=share>

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### August 11

8:30 p.m. Festive evening

<https://youtube.com/live/cQbAMjGi-Y0?feature=share>

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### August 12

8:30 a.m. Prayer. 9:00 a.m. Teaching: Walking on the Footsteps of Father de Montfort

<https://youtube.com/live/cXUG-pvH39I?feature=share>

10:15 am: Teaching: Missionary disciples on the path of synodality initiated by Pope Francis

<https://youtube.com/live/RXywlZLuiU8?feature=share>

Please note: This talk may be right after the previous talk at 9:00 a.m. You will then have access to this particular talk with the previous link

5:30 p.m. Celebration of the Mass to send in Mission

<https://youtube.com/live/NYAEpsPmDIE?feature=share>