

Sacred Heart Novitiate, Eachinkadu from 16-20, Nov. 2015

Chapter 1

The goals of Religious Life

Religious have accepted Jesus' invitation, "If you want to be my disciple, renounce yourself, take up your daily cross, and follow me." (Lk 9:23) Firstly renunciation of self is an absolute necessity. This counsel contains certain definite directions, among the most important of which are the renunciation of riches, of carnal pleasure, and of all ambition and self-seeking, in order to acquire a spirit of voluntary submission and generous devotion to the service of God and our neighbour. Selfishness is a great obstacle to spiritual growth. Some religious have selfish motives and some work for the welfare of their dear ones at home. Secondly one has to carry his cross daily. The cross can be sickness, misunderstanding, failure, labour involved in fulfilling his duties. Thirdly, one has to be keen on doing God's will, fulfilling his duties. Here laziness can come in. Laziness is the greatest enemy of growth in religious life. Mr. M. Scott Peck in his book "The road less travelled" has mentioned that our original sin is our laziness. "In the struggle to help my patients grow, I found that my chief enemy was invariably their laziness. And I became aware in myself of a similar reluctance to extend myself to new areas of thought, responsibility and maturation. One thing I clearly had in common with all mankind was my laziness. It was at this point that the serpent-and-the apple story suddenly made sense." (Road less traveled, p. 291) Further religious have accepted Jesus' call to religious life. They made the religious profession a few years ago. There is a tendency to water down the demands of religious life. Some start this process during the first year after profession.

Some times young Brothers complain that they are not appreciated. Let them ask themselves, "Are we appreciable?" As a young Brother I was appreciated by my superiors, Brothers, teachers and students. I did nothing special. I was faithful to my prayers and to all my duties. Even now my students remember me. Old students of both these schools appreciate me. As a religious, daily I ask myself, "What more can I do for my community, for my students." Those days, every day, I did some practical or other in the class. Even now I follow the same principle.

What are the goals of religious life? "Religious are dedicated to seek the perfection of charity in the service of God's Kingdom, for the honour of God, the building up of the Church and the salvation of the world." (Can. 573) "All those who are called by God to the practice of the evangelical counsels, and who make faithful profession of them, bind themselves to the Lord in a special way. They follow Christ who, virginal and poor (cf. Mt. 8:20; Lk. 9:58), redeemed and sanctified men by obedience unto death on the cross (cf. Phil. 2:8). Under the impulse of love, which the Holy Spirit pours into their hearts (cf. Rom. 5:5), they live more and more for Christ and for his Body, the Church (cf. Col. 1:24)." (PC 1)

"He makes profession in the Church of the evangelical counsels. He does so for two reasons: first, in order to be set free from hindrances that could hold him back from loving God ardently and worshipping him perfectly, and secondly, in order to consecrate himself in a more thoroughgoing way to the service of God... Being means to and instruments of love, the evangelical counsels unite those who practice them to the Church and her mystery in a special way. It follows that the spiritual life of such Christians should be dedicated also to the welfare of the entire Church." (LG 44)

"In every age consecrated men and women must continue to be images of Christ the Lord, fostering through prayer a profound communion of mind with him (cf. Phil 2:5-11), so that their whole lives may be penetrated by an apostolic spirit and their apostolic work with contemplation." (VC 9) "By professing the evangelical counsels, consecrated persons not only make Christ the whole meaning of their lives but strive to reproduce in themselves, as far as possible, 'that form of life which he, as the Son of God, accepted in entering this world.' (LG 44) By embracing chastity, they make their own the pure love of Christ and proclaim to the world that he is the Only-Begotten Son who is one with the Father (cf. Jn 10:30, 14:11). By imitating Christ's poverty, they profess that he is the Son who receives everything from the Father, and gives everything back to the Father in love (cf. Jn 17:7, 10). By accepting, through the sacrifice of their own freedom, the mystery of Christ's filial obedience, they profess that he is infinitely beloved and loving, as the One who delights only in the will of the Father (cf. Jn 4:34), to whom he is perfectly united and on whom he depends for everything." (VC 16)



Chapter 2

Happiness in Religious Life

All religious want to be happy and contented. Happiness is not something ready made. It cannot be bought from market nor can anybody give it to others. "There is only one person who could ever make you happy, and that person is you." (David Burns) Happiness comes from my own actions. I am the first one responsible for it. "Happiness depends upon ourselves." (Aristotle.) "Happiness does not consist in games and amusements but in virtuous activities." (Aristotle) "Happiness resides not in possessions and not in gold; the feeling of happiness dwells in the soul." (Aldous Huxley)

Happiness is also defined as contentment. The Bible tells us that contentment is achieved by a reverence and respect for God's Law. "Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the LORD. Blessed are they that keep his testimonies, and that seek him with the whole heart" (Ps.119:1-2). The word "blessed" means happy. How is this accomplished? By walking in His law, keeping His testimonies, and seeking Him with one's whole heart. The 19th Psalm gives a marvelous description of how to achieve happiness and contentment: The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple. The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring for ever: the judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb. Moreover by them is thy servant warned: and in keeping of them there is great reward. (Ref. Ps. 19:7-11)

Means to attain happiness

1. Renunciation of self: Jesus wants his disciples to renounce themselves, take up their daily cross and follow him (Ref. Lk 9:23). He wants them to know an important truth about life and happiness. According to him, denying self, and walking in the ways of God is the path to happiness. The humble, selfless, teachable person who allows him/herself to be disciplined by God's word is the really the happy person. An enduringly happy, useful, and contented life is possible only to those who "lose" their selfish life in the selfless service of God and their fellow beings. Denying self, coming unto Christ, learning of him, resting in Him, taking up His cross, copying His service to God and to others – these are the steps to a life of enduring happiness and peace. Jesus told his disciples, "These things I have spoken unto you, that in me you might have peace. In the world you shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world", John 16:33. Jesus has not promised that His disciples will have 'a bed of roses' in their waiting for His Kingdom, but he has promised his guidance, and help, producing peace of mind and true happiness in his service. There is an inner peace and happiness in the knowledge that God loves us, cares for us, forgives and helps us. Jesus intercedes to God on our behalf. We show God our love for Him in practical ways – in the reading, believing, and obeying His Word; in worshipping with others; and in "doing good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith", (2 Peter 1:1, Galatians 6:10). Happiness comes from seeing the good in others and doing the good for others. It encompasses fullness of goodness, beauty, truth and love. Our ultimate happiness is found in relationship with God through Jesus (prayer, obedience to his teachings, etc.).

"I have learned to seek happiness by limiting my desires, rather than attempting to satisfy them." (John Stuart Mills) "You're happiest while you're making the greatest contribution." (Robert F. Kennedy) "There is only one way to happiness, and that is to cease worrying about things which are beyond the power of your will." (Epicletus) "Happy are those who are poor, mourn, humble, hunger for justice, pure, kind, merciful, work for peace and persecuted for the cause of justice." (Ref. Mt. 5:3-10) One of the great rewards for obedience and reverence for the Law of God is contentment and peace of mind. The love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. (Ref. 1 Tim. 6:8-10) Happiness is not obtainable without admitting guilt and repenting of it. "He that covers his sins shall not prosper: but whosoever confesses and forsakes them shall have mercy" (Prov. 28:13). Man must repent of breaking that law. He must establish a relationship with God in order to achieve happiness and contentment.

2. Obeying the commandments of God: "Those who keep God's law will be happy here and in the next life." (Ps 1:1) "If you obey my commandments, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete." (Jn 15: 10, 11) Keep the Lord's day holy. Be faithful to your spiritual duties. Obey your parents. Obey your superiors and the Rule of the congregation. Do not kill, do not harm any one. Love others. Do not commit adultery. Avoid all hetero and homo sexual activity. Abusing a child is a crime. Do not steal. Do not manipulate accounts. Lead a simple life. It is easy for us to lose the sense of sin; but sin is a reality. "We must take sin seriously, and heed what Scripture says: Man is a liar. We must strive to ask ourselves repeatedly, whether our conscience too has not already become untruthful, whether God's standards have already become so dim to us, that we no longer notice what sinners we are." (Karl Rahner, *Mary Mother of the Lord*, p. 80)

3. Getting united to Jesus Christ: "All perfection consists in our being conformed, united and consecrated to Jesus." (Montfort, TD 120) "Contemplate him lovingly, stay with him, let yourself be captivated by him and your life then will attain its plenitude." (R.L. 27) Holy Eucharist, Meditation and Holy Rosary can lead us to our union with Jesus and Mary. Do I have love for Holy Eucharist? Am I keen on making my daily meditation? Do I at least pray five decades of the Rosary? "Christ invites you to pray to the Father in the solitude of your heart. Do not let the frenzy of the world invade your soul, take time to listen to His word uttered for you alone, open your heart to it and let it dwell there. It will remain with you throughout the day." (RL 75) "You are a man of action, be true to yourself in your contact with God." (RL 76) "Pray to Mary, Mother of Christ and Mother of the Church that Christ may ever grow in you, that through your apostolate His Kingdom may come." (RL 68) "The Holy Eucharist is at the heart of your prayer. In union with your Brothers of your community and the Christians of your parish, you offer yourself as a holocaust in the unique sacrifice that is agreeable to God." (RL 70) "Acknowledge your sin, confess it before God and the Church." (RL 72) "Prayer accompanies the Brother in all his activities from his rising, when he places himself in God's presence, until the evening, when he lays the happenings of his day in His hands during an examination of conscience and prayer of Compline or a prayer inspired by it." (C. 115)

Do I live in an atmosphere of silence and recollection. St. Paul says, "The kingdom of God is not a matter of food and drink; it is justice, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit." (Rom 14:17) "Happy the people who's God is the Lord!" (Ps 144:15) "Happy the man who finds wisdom and gains

insight." (Prov. 3:13) "He who listens to the word find happiness; blessed is he who trusts in Yahweh." (Prov. 16:20) It is high time that each religious sets up your own religious goals and seek the same without bothering about others. Stand on your own feet. Have the back bone. Truth will make you free.

4. Keeping the three vows:

a. Chastity: Sexuality has two goals: intimacy and generativity. In spite of the vow these goals will have to be met. Intimacy with Jesus has to be built up. Cultivate intimacy with Jesus and Mary. Devotion to the Holy Eucharist, contemplation of Jesus and perfect devotion to Mary will pave way to intimacy with Christ. Contemplate him lovingly. Help children and students to grow in the right way. Religious need to be guides and models. We need to have spiritual children as a result of their full commitment to their mission. This is spiritual fecundity. "Your love embraces the whole world and achieves its fecundity in the Spirit." (RL 28)

b. Poverty: "Do not keep unto yourself the things that come your way; whatever your earn, whatever is given to you, you have promised not to claim as your own, but to share, in full dependence on your Superior and your Brothers." (RL 33) Here religious must be detached from family and from worldly standards. Simplicity is a source of joy.

c. Obedience: "You accept in faith to seek God's will with your community. You want to serve, and not to be served." (RL 39) "Be attentive to all signs and manifestations of the Father's designs on you and others, in fraternal love, sincere dialogue and united prayer. Working with them towards a common goal, you bear, with each of your Brothers, the responsibility for the building up of your community in Christ." (RL 31) Be absolutely faithful to all your duties. Do more and not less. "What more can I do?" must be one's attitude. Service to others is a source of happiness.

5. Being a good teacher: Brothers' main mission is teaching. The teaching mission must be a success story. Work hard to become a good teacher. Improve your knowledge, dream about and invent new methods of teaching and become a very successful teacher. Happiness will be yours. Work hard and become a man of quality, character and achievement. Be a good organizer: scout master, literary association in charge, Legion of Mary in charge, in charge of sports, games, elocution, drama, music, etc. Pope Francis has published an Apostolic Exhortation entitled *Evangelii Gaudium*, The Joy of the Gospel. "An evangelizer must never look like someone who has just come from a funeral! Let us recover and deepen our enthusiasm, that delightful and comforting joy on evangelizing." (EG 10) Accept failures that come on the way. Do not waste time in useless talks. Dream about the possibilities and execute them one by one. Each person must work at least 8 hours a day. Sometimes, religious do not work enough, as food, medical care, shelter, etc are available.

6. Loving and serving the Brothers: Religious need to be attached to their community and work for its welfare. "In your community, grounded on faith, moved by the love of Christ, fed at the Eucharistic meal, sustained by the word of God, united in worship with Mary, you will be, for one another, witnesses to the New Covenant." (RL 46) "Because of the ties that bind you, your community assumes the work of each one." (RL 49) Religious need to learn to serve their Brothers. "How happy you will be if you put washing one another's feet into practice." (Jn 13:17) Serve others, serve the community and be of service to students, teachers and workers. Happiness is built on uprightness and good relationship with God, with Brothers and with those whom they serve.

7. Wrong ways of seeking happiness: The quest for happiness seems to be endless. Many have made it their primary goal in life. In the search for happiness men have indulged in every whim, desire, aim, passion, and pleasure. Yet, few appear to have achieved the happiness they desire. Sometimes Brothers like to have jolly time with Brothers who are their friends. They like to meet, chat and have a party. To have many friends need not be an aim of life. There is no need to waste one's time in chatting over the phone. We should not abuse the mobile phone. Internet can be used as a source of knowledge. Once again this too can be abused. Love all; but all need not be your friends. "Only the upright shall be my friend." (Ps 100:6) Follow principle given in the Book of Sirach Chapter 6: "Let your friends be many; but your counselors, one in a thousand... If you would gain a friend, begin by testing him and do not put your confidence in him too quickly... Distance yourself from your enemies and be careful about your friends. .. A faithful friend is a secure refuge ... Whoever fears the Lord will make true friends for, as a man is, such will his friend be." (Sir. 6: 6,7,13, 14,17) "Do not rely on a friend or trust an intimate companion" (Micah 7:5) Friends are not the models, but Jesus and Mary. Enjoyment is not the aim of religious life, but holiness. "In Christ, God chose you before the world was founded, to be dedicated, to be without blemish in His sight, to be full of love." (RL 1) "Be perfect as the heavenly Father is perfect." (Mt. 5:48) "Be holy because I am holy." (1 Pet. 1:16) Holiness is sinlessness and service to others. In holiness and service there is happiness.

8. Different ways to be adopted: 1. Cultivate positive thoughts 2. Cultivate a compassionate heart 3. Cultivate desire to help others 4. Everyday do an act of love. 5. Fill your mind with good projects. 6. Give up criticism and complaining 7. Get better and better and not bitter and bitter. 8. Have a grateful heart. 9. Listen to God's inspirations 10. "Resolve to make at least one person happy every day." (Sydney Smith)

To be happy, one must follow the following: 1. forgive others 2. accept yourself 3. carry on in spite of difficulties 4. thank God for everything and 5. smile always. "If you want to live a happy life, tie it to a goal, not to people or objects." (Albert Einstein) Happiness depends upon capacity for selflessness. Happiness is the result of your choices and actions. Gratefulness makes you happy. Be happy with what you can do. Surround yourself with supporting people of value. Have a forward looking thought; look at future with hope and enthusiasm. 1. Free your heart of hatred 2. Free your mind from worries. 3. Live simply 4. Give more. 5. Demand less and don't expect miracles in your life. Worry is a silent killer.

9. Twelve useful things: 1. express gratitude 2. cultivate optimism 3. avoid over-thinking about oneself and social comparison 4. practice acts of kindness 5. nurture social relationships 6. develop strategies for coping 7. learn to forgive 8. increase flow experience 9. savour life's joys 10. commit yourself to your goals 11. practice spirituality 12. take care of your body.

11. The formula for happiness is found in the living out the beatitudes. "Happy are the poor in spirit... Happy are those who mourn ... Happy are the humble.... Happy are those who thirst for justice.... Happy are the pure in heart.... Happy are those who work for peace.... Happy are those who are persecuted for the Kingdom.... Happy are those who are insulted because of being Christ's followers." (Matt 5:3-12) "How happy you will be, if you wash one another's feet." (Jn 13:17) Serve others, serve the community and be of service to students, teachers and workers. Be Happy; happiness is built on uprightness and good relationship with God, with Brothers and with those whom the religious serve. Happiness is your birth right and you can have it if you are good.

Chapter 3

Life of ST. LOUIS MARY GRIGNION DE MONTFORT (1673-1716)

1. Birth and childhood: Louis was born on Jan. 31, 1673 at Montfort and he was baptized the following day in St. John's Church. Then the child was entrusted to a wet-nurse known as Mother Andrea, who worked on the farm of the Grignon family at La Bachelleraie. During the second half of 1675, Mr. John bought a farm known as Bois-Marquer in the parish of Iffendic, not far from Montfort. The whole family came to stay here and child Louis was brought back to his parents. As a young boy, Louis learned prayers from his mother and his father taught him the three R's. Not only did he do the primary studies, he helped his father in teaching his younger brothers and sisters. He also taught them religion and prayer. Further he helped his mother and consoled her in her difficulties. He loved to be poor and helped the poor as much as he could. He developed a tender devotion to Mary and loved to recite the rosary.

2. Secondary studies: Towards the end of 1684, Louis entered St. Thomas Becket College, Rennes, run by Jesuits, for his secondary and university studies. During the first year he stayed with his maternal uncle Fr. Alain Robert at the church of Holy Redeemer. During the second year as Louis' younger brother had to join the college, and so the whole family came to stay at Rennes, in a property that belonged to his mother. Bois-Marquer became their summer residence. On his to and fro journey to the college, Louis used to pray before the statute of Our Lady. Louis was a serious student and stood first in his class. John Baptist Blain and Claude Poullart des Places became his friends. Fr. Julien Bellier, the Chaplain of the General Hospital, guided Louis in his service to the poor. Through this priest he came in contact with human misery. Louis met the poor in General Hospitals and helped them. The discovery of the poor was perhaps the most decisive event of his adolescence. One day he got an old woman admitted into St. Yves' Hospital, and this fact was told to his mother by that woman herself. He also used to help poor students in his class as well as those outside. Thus on seeing a poor student, who was made fun of by his classmates, Louis took a collection from those very classmates and got a new set of clothes stitched for him. Louis was much devoted to Mary and joined the Sodality of Our Lady. After joining the sodality, he learned to work with others in common projects and found joy in friendship. While studying at Rennes, he had a deep experience of God and he spent much time in prayer and penance. While praying before a statue of Our Lady, he felt certain of being called to priesthood. By the end of 1692, after his philosophy, he started to learn theology.

3. Departure for Paris: Miss de Montigny, came to Rennes, stayed with the Grignions and got legal service from Mr. John Baptist. She spoke to Louis about the Seminary of St. Sulpice. On her return to Paris, she got some help from a rich lady and came forward to get Louis admitted in St. Sulpice. She wrote to Louis asking him to go over to Paris. Louis as well as the whole family was very happy. His parents got things ready for the journey. Louis refused to accept the horse offered to him for the journey. On the day of departure, Louis bid good-bye to his parents and dear ones. His uncle Fr. Alain Robert, his brother Joseph and perhaps his friend John Baptist Blain accompanied him as far as the Cesson Bridge, some 3 km away from Rennes. They embraced each other and bid their final good-byes. After crossing of the bridge, Louis made a vow never to possess anything. He then gave away the money he had to a beggar and exchanged

his new clothes with the old ones on another beggar. After covering 300 km on foot he reached Paris.

4. In Hostels meant for poor seminarians: As Montfort's benefactress could not get him admitted in St. Sulpice, he was admitted in Fr. De la Barmondiere's Hostel. As for his studies he followed the theological course at the famous Sorbonne University. During the famine 1693, as his benefactress could not pay the hostel fees, he had to earn money by begging and by keeping watch over dead bodies three or four nights per week. In September 1694, Fr. Barmondiere died. His hostel was closed down and Louis was admitted into Fr. Boucher's Hostel. In this hostel food was very poor and during the winter of 1694, Louis became dangerously ill and he was admitted into a hospital. Louis was on the point of death. But miraculously he regained health and he was discharged. Madame d'Alègre came forward to pay the greater part of the fees to be paid in order to get him admitted into the Lesser Seminary of St. Sulpice. The balance amount came from a chapel in Nantes.

5. In the Lesser Seminary of St. Sulpice and ordination: When the new academic year 1695-96, started, Louis gave up his studies at the Sorbonne University. He had already completed the courses required for a bachelor's degree in theology. Louis was not interested in a doctorate in theology and he preferred to study the science of the saints. He preferred to attend the evening courses given by Sulpicians and to use the library. He chose Fr. Leschassier as his spiritual director. St. Sulpice had its own image of a good seminarian, and Louis found it very difficult to conform himself to that established framework. His spiritual father misunderstood him and humiliated. Yet the inner Master continued to mould him into a saint and apostle. Louis' discovery of the holy slavery to Jesus in Mary led him use it as the best means to get united to Christ. He enthusiastically made it his own, giving it new dimensions. His devotion to Mary was centred on Christ. In the Seminary, Louis was appointed the Master of Ceremonies, the librarian and a teacher of catechism to some unruly children in one suburban parish. He fulfilled his duties well. Further he composed hymns and prepared sermons, thus preparing himself for his future apostolate. He was also the librarian. During the summer of 1699, Louis and another seminarian were chosen to represent the Sulpician community at the solemn annual pilgrimage to our Lay of Chartres. There Louis spent much time in prayer. On June 5, 1700, Louis was ordained a priest. After a week of prayer, he offered his first Holy Eucharist on the altar of Our Lady in the parish church of St. Sulpice.

6. In St. Clement Community, Nantes: Fr. Louis wanted to go to Canada as a missionary; but Fr. Leschassier did not agree to it. He was not interested to be in a parish. Hence he stayed for sometime in the seminary itself. Fr. Leveque, the founder of a missionary community known as St. Clement Community, Nantes, came to St. Sulpice. Fr. Leschassier suggested to Fr. Louis to go to that community to be trained for parish missions. The latter reached the place at the end of September 1700. Here Fr. Louis did not find what he was looking for. Hence on Dec. 6, 1700, he wrote to Fr. Leschassier, "My intention was, as yours was too, to prepare for mission-work, especially for teaching catechism to the poor, since this is what attracts me most. But I am not doing that at all and I do not think that I shall ever do it here... I feel a tremendous urge to make our Lord and His Holy Mother loved, to go in a humble and simple way to teach catechism to the poor in country places and to arouse in sinners a devotion to our Blessed Mother... When I see the needs of the Church I cannot help pleading continually for a small and poor band of good priests to do this work under the banner and protection of the Blessed Virgin." (L.5)

7. Trip to Poitiers: In April 1701, Fr. Louis received an invitation from his sister Sylvia for her vestition in the Abbey of Fontevault. He went there and met the Abbess' sister, Madame de Montespan, who advised him to meet the Bishop of Poitiers. When he reached Poitiers, as the Bishop was out of station, Fr. Louis went to the Poorhouse there. After meeting the Bishop of Poitiers, Fr. Louis returned to St. Clement Community, Nantes. The Bishop wanted to consult Fr. Leschassier before assigning work to Fr. Louis in his diocese. Towards the end of August 1701, Bishop Girard wrote to Fr. Louis, "Our poor people continue to want you as their priest." By the end of October, Fr. Louis reached Poitiers without a penny in his pocket. As the official appointment was not made, he stayed in the minor seminary. He visited hospitals and prisons. He gathered beggars and children in the streets to teach them religion. He also gave conferences to 13 or 14 students from the colleges and started an association for them.

8. Chaplain at the Poorhouse of Poitiers: In November 1701, Fr. Louis joined the Poorhouse as one of its chaplains. The Poorhouse was managed by lay superintendents. The house was poor and the food was not enough. Fr. Louis' views were totally different from those of the superintendents and chaplains. He did not accept any salary. He did not eat with the chaplains. He made himself one with the poor. He ate the food that they ate. Thus he invented a new way of being among the poor. At the poorhouse, his devotion and sense of organization worked marvels and in time also aroused the hostility of certain malcontents. Every morning, he, along with some beggars, went to the town and collected alms and food. He introduced the custom of distributing food thrice a day instead of the usual once a day. He introduced some reforms in the spiritual domain also. Though the superintendents were not happy, real conversions took place. He also started the Association of Wisdom for some twenty girls who were physically handicapped. A clever and virtuous blind girl was made the leader.

9. The first disciple, Sr. Marie Louise Trichet: Many people used to come to Fr. Louis for confessions. Thus one young lady called Elizabeth came to Fr. Louis. On her return home, she told her sister Marie Louise Trichet about the saintly priest and the latter met Fr. Louis and came to him several times afterwards. She also made a retreat along with others under his guidance. She expressed to him her desire to become a religious. Fr. Louis told her, "If you want to be a religious, go and stay in the poorhouse." In November 1702, after getting a special permission from the new Bishop (Bishop Girard expired in March 1702), she was admitted into the Poorhouse to help the girl who was in charge of the organization for the physically handicapped girls. On Feb. 2, 1703, Fr. Louis gave her a gray habit and called her Sr. Marie Louise of Jesus. He also started signing as Fr. De Montfort. Then onwards he came to be known under that name.

10. At the General Hospital of Salpetriere: During the spring of 1703, Montfort had to face some problems within the Poorhouse as well as from outside. Around Easter, he left the Poorhouse of Poitiers, and went to Paris. There he joined the General Hospital of Salpetriere as a volunteer priest. The Hospital had 5000 poor people and twenty-three chaplains. Montfort helped the poor much; but the other priests did not like his ways and he was asked to live.

11. His search for Wisdom and the Pot-de-Fer Street experience: Fr. Montfort took shelter under a staircase of a dilapidated house. Here he spent a good part of his time in contemplation. He meditated upon the love of the Eternal and Incarnate Wisdom for humankind. He meditated upon the Book of Wisdom and on the Gospels, especially on the passion and death of Christ. Definitely during this period of 1703-04, Montfort had a mystical experience of being united to

Jesus Christ. “Invited in 1703 to give several conferences at the Seminary of the Holy Spirit, founded by his friend Fr. Claude Poullart des Places, he presented a commentary on the Book of Wisdom. He also wrote his first book, “The Love of Eternal Wisdom”. While Montfort was at the Pot-de-Fer Street, the poor of Poitiers wrote to Fr. Leschassier, “We, 400 poor people, beg you most humbly, for the greatest love and glory of God, to send us back our venerable shepherd, he who loves the poor so much, Fr. Grignon.” The Bishop of Poitiers also wrote to him. Before he left Paris, Montfort was asked to bring order and peace to the hermits of Mount-Valerien. By his example and love, he was able to do it.

12. Director of the Poorhouse of Poitiers: On March 23, 1704, Montfort was back at the Poorhouse of Poitiers as its Director. He prepared a Rule for the house and got it approved by the Bishop. He looked after the material and spiritual needs of the poor well. Once again some problem arose and therefore after one year of service, he left the Poorhouse for good.

13. A Missionary in the diocese of Poitiers: By the middle of 1705, the Bishop of Poitiers appointed Montfort director of the Retreat House and as a missionary in the diocese. Montfort lived at the House of the Penitents. He chose Montbernage, a poor quarter on the suburb, for his first mission. Here the people were workers: craftsmen, trench-diggers, bakers, fishmongers, etc. He bought a dancing hall, converted it into a chapel and dedicated it to Mary, Queen of All Hearts. He started to preach a mission. More and more people came for the mission. The poor people of Poitiers knew him and loved him. They considered him a saint. He had great influence over them. He organized processions and the recitation of the rosary. At the end of the mission, the people renewed their vows of Baptism, consecrated themselves to Jesus through the hands of Mary. Montfort then preached in a number of places. While hearing confessions in the Church of the Penitents, he noticed a young called Mathurin Rangepard, who wanted to become a Capuchin. But Montfort said to him, “It is God’s Providence that led you here. Would you like to help missionaries in their work? Follow me and thus you will follow your vocation.” He followed Montfort and was known as Bro. Mathurin. While preaching at the Calvary church, the people brought bad books and pictures to be burned. A heap was made. Someone placed an effigy of the devil at the centre of the heap. A rumour spread that Montfort was going to burn the devil and it reached the ears of one of the V.G.s, namely Fr. Villeroi, who did not appreciate Montfort. He came and ordered Montfort to stop the preaching and humiliated him. While Montfort was preaching at St. Catherine’ Church, the Bishop, who had come back from Paris, ordered Montfort to stop preaching in his diocese.

14. Pilgrimage to Rome and audience with the Pope: Once again Montfort thought of going to foreign countries to preach. But before doing anything, he planned to go to Rome on foot and meet the Pope. Before leaving he wrote an affectionate letter to the people of Montbernage requesting them to remain faithful to the holy practices that he had taught them. Montfort along with a Spanish student started for Rome on foot. On the way they visited the Marian Shrine at Loretto. In Rome, Fr. Thommasi, a Theatine religious, arranged for Montfort an audience with the Pope. On June 6, 1706, Montfort had an audience with Pope Clement XI and expressed his desire to work as foreign missionary. The Pope said, “You have, Sir, a field large enough to exercise your zeal in France. Do not go elsewhere. Work always with perfect obedience to the Bishops in whose diocese you will be called to work. God, by this means, will bless your works.” The Pope conferred on him the title of “Apostolic Missionary” and blessed his crucifix attaching a plenary indulgence.

15. Missionary under the protection of Our Lady and St. Michael: Montfort returned to France on Aug. 25, 1706 and Bro. Mathurin met him. The Bishop heard about his return and asked him to leave the diocese within 24 hours. Montfort and Mathurin left for Saumur and Mount St. Michael. At Saumur, Montfort entrusted his mission to Our Lady of Ardilliers. On Sept. 28, 1706, they reached Mount St. Michael. They spent a fortnight there and Montfort entrusted his mission to the protection of St. Michael. On his return from Mount St. Michael, Montfort came to Rennes. He met Fr. Bellier, who was his guide when he was a student there, and the latter advised him to join Fr. Leuduger's group of missionaries. He met also his uncle Fr. Alain Robert. At the latter's advice, he had a meal with his parents, who were then staying in Rennes. In Rennes, he preached in several churches. Then he along with Bro. Mathurin paid a visit to Montfort and had a meal with Mother Andrea. They moved on to Dinan, where a mission was about to start. At Dinan, he stayed with the missionaries. During the mission, Montfort did the duties of a catechist and took special care of the poor. One evening, going along the streets, Montfort found a poor man covered with ulcers. He took him on his shoulders and went to the Missionaries' House. He knocked at the door and cried out, "Open to Jesus Christ." He, who came to open the door, was much astonished at the sight. Montfort put the poor man on his bed and warmed him as much as he could. He spent the night in prayer. He saw Jesus in the poor.

16. In Fr. Leuduger's Missionary Group: "After the mission at Dinan, Montfort, always in the company of Mathurin, headed for St. Brieuc in order to join up with the group of missionaries led by Fr. Dom Leuduger. Fr. Dom Leuduger continued the great tradition of the "Britton mission". His reputation and influence were both strong. About 20 priests worked with him on a permanent basis, and occasionally, as needed, others joined him. The collaboration between the experienced missionary and Montfort was fruitful from more than one point of view. But it did not last very long. In August of the same year, 1707, during the mission at Moncontour, the mission team broke up. He was asked to leave. There must have been a difference in their concept about mission. It was a difference more of spirit than practice. Montfort preferred to preach in the Apostolic way, i.e., "in a great spirit of simplicity, poverty, penance, and abandonment to Divine Providence." Montfort did not like funded missions. With Fr. Leuduger's group, Montfort preached at La Cheze in Northern Brittany and rebuilt the Chapel of Our Lady of Pity. From there he went to Plumieux, and Trinity-Prorhoet. In order to preserve the fruits of the mission, he started an Association of Virgins, an Association of the Friends of the Cross and a Confraternity of the Rosary. For the success of the missions he spent much time in prayer and did penance. He excelled in helping the poor. To a lady, who wanted to give him money for a new cassock, he said, "My body can do without a new cassock, but Jesus Christ's poor cannot do without bread." Along with other priests he preached a mission at Montfort itself. Then came the mission at Moncontour. Montfort's popularity pushed even veteran missionaries into shade and they did not like it. There Montfort took a collection to offer masses for the dead. Fr. Leuduger did not approve of it and asked Montfort to leave the group.

17. At the Hermitage of St. Lazare: Montfort was with Fr. Leuduger's group from Feb.-Oct. 1707. Being asked to leave the group, Montfort found himself without a ministry. He made use of the occasion for retreat, reflection and for training up his Brothers. With Bros. Mathurin and John, he occupied the hermitage of St. Lazare in the town of Montfort. Montfort restored the chapel, carved a statue of Our Lady Wisdom and placed it on an altar and above it a picture of a

dove with outstretched wings symbolizing the Holy Spirit. People came to him and he taught them. Some priests invited him to preach in their parishes and he obliged them. During the spring of 1708, the Bishop of St. Malo came there and ordered Montfort not to preach. Understanding that his presence in the diocese was no longer wanted, Montfort decided to leave.

18. First missions in the diocese of Nantes: Mgr. Barrin, one of the Vicar Generals and a schoolmate of Montfort, invited Montfort to the diocese of Nantes. At first Montfort preached a mission under the leadership of a Jesuit. Then he started to be the leader and Mgr. Barrin gave him Fr. Bastieres as assistant. At the end of summer in 1708, Montfort preached a mission at Vallet with great success. After that he preached at La Boissiere and Landemont. Planting of crosses and recitation of the rosary became part and parcel of the mission. In Nov. 1708, Montfort preached at La Chevroliere. His next mission was at Vertou and there everything was smooth and Montfort said, "No Cross. What a Cross!" In December 1708, he preached a mission at St. Fiacre. In the diocese of Nantes, Montfort developed a personal method of structuring the missions. His spiritual orientation included: 1. living on Providence, dependent on the people; 2. paying a special care to the poor; 3. Mary's place in prayer, notably the practice of the Rosary; 4. Wisdom of the Cross; and above all, 5. renewing the vows and promises of Baptism. He knew how to insert his convictions into his sermons. With him, teaching took on the power of witnessing. He was given the grace to touch souls. Singing Hymns, organizing processions, founding confraternities, etc. added to the effectiveness of the missions. At the beginning of the Lent of 1709, Montfort preached a mission at Campbon. The church was in a pitiable condition. On dirty walls spread a black mourning band adorned with the crest of the Dukes of Coislin. The floor was obstructed by uneven tombstones. After the mission, Montfort spoke to the people of the neatness needed for God's House. He got the men to take the tombstones to the cemetery and got the floor redone. He removed the crest of the Dukes of Coislin from the walls and got the walls whitewashed. A few days later, the Steward of Pontchateau came with officers to have Montfort arrested for encroaching on the Duke's rights. The Duke was sick and his brother, the Bishop of Metz, did not object to Montfort's action and the Steward had to withdraw; but he kept a grudge against Montfort. Some people planned to kill Montfort on the day that he had planned to Pontchateau. Fortunately Fr. Bastieres came to know about the plot and the missionaries postponed their journey and thus saved themselves.

19. The construction of the Pontchateau Calvary: In May 1709, Montfort, with a new assistant Fr. Gabriel Olivier, started a mission in Pontchateau. He had nursed a great plan to build a monumental Calvary on the moor of La Madeleine in Pontchateau. After sounding the local clergy, he announced to the parishioners of Pontchateau his plan. People received the news with enthusiasm and expressed their readiness to cooperate. The plan was simple but grand. Montfort drew three concentric circles. On the inner and topmost circle, three crosses were to be planted and at the foot of Jesus' cross the statues of Mary, John and Mary Magdalene were to be erected. The mud between the second and third circles was to be taken and put on inner circle to raise into a hill. Beyond the third circle, 150 fir trees, divided into tens by means of 15 cypresses, were to form a huge rosary. The news about the construction spread far and wide. People from the surrounding parishes came to work on the Calvary. On certain days even 500 people were there to work. Montfort often provided with a simple meal. He got suitable statues made.

20. Montfort's further missions: As the work on the Pontchateau Calvary was going on, Montfort preached missions in a number of parishes, Fr. Olivier helped him both in the missions

and in the construction work. The two chief missions that they preached together were those of St. Donatien and Bouguenais in June and July 1710. The two were at Pontchateau in August 1710. The mission at Bouguenais ended with a grand procession.

21. The Pontchateau tragedy:By the second week of September 1710, the Calvary was ready for blessing. It was beautiful and grand. Montfort fixed its blessing for Sept. 14, the feast of the Exaltation of Holy Cross. The Bishop also gave his consent. Four famous preachers were appointed. On the eve of the Feast, while the last preparations were going on and while a huge crowd was gathering, a priest arrived at 4.00 p.m. with a letter from the Bishop of Nantes. The Bishop forbade the blessing. Montfort left the crowd there and walked the whole night and reached Nantes by 6. a. m. He met the Bishop; but the latter did not revoke his decision. On the feast day the programme went on as planned, but without the blessing. Montfort returned only at noon on the 15th. Most of the crowd were still there. He conveyed the message, consoled the people and resigned himself to that awful disappointment. The Bishop of Metz, the new Duke of Coislin, gave Montfort permission to build the Calvary on the Moor of La Madeleine. The Steward was not at all happy. He wrote to the Governor of Brittany that Montfort was constructing a fortresses with moats and underground passages, which could be used by the enemy of the nation as hiding places. An inquiry was made by the Commissioner of Brittany, Mr. Ferrand. He came, examined the works and wrote a report confirming the accusation. The report was sent to Paris and the King ordered that the Calvary should be destroyed. Montfort went to St. Molf to preach. During the first week of the mission, Fr. Olivier brought him a letter from the Bishop. On reading it, Montfort wept as the Bishop was forbidding him to preach and hear confessions all over his diocese. Montfort went to the Bishop's House and the Bishop informed him about the royal order to destroy the Calvary. He accepted this great trial with calm serenity. He went to the Jesuits' House and made a retreat.

22. After the Pontchateau tragedy: The first months following the fatal day in September were among the darkest ever experienced by Louis, a bleak period of torment for his soul. Like his desert experience in the Pot de Fer street and his painful dismissal from Poitiers, this trial touched the depths of his soul. He stayed in Cathuy House, which was offered to him as a temporary refuge by Fr. Olivier's mother. During the last quarter of the year, he started a Hospice for the Incurable. Montfort and his helpers rescued the incurables from the indignity of dying in the gutters. On Nov. 10, 1710, Montfort became a member of the Third Order of St. Dominic. In Jan. 1711, Montfort once again came to lime-light There was a devastating flood in the Loire River. Some people got marooned and no one dared to rescue them; but Montfort got a boat, coaxed some people to join him and brought help to the marooned people. Montfort stayed at the Cathuy House till March 1711.

23. In the Dioceses of La Rochelle and Luçon: Mgr. Barrin of Nantes wrote to the Bishops of La Rochelle and Luçon recommending Montfort to their dioceses. Both the bishops were ready to receive him. At the beginning of the Lent of 1711, Montfort started a mission at La Garnache in the diocese of Luçon. He preached the mission, rebuilt a chapel and placed in it a statue of our Lady of Victory. He began a new method of feeding the poor. At his request each family adopted a poor person and undertook to look after him or her. During the first half of May, he came to La Rochelle and Bishop Champflour received him warmly and granted him all possible faculties. After preaching a mission at L'houmeau, he preached three important

missions in La Rochelle itself: one for men, one for women and the third one for soldiers. His own brother, Fr. Gabriel Grignon, Fr. Bastieres and several Dominican Fathers were his assistants. Bro. Mathurin and some lay people also helped him.

Montfort conducted a series of things with great success. He involved the entire town in the activities of the mission. The final mission ended with an imposing procession. There was a crowd. Everything was beautifully planned and executed. The people marched in perfect order. Hymns were sung, band played the music, colourful banners were used and rosaries were recited. The procession was so impressive that a contemporary has left a lively description as well as a meticulous drawing of its overall design. That painting by Mr. Claude Masse is preserved to this day in one of the archives in Paris.

In 1712, the Bishop of Luçon sent Montfort to preach a mission on the Island of Yeu. At that time English pirate ships infested the sea-passage between Brittany and the Island of Yeu. As soon as the boat was 12 km from the land, two pirate ships were coming towards the boat. The wind was against the boat and it was favouring the pirate ships. The captain as well as all seamen were terribly afraid. Montfort asked them to recite the rosary with him. When the rosary was over, the wind changed its direction and the ships moved away. The mission on the island was a great success. In July 1712, he left the diocese of Luçon for La Rochelle. He spent the autumn at the Hermitage of St. Eloi. During the last part of 1712 and during the first part of 1713, he preached missions at St. Vivian, Esnandes, Courçon, Le Beugnon Bressuieres and Argenton-Chateau. Towards the end of May, he came to La Seguniere to preach a mission there. He spent a month there giving conferences, and instructions and hearing confessions. He restored the chapel of Our Lady of All Patience.

During the period 1711-1713, Montfort's robust physique showed signs of fatigue. A deterioration began due to several factors: his ascetical practices, thousands of kilometres covered on foot in all types of weather, more than ten years of frustration and tension, the effect of the poison, etc. Definite symptoms of burn-out began to make their appearance. There was also an evolution in his psychological make up. He became more balanced, and more open and tolerant. He acquired the quality of geniality.

The dioceses of Luçon and La Rochelle became Montfort's principal field of apostolate. He spent the most fruitful years of mature active life within the secondly mentioned diocese. He set about evangelizing a whole territory, traveling slowly and humbly on foot from one village to another, wherever his preaching was requested. Not a single village was neglected. He entered deeply into the lives of the communities, which received him. His was not a passing visit and he went back to the same villages. His relationship with the crowds, which called him affectionately "the good Father Montfort", was more personal and human than ever before. He gave to a number of people individual spiritual direction. He became a popular leader capable of animating crowds. He was capable of using a language convincing as well as appealing to ordinary people. He also had the gift of touching the hearts. In short, he became an effective preacher, guide and leader.

24. Montfort, a spiritual writer: In the suburb of La Rochelle, a pious lady gifted to Montfort a house with a small garden enclosed by a wall. It was close to the gates of the town in the canton of St. Eloi, which was, from then on, called as St. Eloi Hermitage. Montfort spent a good part of the autumn of 1712 in this hermitage and wrote "The Treatise on the True Devotion to Mary". He also wrote the "Secret of Mary", a summary form of the True Devotion to Mary. The third of his books on Marian devotion was "The Secret of the Holy Rosary". As already seen, his

first book was “The Love of Eternal Wisdom”. In 1714, he wrote “A Letter to the Friends of the Cross.” Further he wrote a large number of Canticles, which were used during the missions as a means of catechizing and praying.

25. Montfort, a founder of religious congregations: In December 1700, Montfort wrote about founding a congregation of priests. In 1703, he gave a religious habit to Sr. Marie Louise Trichet and later Sr. Catherine Bruno joined her. In 1705, he recruited Bro. Mathurin to help the Missionaries and later more Brothers joined him and a few of them taught in the schools he founded. In 1713, he started writing two Rules one for the Company of Mary and the other for the Daughters. In 1715, both were completed and they were approved by the Bishop of La Rochelle. At the beginning of the Rule for the Missionaries, we find his Prayer for Missionaries, which is very appealing. In July 1713, Montfort went to the Holy Spirit Seminary, Paris. Its founder, Fr. Claude Poullart des Places, before his death, had promised to train priests for Montfort. His successors were quite willing to help him. But at that time no one could be spared, and therefore Montfort had to return empty handed. On his return journey he paid a visit to Srs. Marie Louise and Catherine Brunet in Poitiers and spoke to them about the possibility of their leaving for La Rochelle. Early in 1715, Fr. Adrian Vatel joined Montfort and towards the end of year Fr. Rene Mulet. On June 9, 1715, Montfort and four Brothers pronounced their religious vows and on Aug. 22, 1715, the two Sisters mentioned above made their religious vows in La Rochelle.

26. Montfort’s further missions and visit to his friend Fr. Blain: Bro. Nicholas joined Montfort and along with him, Montfort came to St. Lo on Aug. 17, 1714 and preached a very successful mission. From there in September Montfort came to Rouen to meet his friend Fr. Blain, who was then the Canon of the Cathedral and Director of the Christian Schools. He had valuable experience regarding the organization of communities dedicated to the education of the poor. The two friends met after a lapse of ten years. Blain wanted Montfort to moderate the rigour of his own life. Montfort as an answer showed Blain a copy of the Gospel and asked him, whether he had any objection to what Jesus had taught and practiced. He concluded by saying, “There are several paths to reach God. I leave them to walk in their own way; leave me to walk in mine, and all the more so, because you cannot dispute its advantages.” Montfort revealed to Blain that the former was granted the grace of being constantly in the presence of Jesus and Mary. Then they talked about the foundation of schools and about the rules to be followed in the schools. During the second half of October, Fr. Montfort and Bro. Nicholas started their return journey. Montfort from Nantes went to Pontchateau with Bro. Jamesto bring the Calvary statues to Nantes. After an absence of four months Montfort returned to La Rochelle to begin his missions.

27. Montfort, a founder of free schools for boys: During the first half of 1714, Montfort had several meetings with the Bishop of La Rochelle concerning free schools. Montfort chose an unused school building and repaired it well. His school started functioning in the autumn of 1714. Montfort looked into all organizational details. Only poor boys were admitted and many such joined the school. Montfort appointed a priest as its director. The teachers were dressed in a black uniform. The boys were arranged in nine benches raised up as an amphitheatre at various levels, so that the students could neither talk nor play without the teacher noticing it. He gave to those benches the names of the nine choirs of angels. There were about 150 students in each class. Reading, writing, arithmetic and catechism were taught. After class, the children returned home in an orderly manner under the supervision of the teachers. Montfort visited the school

everyday, whenever he was in La Rochelle. Bro. Philip must have been one of the teachers. Later he was transferred to the school in Nantes as headmaster.

28. Montfort, a founder of free schools for girls: Children from poor families could not study in public or private schools as the fees were beyond their means. Hence Montfort, after founding a free school for boys, worked at founding one for girls. He wanted Sisters Marie Louise and Catherine Brunet to leave Poitiers and come to La Rochelle to look after the school. It was not easy for them to leave Poitiers as the people in charge of the Poorhouse did not want to relieve them. After overcoming much difficulty, they reached La Rochelle on March 28, 1715. The free school for girls started functioning under the supervision of the Sisters.

29. Montfort's final missions and death: In February 1715, Fr. Adrian Vatel, came to La Rochelle in a ship bound for the West Indies in order to become a missionary there. As his permissions, Fr. Vatel became Montfort's first priest disciple. After establishing the schools and the Daughters of Wisdom at La Rochelle, Montfort started his missions in the Vandeen Woodlands. On April 19, 1715, he along with Fr. Vatel and two other associates, came to St. Amand-sur-Sevre. The mission was a great success and many got converted. At the end of the mission he planted three crosses. After that mission, as Montfort was tired, he took a week's rest at the mansion belonging to the sisters of Bishop Bauveau of Nantes. Around that time, he called in all his Brothers to give them a retreat at La Seguniere. On June 9, 1715, the retreat got over and Bros. Nicholas, Philip, Louis and Gabriel made in his hands for one year, the simple vows of Poverty and Obedience. Montfort also made the same vows on that day.

In Aug.-Sept. 1715, Montfort started the mission at Fontenay. While Montfort was preaching a retreat to the Sisters of Notre Dame, Fr. Rene Mulot, the brother of the parish priest of St. Pompain came to request Montfort to preach a mission in his brother's parish. He was sickly and was taking rest staying with his brother. Montfort expressed his inability to do so; but Fr. Rene went on pleading. Finally Montfort said, "If you can help me in the mission at Vouvant, I shall preach a mission at St. Pompain." In spite of his ill health, Fr. Rene agreed to do so. A week later, the Mission at Vouvant started and Fr. Rene Mulot helped Montfort. During the mission Fr. Rene was cured of his illness and accepted the invitation of Montfort to follow him. At Vouvant one lady gave Montfort a house and the wife of the Lieutenant of Vouvant gave him two pieces of land to start a free school there and another lady a small house for the Brothers who would be running the school.

In December-January, Montfort preached the mission at St. Pompain. Montfort's father expired on Jan. 21, 1716. After the mission at Villiers, Montfort returned to St. Pompain. During the first week of Lent, he sent 33 White Penitents from there on a pilgrimage to Our Lady of Ardilliers in order to pray to God to send him good missionaries. Frs. Mulot and Vatel accompanied them. All went on foot, bare footed, singing hymns and reciting the rosary and other prayers. On their return, Montfort and some Brothers made the same pilgrimage. Montfort's last mission was preached at St. Laurent-sur-Sèvre. On April 1, 1716, Montfort and Bro. Gabriel reached the place. Fr. René Mulot and his brother, the parish priest of St. Pompain, joined them later. The mission started on April 5th. It went on well and Montfort got a Calvary ready for blessing. He was informed that Bishop Champflour would be visiting the parish on the 22nd. He got the parish ready to receive the Bishop and planned out everything well. The Bishop came on the appointed day and he was given a grand reception. Montfort was then tired and he had high fever. In the afternoon, he preached a sermon on the kindness of Jesus. Acute pleurisy set in and after the sermon he went to bed never to get up again.

Medicines had no effects and Montfort's health got deteriorated. Fr. Mulot forced Montfort to lie on a mattress instead of on straw. Montfort made his confession and received the sacrament of the sick. On the 27th, he dictated his Will to Fr. Mulot and then signed the document: "I, the undersigned, the greatest of sinners, will that my body be buried in the cemetery and my heart under the step of the altar of the Blessed Virgin. I confide to His Lordship the Bishop of La Rochelle and to Fr. Mulot my small pieces of furniture and my mission books, to be preserved for the four Brothers who joined me in a life of obedience and poverty... If there is any possibility of putting up a building in Vouvant, it should be put at the disposal of the Brothers of the community of the Holy Spirit to conduct charitable schools..."

By 4.00 p.m. on April 28, people came in large numbers to see Fr. Montfort alive for the last time and to receive his blessing. Montfort at first refused to give the blessing protesting that he was not worthy. Fr. Mulot suggested to him, "Bless them, Father, with your crucifix and it will be Jesus, who blesses them." Montfort accepted the suggestion and blessed the people with all his heart. People were weeping and to show them the Christian meaning of life and death, he sang one of the hymns that he had composed. Montfort held fast in one hand the crucifix blessed by the Pope and in the other the small statue of Our Lady that he always carried with him. He looked at the two images with tender love and kissed them in turn invoking the names of Jesus and Mary. Then he had a few moments of deep peace and silence. Suddenly he roused himself from his torpor crying out, "It is in vain that you attack me. I am between Jesus and Mary. Thanks be to God and to Mary! I am at the end of my life. Henceforth, I will sin no more." Then at 8.00 p.m., on Tuesday, April 28, 1716, Montfort surrendered his soul to his Creator.

The news of Montfort's death spread far and wide. The funeral was fixed for the 29th. The mission at St. Laurent was still going on. In the forenoon of the 29th, the Calvary was to be blessed. Under the emotions of the previous days, and worn out by his ministry in the confessional, Fr. Mulot, at the beginning of the ceremony, in the midst of impressive silence, said, "My Brothers, today, we have two crosses to plant, first this material Cross that you see and the secondly, the burial of Fr. Montfort that we must do today." The funeral service took place in the afternoon. People came from all around even from Nantes. More than 10,000 people were present. The body had to be carried early to the church in order to satisfy the piety of the people. The burial service took place amidst general gloom and before a numerous clergy who wanted to show their veneration toward Fr. Montfort. He was buried in the Chapel of the Blessed Virgin on the left side of church. When the coffin was lowered into the grave the whole sorrowful crowd was weeping openly and during several days, people used to say with much grief, "Holy Father Montfort is dead!"

St. Louis Marie Grignion de Montfort (Chronology)

31-1-1673: Birth at Montort-sur-Meu, Brittany, France
1673-1675: Stay with Mother Andrea
1675-1685: Stay Bois-Marquer in Iffendic
1685-1692: Studies in St. Thomas Becket College, Rennes
1685-1686: Stay with Fro. Alain Robert
1686-1692: Stay with parents in Rennes.
End of 1692: Leaving for Paris to study theology
1692-1694: Stay in Fr. Barmondier's Hostel and study in Sorbonne University
1694: Stay in Fr. Boucher's Hodtel and study in Sorbonne University
End of 1694: Serious illness, hospitalization and miraculous cure
1695-1700: In St. Sulpice Little Seminary, Paris
1699: Pilgrimage to Our Lady of Chartres
5-6-1700: Ordination to priesthood in St. Sulpice Parish Church, Paris
Sept. 1700: Joining St. Clement Community, Nantes
April 1701: Visiting the Abbey of Fontevault, meeting Mrs. Montespan
April 1701: Visiting Poitiers, meeting Bishop Girard and return to Nantes
Nov. 1701: Reaching Poitiers, appointed Chaplain in the Poorhouse of Poitiers
1701-1703: Chaplain in the Poorhouse of Poitiers
02-02-1703: Vestition of Sr. Marie Louise Trichet
April – Sept. 1703: Chaplain at the General Hospital of Salpetriere, Paris
Sept 1703- April 1704: Stay under a staircase on the Fot-de-Fer Street, Paris
Spending time in contemplation, conferences in Holy Spirit Seminary, writing Love of Eternal Wisdom, restoring peace among the monks of Mount Valerian
09-03-1704: The poor of the Poorhouse of Poitiers requesting Montfort to come back, the Bishop of Poitiers also making the same request.
April 1704: Back at the Poorhouse of Poitiers as its Director
May 1705: Leaving the Poorhouse of Poitiers for good and becoming a missionary in the diocese of Poitiers.
1705: Bro. Mathurin joining Fr. Montfort
1706: Mission in Calvary Church, V.G. stopping the mission and burning of bad books stopped.
1706: Mission at Saturnin, Bishop's order asking Montfort to leave the diocese.
Lent 1706: Pilgrimage to Rome and audience Pope Clement XI on 6-6-1706
Aug. – Sept, 1706: Return to France and pilgrimage to Our Lady of Ardilleirs and to Mount St. Michael
Oct. 1706 – Feb. 1707: Stay in Rennes, Missions in Dinan, St Suliac, and Becherel
Feb. – Oct. 1707: In Fr. Leuduger's group and missions in the diocese of St. Malo and St. Brieu
Oct. 1707- June: 1708: Stay at the Hermitage of St. Lazare, teaching in and around Montfort
June 1708: Bishop asking Montfort not to preach, starting missions in the diocese of Nantes
1708: Missions at St. Similien, Valet, La Chevroliere, Vertou, St. Fiacre
1709: Missions at Campbon, & Pontchateau, commencement of the work on the Calvary
1710: Missions at St. Danatien, Bouguenais, interdict on blessing the Calvary on 13-09-1710
Oct. 1710-11: Mission at St. Molf, forbidden to exercise ministry, stay at Cathuy House, Hospital for the Incurables, Joining 3rd Order of St. Dominic, helping flood victims
Lent 1711: Leaving Nantes and preaching in the diocese of Luçon, La Garnache
May 11, 1711: Starting missions in the diocese of La Rochelle, Lhoumeau, La Rochelle, etc
1712: Missions at the Island of Yeu, Sallertaine, St. Christophe, St. Vivien, Esnandes,

1713: Missions at Courçon, Beugnon, Bressuire, Argenton, La Seguinere
 Trip to Holy Spirit Seminary, Paris, return, mission at Mauzé, Courçon

1714: Missions at Roussay, Villedieu, St. Lo, meeting Fr. Blain at Rouen
 Return to La Rochelle via Nantes and Rennes, mission at the island of Aix

Sept. 1714: Starting Free School for boys at La Rochelle

Feb. 1715: Recruiting Fr. Vatel, mission at Taugon-la-Ronde

28-03-1715: Arrival of Srs. Marie Louise and Catherine Brunet in La Rochelle and starting
 free school for girls.

1715: Bros' Profession on 9-6-1715, Srs' Profession 22-08-1715, Recruiting Fr. Mulot

1715: Missions at St. Amand, Mervent, Fontenay, Vouvant, St. Pompain,

1716: Mission at Villiers-en-Plaine, sending 33 White Penitents from St. Pompain to Our Lady
 of Ardilliers followed by the same pilgrimage by Montfort & Brothers

01-04-1716: Arrival at St. Laurent-sur-Sevre, starting the mission on the 5th

22-04-1716: Reception to Bishop, Montfort's becoming dangerously ill

27-04-1716: Montfort dictated his Will and signed it.

28-04-1716: Funeral service and burial

1838: Declared "Venerable" by Pope Gregory XVI

1869: Proclaimed his virtues heroic by Pope Pius IX

22-01-1888: Beatified by Pope Leo XIII

20-07-1947: Canonized Pope Pius XII.

* * * * *

Montfort's thirst Eternal and Incarnate Wisdom

When Montfort joined St. Sulpice Seminary, Paris, he discontinued his theological studies in Sorbonne University. Thus "he had more time to devote to God and could give full play to his dominant inclination for solitude and prayer." (Blain p.70) Further "He was more interested in the science of the saints than in theological studies. He was brilliantly intelligent, and if he had continued his studies at la Sorbonne, he would have been an excellent student; however, he was keener on the science of the saints than on theological studies." (Blain, p. 56) During the years between 1695 and 1700 he read a number of spiritual books as well as the Holy Scripture. He meditated on the matter given in the books, "The holy ways of the Cross and the sorrows of the world" written by Fr. Boudon, "The Letters of Fr. Surin", "The Maxims" by Fr. Amable Bonnefons and the writings of Fr. Jean Baptiste Saint-Juré. Of course, his main book for meditation was the Bible.

After a short stay in St. Clement's Community, Nantes, Fr. Montfort was appointed as one of the chaplains in the Poorhouse of Poitiers. Here he lived with the poor and lived like them. Actually he lived the spirituality of the cross. Then he was a chaplain at the General Hospital of Salpetriere, Paris. After five months, he was asked to leave. He felt as if rejected by all. "My only friend here is God. Those friends I once had in Paris have deserted me." (L. 15) He spent many days in utter poverty under the staircase of a dilapidated building at the Pot-de-Fer Street.

Fr. Jean Baptiste Blain, Fr. Montfort's classmate and biographer, has presented a graphic picture of Montfort's stay at the Pot-de-Fer street: "At that time this great lover of poverty used to take shelter in a small corner of a derelict house, near the Novitiate of the Jesuit Fathers. Kept so well-hidden and so few people knew he was there that I had great difficulty in finding him in a place which looked like the cave of Bethlehem; it was a small recess under a flight of stairs which let in hardly any sun. The only pieces of furniture I could see were an earthen pot and a tumbledown bed fit for a tramp or a drop-out. This was the kind of lodging he had wherever he went either from choice or necessity; yet God made up for his poverty, his humiliations and sufferings by granting him the grace of communicating with Him so intimately and so frequently that the servant of God spent the greater part of his days and nights in prayer." (Blain, pp. 220-222) During the period 1702-04, his Letters 13, 15, and 16 tell us that Montfort had a great desire to be united to Jesus Christ, the Eternal and Incarnate Wisdom. During autumn of 1702, he wrote to a religious of the Blessed Sacrament, "In the beloved cross is true wisdom and that is what I am looking for night and day more eagerly than ever." (L. 13) At the beginning of May 1703, he wrote to Sr. Marie Louise Trichet, "What wealth, what glory, what happiness would be mine if from all this (cross) I obtained divine Wisdom, which I long for day and night!" (L. 15)

Montfort was very eager to be united to Wisdom and he prayed for it day and night. He, on Oct. 24, 1703, wrote to Sr. Marie Louise Trichet expressing his inner sentiments: "When shall I possess this lovable and mysterious Wisdom? When will Wisdom come to live in me? When shall I be sufficiently equipped to serve as place of rest for Wisdom in a world where he is rejected and without a home? Who will give me this bread of understanding with which Wisdom nourishes great souls? Who will give me to drink of the chalice from which Wisdom quenches the thirst of those who serve him? When shall I be crucified and lost to the world? ,... So pray, entreat God, plead for me to obtain divine Wisdom. You will obtain it completely for me; of this I am quite convinced." (L.16)

“The ease with which Louis transforms the whole meaning of his dark night reminds us of similar sentiments voiced by St. John of Cross in the description of the ascent of the mountain of love... The fourth and fifth degrees of love, according to the description of St. John, suffering and unitive love, become intertwined in Louis’ writings that date from this period. The power of expressiveness contained in them is proportionate to what he is suffering... What is most remarkable in Montfortian expression as compared with the language of the mystics, is the equation of Wisdom with the object of his burning desire and divine spouse in an evolution towards mystical marriage.” (Montfort, A prophet for our times, pp. 230, 231)

Montfort was really enamoured of wisdom. a wisdom which is not merely a truth to be discovered but a person to be possessed, namely the Son of God seen under the feminine image of wisdom. On Oct. 28, 1704, Fr. Montfort wrote to his mother, "In my new family - the one I belong to now - I have chosen to be wedded to Wisdom and the Cross, for in these I find every good, both earthly and heavenly. So precious are these possessions that, if they were but known, Montfort would be the envy of the richest and most powerful kings on earth." (L.20) Fr. Poullart des Places invited Fr. Montfort to give talks to his seminarians in the Holy Spirit Seminary, Paris. Not only did he give these talks, but he also wrote his first book, "The Love of Eternal Wisdom", during the period between 1702 - 1704.

The manuscript, which is kept today at the General House of the Company of Mary in Rome, is in a remarkable state of preservation. It has 146 pages. The first printed edition came out in 1856. The Definitive Edition of 1929 marked a turning point in the interpretation of Montfort spirituality. Fr. Jean-Pierre Prévost, SMM, in an article entitled : 'Love of Eternal Wisdom' has stated, "A number of those who know Montfort spirituality well, have not failed to note the great doctrinal value of LEW and its fundamental importance for an understanding of Montfort’s work as a whole. Besides considering it as 'an academic treatise' and a 'great work' equal to the True Devotion... the Love of Eternal Wisdom is a fundamental book. It is this book alone which gives us the overall view of Montfort spirituality. J.-M. Dayet expresses a similar opinion: 'Louis Marie Grignon de Montfort appears here, as an undoubted contemplative and lover of Eternal Wisdom. This point of view is fundamental for a full understanding of his spirituality'." (Jesus living in Mary, pp. 633, 634)

Montfort has written this book not for mere reading nor for instruction. Mere reading can be tiresome as it contains a chain of scriptural quotations. After a first reading one may come to the conclusion that this book is a kind of bible history in the first part and a book of asceticism in the second. Hence another deeper type of reading is required in order to interiorize Montfort's spirituality. He is conveying to us the process he went through in order to obtain Wisdom. He is inviting us, like himself, to contemplate the events of the Salvation History as described in the Wisdom Literature of the Old Testament and also the events connected with the incarnation, life, death and resurrection of the Incarnate Wisdom, thereby knowing and experiencing, one may get united to Him. Montfort's personal experience is that God loves us unconditionally unto folly. He wants us to turn to God, to be influenced and transformed by Him. This transformation will lead us to love God and others unconditionally, as God loves us. When we realize that God loves us we begin to love Him, and this process goes deeper and deeper. Contemplation of God's love, of the initiatives which He has taken even in our own personal life and in the simple happenings of our life, we will nurture our love for Him.

When we appreciate a beautiful flower or a beautiful scenery, we not at all think about ourselves. When one appreciates his mother's love for him, once again the concentration is on her qualities and not on his own. This was the experience of Montfort with regard to God. He was captivated by His love, that he did not bother about the miserable material conditions in which he was while living under the staircase in Paris. And in his book, he is inviting us to contemplate God in eternity, and God effecting the creation and the Redemption. "This eternal beauty, ever supremely loving, is so intent on winning man's friendship that for this purpose he has written a book in which He describes His own excellence and His desire for man's friendship." (LEW 65)

If one is filled with thoughts about self, God and others cannot become objects of one's love and so self-emptying is a must. If one is preoccupied with his own survival, then he has no time to love. Only by dying to self and by making room in our hearts for God and for others can we be converted from self-centredness to God centredness, which is the object of spirituality and mysticism. For Montfort, "obtaining and keeping Divine Wisdom" (LEW 203) was the core of his spirituality, and according to him, "all perfection consists in our being conformed, united and consecrated to Jesus" (TD 120) and he yearned for this union with Jesus. His meditation on the Book of Wisdom led him to take "Wisdom as the spouse of God, a personification of the attributes of God ... Wisdom is with God in the creation, Wisdom is the companion of God in ruling the world ... This Wisdom becomes also the companion of man ... Wisdom becomes the spouse of man. From this derives the major part of Christian mysticism ... Spiritual life is the entering into this union with God in Wisdom. Taking Wisdom home, living with him, man becomes capable of realizing his vocation as man." (Divo Barsotti, The Book of Wisdom, pp. 34, 35)

"The Dutch Province of the Daughters of Wisdom requested the Titus Brandsma Institute in Nijmegen, the Netherlands, to do research work on The Love of Eternal Wisdom. Based on research done, Pierre Humblet published a booklet entitled "The Mystical Process of Transformation in Grignon's LEW". In this booklet it is mentioned: "In our study of 'The Love of Eternal Wisdom' what struck us most was the fact that its spirituality is highly pervaded by a fundamental undercurrent ... Mystical experience can be described as the inescapable human experience of being seized to the core of one's existence by 'Something' or 'Someone'; a shocking encounter with the Absolute; being touched at the deepest level in such a way that one is transformed by it and cannot go back to the 'old self' without a lasting sense of loss and/or unfaithfulness. The mystical way is the profound process of change initiated by it ... It is also important to realize that mysticism is not just something for the 'great ones', the saints among us. Its essence does not lie in a remotely situated final 'perfection', but is actually very close to us in its starting point: a passionate love which serves to orient our lives ... Every true experience of being 'called', for example, is at the bottom a mystical experience which starts the person called on a certain road and helps that person to stay on it. It calls away from the restrictiveness of self-orientation and makes us go forth to the Other (our Sovereign) and to the other (our neighbour), to cite the adjacent words of Montfort. Mysticism does not just express itself in words; it has a transformative impact on the whole person, on our entire being, and all of our conduct." (Mystical Process of Transformation, pp. 13, 17)

2. An introduction to the book

Montfort starts his book with a prayer to Eternal Wisdom: "Because I long so dearly to possess you, I am looking for you everywhere, like Solomon, wandering in all directions. ... Bestow your blessings and your enlightenment so that those who read it may be filled with a fresh desire

to love you and possess you, on earth as well as in heaven." (LEW 2) Hence the purpose of this book is to invite people to desire and possess Wisdom.

“LEW 1-7 form a whole and serve as a prelude or prologue. This prelude is made up of three elements: a prayer addressed to Wisdom, in which Montfort, in the style of the prophets of the OT and the NT, expresses his conviction that he is inspired to speak while remaining very conscious of his limitations (LEW 1-2); a quotation of Wis 6, which is an exhortation to seek wisdom with all one’s strength (LEW 3-4); and finally a word to his readers (LEW 4-7), inviting them to join him in contemplating and seeking Wisdom. The first chapter is also to be seen apart from the following ones. Here we have an introduction to the discourse, punctuated by questions, which tries to capture the attention and interest of the reader: "Can we love someone we do not even know? . . . Why is Jesus, the adorable, eternal and incarnate Wisdom loved so little[?] . . . What good will it do us to know all the other branches of knowledge necessary for salvation if we do not learn the only essential one, the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ?" (LEW 8-12). The whole chapter culminates in the expression of one of Montfort’s major convictions: "To know Jesus Christ incarnate Wisdom, is to know all we need'." (J.P. Prévost, *Jesus Living in Mary*, p. 641)

In LEW Nos. 3 and 4, Montfort has quoted the entire chapter 6 of the Book of Wisdom. The author of the Book of Wisdom warns the princes to search for Wisdom (1-21), and tells them how to acquire the virtue of wisdom (22-25). In LEW 5, Montfort tells us, "Eternal Wisdom invites men to come to him because he wants to teach them with a smile. He bestows blessings on them many times over and forestalls their needs in a thousand different ways, and even goes as far as to wait at their very doorstep to give them proofs of his friendship." (LEW 5) There is the constant invitation, "Desire ardently to know words, love them and you will find instruction in them. . . . Those who seek Wisdom will find her. . . . The first step, then towards acquiring Wisdom is a sincere desire for instruction; the desire for instruction is love; and love is keeping her laws." (Wis. 6:12,13,18)

The first part of the book deals with Eternal Wisdom's love for humans and the second part deals with the means to be taken by humans to possess and keep Wisdom. Montfort raises the question, "Can we love someone we do not know?" (LEW 8) To know the Eternal and Incarnate Wisdom, Montfort has described the whole Salvation History in different tableaux for us to contemplate. The contemplation of Eternal Wisdom will lead us to love Him, i.e., contemplating on His love for us, we will fall in love with Him. This is the dynamic structure which leads to an interior transformation. "The history of redemption, the varied activities of Eternal Wisdom in relation to us humans, is sketched at such length in part I and presented to us for contemplation precisely in order to show us the love of Eternal Wisdom with passionate intensity and thus to arouse in us a response of love for that Wisdom." (*Mystical Process of Transformation*, p. 25)

In the first chapter, Montfort gives an introduction to his book and outlines his subject. He describes the nature of Wisdom and the need to know and appreciate Wisdom. He says, "Nothing is more consoling than to know divine Wisdom. Happy are those who listen to Him; happier still are those who desire Him and seek Him; but the happiest of all are those who keep His laws. Their hearts will be filled with that infinite consolation which is the joy and happiness of the Eternal Father and the glory of the angels. . . . This knowledge of Eternal Wisdom is not only the most noble and the most consoling of all, it is also the most useful and the most necessary since eternal life consists in knowing God and Jesus Christ, His Son (Jn 17:3). . . . To know Jesus Christ, Incarnate Wisdom, is to know all we need. To presume to know everything and not to

know Him is know nothing at all." (LEW 12) Wisdom can also be considered as a gift, that is, "a delectable knowledge, a taste for God and His truth." (LEW 13)

Montfort gives us a clear picture of the book by saying, "Following the example of this great man (Solomon), I am going in my simple way, to portray Eternal Wisdom before, during and after his Incarnation and show by what means we can possess and keep him." (LEW 7) "Starting with his very origin, we shall consider Wisdom in eternity, dwelling in his Father's bosom and object of his Father's love. Next we shall see him in time, shining forth in the creation of the universe. Then we shall consider him in the deep abasement of his Incarnation and his mortal life; and then we shall see him glorious and triumphant in heaven. Finally we shall propose the means to acquire and keep him." (LEW 14)

3. The Eternal Wisdom in eternity

In Chapter 2, Montfort presents us **the first tableau** for our contemplation. "Here, with St. Paul, we must declare, 'O the depth, the immensity and the incomprehensibility of the Wisdom of God!' (Col. 1:16)" (LEW 15) Montfort gives an exposition of Wisdom, beginning with his dwelling in the womb of his Father. It is this personal relationship of Wisdom with the Father that constitutes the excellence of his being. Montfort wants us to consider "Wisdom in eternity, dwelling in his Father's bosom and object of his Father's love." (LEW 14) He is inviting us to meditate on what is given by St. John at the beginning of his Gospel, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ... No one has ever seen God; the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known." (Jn. 1:1, 18)

Montfort says, "Eternal Wisdom is a breath of God, a pure emanation of the glory of the Almighty. Hence nothing defiled gains entrance into him. He is the reflection of eternal light, the spotless mirror of God's majesty, the image of his goodness." (Wis. 7:25, 26, LEW 16) Fr. H.-M. Manteau-Bonamy, O.P. in his book, St. Louis Marie Grignon, theologian of Eternal Wisdom, says, "What is remarkable, what one can continually affirm is this double truth: Wisdom is the Word, divine and incarnate and at the same time Wisdom is the Holy Spirit, the divine Love, which proceeds ... Wisdom could be taken both as the Word and as the Spirit. If for Montfort, Wisdom is surely the Word, eternal and incarnate, he makes it clear that it is not the conceptualized Word of the Scholastics, but the Word of St. John (Apocalypse and the Prologue to his Gospel)." (pp. 34, 40)

"This is the Eternal Wisdom of which Solomon often speaks in his books, when he says that Wisdom was created - that is, produced- from the very beginning before anything was made or even before the beginning of time. Speaking of himself, Wisdom says, 'I was begotten from eternity, before the creation of the world. The depths did not exist as yet and I was already conceived' ((Prov. 8:23, 24)." (LEW 18)

Montfort then presents us with **the second tableau** to meditate upon: Wisdom's activity in souls. For this he has quoted 32 verses out of 37 from the most famous chapter of the Book of Sirach, that is, chapter 24. Wisdom personified speaks to Israel, "I came forth from the mouth of the Most High; I was born before all creatures... I had my dwelling in the heights and my throne was in a pillar of cloud... Then the Creator of the universe commanded me and spoke to me. He who created me rested in my tent. And he said to me: 'Dwell in Jacob, let Israel be your heritage and take root in my elect.' ... I took root in the people whom the Lord had honoured, whose heritage is the portion of the Lord... Like a cedar on Lebanon and like a cypress on Mount Zion I have grown tall." (Sirach 24: 3-13, LEW 21-25)

Wisdom has fixed her abode in Israel and there she exercises her power and grants all her gifts. Finally she concludes her words by calling all to her, "Come to me, all you who yearn for me, and be filled with my fruits.... Those who listen to me will not be put to shame; those who work with me will not sin." (Sirach 24: 19-22, LEW 27, 28) This beautiful hymn forms the climax of the whole book of Sirach. Wisdom, who has throne in heaven, has chosen to dwell in Israel, i.e., in us. Montfort has given a small commentary on the verses in LEW 29 and concludes the chapter by saying, "Divine Wisdom shows himself to be the mother and source of all good and he exhorts all people to give up everything and desire him alone... In verses 30 and 31, divine Wisdom lists three degrees in holy living: 1. Listen to God with humble submission; 2. act in him and through him with persevering fidelity; 3. finally, seek to acquire the light and unction you need to inspire others with that love for Wisdom which will lead them to eternal life." (LEW 30)

Fr. Ernest Lussier, s.s.s., in Old Testament Reading Guide on the Book of Sirach has said, "This chapter 24 is the high point of the book. It stands out by the beauty of its form and the depth of its doctrine. The introduction (1-2) presents Wisdom sounding her own praise. She describes her divine origin and her action in the physical world (3-6), her residence in Israel (7-12), her growth and her fruits (13-17), and finally makes her appeal (18-21). The author then shows her manifestation in the Law (22-27). He has drawn from that source for those who wish to be wise (28-31)." (pp. 96, 87)

Seeking and obtaining Wisdom, according to Montfort, is the goal of Christian spirituality and mysticism. He tells us, "All perfection consists in our being conformed, united and consecrated to Jesus." (TD 120) Wisdom became incarnate to live among all people in order to draw them to himself. Fr. Maurice Gilbert, s.j., while writing about the personification of Wisdom in Old Testament, has said, "Wisdom, is she not the figure of Revelation of God to his people, the Revelation which makes itself known through acts and words... Ben Sirach underlines that Wisdom, who has come to dwell in Jacob, is none other than the Presence of God in the midst of his people. Presence is actualized in the temple; but it is also enlarged to include the whole people of God. The Presence finally offers itself to us as food to be welcomed or to make it our own everyday with docility. This is authentic cult." (Cahiers Evangile, Mai 1980, pp. 31, 32)

4. The power of Wisdom in creation

In Chapter 3, Montfort presents the **third Tableau**, 'Wisdom's action during creation'. Montfort invites us to contemplate the beauty of creation and to look at God's love for man as shown by this wonderful creation. "Solomon says that Eternal Wisdom is the mother and maker of all things. Notice that Solomon does not call him simply the maker of the universe but also its mother because the maker does not love and care for the work of his hands like a mother does for her child." (Ref. Wis. 7:12, 21; LEW 31) Further Montfort tells us that "after creating all things, Eternal Wisdom abides in them to contain, maintain and renew them. It was this supremely perfect beauty who, after creating the universe, established the magnificent order we find there." (LEW 32)

In 1998, in Rome, Bro. T.A. Joseph, s.g., published Excerpts of his Doctoral Dissertation on the Book of Wisdom 6:22-10:21. In it he says, "Pseudo-Solomon does a re-reading of God's creative action as described in Gen 1-3 through the attribution of creation to Wisdom in Wis 9:1-3; 10:1-2 and throughout the Book of Wisdom. He attributes God's saving action right from the time of Adam through to the Exodus to Wisdom in Wis 9:18 onwards and offers a re-reading of the

saving traditions of Israel found in the Book of Exodus. ... He identifies Wisdom with the Holy Spirit in Wis 9:17. He speaks of Wisdom's power to renew all things and of her passing in every generation into holy souls to make them friends of God and prophets in Wis 7:27 thus attributing prophetic inspiration, a function of the Holy Spirit to Wisdom....In Wis 7:25-26 he seems to enter into the very depths of the mystery of God. To speak of the divine origin of Wisdom without however compromising his faith in monotheism, he has recourse to metaphoric language.... Of the five metaphors of breath, emanation, radiation, mirror and image, he uses the first three to characterize Wisdom in her divine and dynamic aspect while the last two seem to indicate her consubstantiality with God." (Bro. T.A. Joseph, pp. 24, 25, 26)

Montfort has quoted Proverbs 8:30-31. "I was with God and I disposed everything with such perfect precision and such pleasing variety that it was like playing a game to entertain my Father and myself." (Ref. Prov. 30, 31, LEW 32) We must contemplate nature and come to admire and love the Creator. We need to spend time to admire the beautiful scenery and perfect order in nature. They reveal God and his love for us. "We are filled with wonderment at the changes we see in the seasons and the weather, at the variety of instincts in animals, at the different species of plants, at the diversified beauty of the flowers and the different tastes of fruits." (LEW 33)

"In Prov. 8:22-31 we have a clear personification of wisdom. This has been variously attributed to the influence of various near-eastern goddesses, especially the Egyptian Maat and more recently the Hellenistic goddess Isis in her Egyptian form. Similarly, Sirach in Sir 24 writing under the influence of Prov 8 identifies her with the Torah. ... It is Pseudo-Solomon who is most bold and innovative in his talk of Wisdom. He does not hesitate to use language and images that were used in the contemporary religious cults especially that of Isis. He presents her as the spouse of God (Wis 8:3), an initiate in his knowledge and an associate in his works (Wis 8:4). He dares to call her 'God's throne-partner' (Wis 9:4). He not only re-affirms her presence at creation (Wis 9:9) as in Prov 8:30, but also speaks of her generative role in creation calling her the 'mother of all things' (Wis 7:22a)... Wisdom unveils and manifests herself to those who seek her ardently. She communicates herself to them inviting them to an involvement similar to that of love. She takes possession of them and transforms them (Wis 6:12-20." (Bro. T.A. Joseph, pp. 26, 27)

In **the fourth tableau** Montfort invites us to meditate upon the creation of man. "If the power and gentleness of Eternal Wisdom were so luminously evident in the creation, the beauty and order of creation, they show forth far more brilliantly in the creation of man. For man is his supreme masterpiece, the living image of his beauty and his perfection, the great vessel of his graces, the wonderful treasury of his wealth and in a unique way his representative on earth. 'By your wisdom you appointed man to have dominion over every creature you made.' (Wis. (9:2)" (LEW 35) "We might say that Eternal Wisdom made copies, that is, shining likeness of his own intelligence, memory, and will, and infused them into the soul of man so that he might become the living image of the Godhead. (Ref. Gen. 1:26) In man's heart he enkindled the fire of the pure love of God. He gave him a radiant body and virtually enshrined within him a compendium of all the various perfections of angels, animals, and other created things." (LEW 37) Then Montfort draws our attention to the first steps in Salvation History. He refers to Adam's fall. "But, alas, this vessel of the Godhead was shattered into a thousand pieces. This beautiful star fell from the skies. This brilliant sun lost its light. Man sinned and by his sin lost his wisdom, his innocence, his beauty, his immortality, in a word, he lost all the good things he was given and found himself burdened with a host of evils. His mind was darkened and impaired. His heart turned cold

towards the God he no longer loved... In a single instant, man became the slave of demons, the object of God's anger, the prey of the powers of hell."(LEW 39)

5. Wisdom's goodness and mercy before Incarnation

The fifth Tableau: In chapter 4, Wisdom is depicted as goodness and mercy. Montfort wants us to contemplate the Council of the Holy Trinity during which Incarnation is decided upon. In Nos. 41 - 46, there is a vivid description of this council meeting. "I seem to see this lovable Sovereign convoking and assembling the most holy Trinity, a second time, a second time, so to speak, for the purpose of rehabilitating man in the state he formerly created him." (LEW 42)

The sixth Tableau, the activities of Eternal Wisdom before the Incarnation: Montfort tells us, "During the whole time preceding his Incarnation, Eternal Wisdom proved in a thousand ways his friendship for men and his great desire to bestow his favours on them and to converse with them." (LEW 47) In quoting **the entire chapter 10 of the Book of Wisdom**, Montfort invites us to meditate upon the actions of Wisdom in the history of humankind. The sacred author shows us how God entered into communion with humankind starting with Adam. The meditation on the Genesis continues with Noah, Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, Moses and during Exodus. "It was Wisdom who safeguarded Adam, the first man, created alone to be the father of men. He rescued him from sin and gave him power to control and rule over all things.... When the Deluge flooded the earth, it was Wisdom once again saved it, piloting the just man Noah in a frail wooden ark... When the just man Jacob fled the wrath of his brother Esau, Wisdom guided him along straight paths and showed him the kingdom of God... He liberated a holy people and a blameless race, the Hebrews, from a nation of oppressors. He entered the soul of God's servant, Moses, and withstood fearsome kings with signs and wonders.... For Wisdom opened the mouths of the dumb and made the tongues of the babes speak with fluency." (Wis. 10: 1-21, LEW 48, 49)

Wis. 10:1-21 is an ode to praise the activity of Lady Wisdom throughout the Salvation History, showing how she blessed and saved believers who trusted in her. "The Book of Wisdom is essentially an appeal to believe in the God of revelation. This complicated and sophisticated rhetorical exhortation was composed to justify the activities of the God of Israel in the eyes of intelligent, cosmopolitan Jewish students, some whom were being tempted to abandon their revealed religion in favour of prevailing secular culture... He climaxes this approach by the final series of narratives about the seven decisive interventions of this saving God on behalf of his chosen people... The Sage casts his net wide to provide his readers with as many motives as possible for choosing to remain loyal to traditional Israelite faith. The Book of Wisdom proper – Part II (**Wis. 6:12-16 + 6:22-10:21**) is an aporia or philosophical inquiry to investigate the nature and features of Lady Wisdom, a personification... The Sage, however, has endowed this mythic figure with features not typical of her biblical role and accented her association with God in his work as creator and saviour. He shows that union with Lady Wisdom is the only way to ensure perfect communion with God." (James M. Reese, o.s.f.s., The book of Wisdom, pp. 15,16,18, 68)

"In this chapter X of the Book of Wisdom, the Holy Spirit describes the various evils from which eternal Wisdom delivered Moses and the Israelites during the time in the desert. To this we may add those who were delivered from great dangers by eternal Wisdom in the Old and New Testaments. Among them were Daniel who was freed from the lions' den, Susanna from the false

crime she was accused of, the three young men from the furnace in Babylon, St. Peter from prison, St. John from the cauldron of boiling oil and numberless martyrs and confessors from physical torments they were made to suffer and the calumnies which blackened their good name. All these were delivered and healed by Eternal Wisdom" (LEW 50)

Fr. Rui de Menezes, s.j. in his book *Wisdom Traditions of Israel* says, "The real innovation brought forward the Wisdom of Solomon regarding Wisdom is her role in the realm of History. For him Wisdom is salvific. Thus she 'delivered' Adam from his transgression (Wis10:1b), she 'saved' Noah from the Flood (v.4), she 'preserved' Abraham blameless before God (v.5), she 'rescued' Lot (v.6), she 'rescued' Jacob from his troubles (v.9), she 'delivered' Joseph from the sin of adultery (v.13), and in the case of Moses she 'delivered' people and blameless race from the Egyptians, a nation of oppressors (v.15). Note that the persons we have cited here are only alluded to their names are not mentioned." (p. 193) "Chapters 3 and 4 complement each other admirably, in that they give us a synthesis of the two great theological themes of the OT, namely Creation and Salvation. On the one hand, chapter 3 places us at the heart of the theology of the Wisdom writers, which is a theology of Creation, seeing the beauty of the world as a fruit of Divine Wisdom." (J.P. Prévost, *Jesus living in Mary*, p. 642)

6. The Excellence of Eternal Wisdom

In chapter 5, Montfort presents the **seventh tableau**, the excellence of Wisdom. He wants us to meditate on what is given in Wis. 8:1-18. He has quoted these verses adding a brief commentary borrowed on the whole from *Le Maître de Sacy*. Solomon fell in love with wisdom and set about obtaining her as his bride. He wanted her to be the guide for his life. The virtues which she teaches are knowledge, respect, immortality and skill in government. The Sage, in Wisdom chapter 8, explains how Lady Wisdom became for him the model of an upright worshipper.

" 'From my youth I have loved and sought Wisdom and desired to take him for my inseparable companion.' (Wis. 8:2) Whosoever wishes to find this precious treasure of Wisdom should, like Solomon, search for him, a) early and, if possible, while still young; b) purely and spiritually as a chaste young man seeks a bride; c) unceasingly, to the very end, until he has found him. It is certain that Eternal Wisdom loves souls so much that he even espouses them, contracting with them a true, spiritual marriage which the world cannot understand. History furnishes us with examples of this." (LEW 54) " 'Wisdom is the teacher of the knowledge of God and director of all his works.' (Wis. 8:4) Eternal Wisdom alone enlightens every man that comes into this world. He alone came from heaven to teach the secrets of God. We have no real teacher except the incarnate Wisdom, whose name is Jesus Christ. He alone brings all the the works of God to perfection, especially the saints, for he shows them what they must do and teaches them to appreciate and put into practice all he has taught them." (LEW 56)

" 'I therefore resolved to take him as my companion in life, knowing that he would share his goods with me and be my consolation in my cares and sorrows.' (Wis. 8:9) Eternal Wisdom is so rich and generous; how can anyone who possess him be poor? He is so gentle, attractive and tender; how then can anyone who possesses him be unhappy? But among all those who seek Eternal Wisdom, how many can honestly say with Solomon, 'I have resolved to possess him?' The majority of men do not make such a resolution with real sincerity. Their decisions are mere wishful thinking or at best weak and wavering resolves. That is why they never find Eternal Wisdom." (LEW 59) "After summing up his previous commentary, Solomon draws this conclusion: 'I went about seeking for Eternal Wisdom in all directions.' To possess him we must seek him ardently; in other words, we must be ready to give up everything, to suffer everything,

in order to obtain possession of him. Only a few find him because only a few look for him in a manner worthy of him." (LEW 61)

7. Eternal Wisdom's desire to give himself to men

In Chapter 6, Montfort presents the **eighth tableau**, the earnest desire of Eternal Wisdom to give herself to humans. Montfort says, "The bond of friendship between Eternal Wisdom and man is so close as to be beyond our understanding. Wisdom is for man and man is for Wisdom." (LEW 64) "This eternal beauty, ever supremely loving, is so intent on winning man's friendship that for this very purpose he has written a book (Book of Wisdom) in which he describes his own excellence and his desire for man's friendship. This book reads like a letter written by a lover to win the affections of his loved one, for in it he expresses such ardent desires for the heart of man, such tender longings for man's friendship, such loving invitations and promises, that you would say he could not possibly be the sovereign Lord of heaven and earth and at the same time need the friendship of man to be happy." (LEW 65)

In Nos 66-68, Montfort has paraphrased **Prov. 8:1-4, 15-31, 31-36** to show the desire of Wisdom for humankind. "You children of men, it is you I have been calling so persistently... I love those who love me and those who seek me diligently find me.. He who finds me finds life and obtains salvation from the Lord." (Prov.8: 4,17, 35) In Prov. 8:1-36 has the last and the longest exhortation. This is perhaps the most well-known passage from the book of Proverbs. Wisdom personified invites the people of Israel to come to him. "In his pursuit of man, he hastens along the highways, or scales the loftiest mountain peaks, or waits at the city gates, or goes into public squares and among the gathering of people, proclaiming at the top of his voice, 'You children of men, it is you I have been calling so persistently; it is you I am addressing; it is you I desire and seek; it is you I am claiming. Listen, draw close to me, for I want to make you happy' (Prov. 8:4)." (LEW 66)

" 'My children, listen to me. Happy are those who keep my ways. Hear my instructions, be wise and do not ignore them. Happy is the man who listens to me, watching at my gates every day, waiting beside my door. He who finds me finds life and obtains salvation from the Lord; but he who sins against me, wounds his own soul. All who hate me love death' (Prov. 8:32-36)." (LEW 68) To understand the signification of the figure of Wisdom in the O.T., "a careful study of some major texts is a must. This involves Prov. 8; Prov. 9:1-16; Sirach 24; Wis. 7-9... Who is Wisdom? In Prov. 8, it is not clearly mentioned, Of course, it identifies itself with intelligence, to that profound understanding of the reality, but this does not clarify much. It is presented also as a woman.. The Book of Wisdom essentially underlines the relationship which Wisdom likes to set up with her listeners." (Maurice Gilbert, s.j.. Wisdom personified in the texts of the O.T.)

In this chapter 8 of the Book of Proverbs, Wisdom speaks about her grandeur and her promises. In N° 69, Montfort has quoted **Wis. 6:12-15** to show the great desire of Wisdom to communicate herself to humankind. "Even though Eternal Wisdom has spoken so kindly and so reassuringly to win the friendship of men, he still fears that they, filled with awe at his glorious state and sovereign majesty, will not dare approach him. That is why he tells them that 'he is easily accessible, is quickly recognized by those who love him and is found by those who seek him; that he hastens to meet those who desire him and that anyone who rises early to look for him will have no trouble, for he will find him sitting at his door, waiting for him' (Wis. 6:13b-15)." (LEW 69)

Montfort then passes on from the OT to NT: “Finally, in order to draw closer to men and give them a more convincing proof of his love, Eternal Wisdom went so far as to become man, even to become a little child, to embrace poverty and to die upon a cross for them.” (LEW 70) "Eternal Wisdom, on the one hand, wished to prove his love for man by dying in his place in order to save him, but on the other hand, he could not bear the thought of leaving him. So he devised a marvelous way of dying and living at the same time, and of abiding with man until the end of time. So, in order fully to satisfy his love, he instituted the sacrament of Holy Eucharist and went to the extent of changing and overturning nature itself." (LEW 71) Montfort's praise of Wisdom ends with, "Above all else let us seek and long for divine Wisdom. 'All other things that are desired are not to be compared with Wisdom;' (Prov. 1:15) And again, 'Nothing that you desire can be compared with him.' (Prov. 8:11) You may desire the gifts of God and even heavenly treasures, but if you do not desire Wisdom, you desire always something of far less worth." (LEW 73). But being a realistic man and knowing well his own times, Montfort warns people about the choice to be made: "But we must beware of choosing a wrong wisdom, because there is more than one kind" (LEW 73).

8. Choice of true Wisdom

In some ways, chapter 7 seems to differ from the rest of LEW and even from the Wisdom language. Yet Montfort continues to take up his stand within the Wisdom theme. On the one hand, he echoes here the very severe criticism leveled by James at "earthly" wisdom. According Montfort, "This **worldly wisdom** consists in an exact conformity to the maxims and fashions of the world; a continual inclination towards greatness and esteem; and a subtle and endless pursuit of pleasure and self-interest." (LEW 75) "The worldly man bases his conduct on honour, on 'What will people say?', on convention, on high living, on self-interest, on ceremonious manners, and on witty conversation." (LEW 77) "He obeys as faithfully as he can the commandments the world gives him: 1. You shall be well acquainted with the world. 2. You shall be respectable. 3. You shall be successful in business. 4. You shall hold on to whatever is yours. 5. You shall rise above your background. 6. You shall make friends for yourself. 7. You shall frequent fashionable society. 8. You shall seek a good life. 9. You shall not be a kill-joy. 10. You shall not be singular, uncouth or over-pious." (LEW 78) "The **wisdom of the flesh** is the love for pleasure. This is the wisdom shown by the worldly-wise who seek only the satisfaction of the senses. They want to have a good time. They shun anything that might prove unpleasant or mortifying for the body, such as fasting, and other austerities. Usually they think only of eating, drinking, playing, laughing, enjoying life and having a good time. They must always be comfortable and insist on having entertaining pastimes, the best of food and good company." (LEW 81) "**Diabolical wisdom** is the love and esteem of honours. This is the wisdom of the worldly-wise who, secretly, of course, long for distinctions, honours, dignities and high offices. They strive to be seen, esteemed, praised and applauded by men." (LEW 82) "**Natural wisdom** consists in an eminent knowledge of nature in its primary elements... Philosophers boast that this wisdom is acquired through philosophical argumentation. Alchemists boast of cabalistic secrets for finding the philosopher's stone in which, they imagine, this wisdom is found." (LEW 84, 85) Montfort concludes this chapter by saying, "So let us remain with Jesus, the eternal and incarnate Wisdom. Apart from him, there is nothing but aimless wandering, untruth and death. 'I am the way, I am the truth, I am the life.' (Jn. 14:6)" (LEW 89)

9. Marvelous effects of Wisdom in souls

In chapter 8, Montfort presents us **the ninth tableau**: the marvelous effects of Wisdom. He has mainly quoted from chapters 7 and 8 of the Book of Wisdom to explain the effects mentioned

below. "Nothing gives Wisdom more pleasure than to communicate himself. That is why the Holy Spirit tells us that Wisdom is forever seeking throughout the world for souls worthy of him, (Ref. Gen. 25:27) and he fills these holy souls with his presents making them 'friends of God and prophets' (Wis. 7:27)... When divine Wisdom enters a soul, he brings all kinds of good things with him and bestows vast riches upon the soul." (LEW 90)

"1. Eternal Wisdom communicates his Spirit of enlightenment to the soul that possesses him, 'I prayed, and understanding was given to me. I pleaded and the spirit of wisdom came upon me.' (Cf. Wis. 7:22-24) ... 'Because of Wisdom, who communicates his spirit to me, I shall be found keen in judgment and even the great shall be surprised in my presence.' (Wis. 8:21)" (LEW 92)
"Eternal Wisdom communicates to man the great science of holiness as well as the natural sciences, and even the most secret ones when they are needed. 'If anyone desires deep knowledge, Eternal Wisdom knows the past and can forecast the future. He understands the subtleties of speech and the lessons of parables.' (Wis. 8:8) To Jacob he gave the science of the saints (Wis. 10:10). To Solomon he gave a true knowledge of the whole of nature (Wis. 7:17). He revealed to him countless secrets that no one before him had ever known (Wis. 7:21)." (LEW 93) "

"2. Wisdom gives man not only light to know the truth but also a remarkable power to impart it to others. 'Wisdom has the voice to convey knowledge' (Wis.1:7). Wisdom knows what we want to say and communicates to us the art of saying it well, for 'he opened the mouths of those who were dumb and made the tongues of babies eloquent' (Wis. 10:21). He cured Moses of his impediment of speech. He imparted his words to the prophets, enabling them 'to root up and to pull down, to destroy and demolish, to build and to plant' (Jer. 1:10)" (LEW 95)

"3. Eternal Wisdom, besides being the object of the eternal Father's delight, and the joy of angels, is also the source of purest joy and consolation for man who possesses him. He gives to man a relish for everything that comes from God and makes him lose his taste for things created. He enlightens his mind with the brightness of his own light and pours into his heart an indescribable joy, sweetness and peace even when he is in the midst of the most harrowing grief and suffering, as St. Paul bears witness when he exclaims, 'I exceedingly abound with joy in all our tribulations' (2 Cor. 7:4)." (LEW 98)

"4. When Eternal Wisdom communicates himself to a soul, he gives that soul all the gifts of the Holy Spirit and all the great virtues to an eminent degree. They are: the theological virtues - lively faith, firm hope, ardent charity; the cardinal virtues - well-ordered temperance, complete prudence, perfect justice, invincible fortitude; the moral virtues - perfect religion, profound humility, pleasing gentleness, blind obedience, complete detachment, continuous mortification, sublime prayer, etc. These are the wonderful virtues and heavenly gifts." (LEW 99)

"5. Finally, as nothing is more active than Wisdom' (Wis. 7:24), he does not leave those who enjoy his friendship to languish in mediocrity and negligence. He sets them on fire, inspiring them to undertake great things for the glory of God and the salvation of souls." (LEW 100)

6. "The cross is the portion and reward of those who desire or already possess Eternal Wisdom. But our loving Saviour numbers, weighs and measures everything and sends crosses to his friends in proportion to their strength, and tempers them with divine unction to such an extent that their hearts are filled with joy." (LEW 103)

Fr. Maurice Gilbert, s.j., the exegete and respected specialist on Wisdom, after making a detailed study of the "spiritual exegesis employed by Montfort," wrote an article entitled "Montfort's

Spiritual Exegesis" in French in the Nov. - Dec. 1982 edition of Nouvelle Revue Théologique. It was later translated into English by Sr. M.C. McAuley, dw. In it Fr. M. Gilbert has said, "It is truly surprising to observe the impact of the Book of Wisdom on Montfort's treatise. I do not know whether there exists any other spiritual writing of the same importance in which the doctrine is based, as in the case of Montfort, on this little Greek book of the Old Testament. If it may be said that, in general, the wisdom writings of the Old Testament has been little used, it is certain that no patristic commentary of the Book of Wisdom has been preserved. The case of Montfort's spiritual exegesis of the Book of Wisdom is exceptional, especially when we think that his treatise is held by a religious family which draws inspiration from it." (p. 684)

10. Incarnation and the life of Jesus

Chapters 9-14 form the keystone of the book, the mystery of the Incarnation. In chapter 9, Montfort presents the **tenth tableau**, the mystery of Incarnation: The mystery of Incarnation provides us with a large number of tableaux for loving contemplation: the Annunciation, Mary's consent, the Birth of Jesus, the Epiphany, the Presentation of Jesus, flight into Egypt, the return to Nazareth, lost in temple, life of a carpenter in Nazareth, Baptism of our Lord, different events during the public ministry, etc. The hours spent in contemplation of the Incarnate Wisdom will help us to understand his love for us and excite in us love for him. "The torrential outpouring of God's infinite goodness which had been stemmed by the sins of men since the beginning of the world, was now released precipitately and in full flood into the heart of Mary. Eternal Wisdom gave to her all the graces which Adam and all descendants would have received so liberally from him had they remained in their original state of justice." (LEW 106)

"Desiring to give himself to Mary by becoming man in her, he sent the archangel Gabriel to greet her on his behalf and to declare to her that she had won his heart and that he would become man within her if she gave her consent... Humbling herself before her Creator she said, 'Behold the handmaid of the Lord! Let it be done to me according to your word' (Lk. 1:38)." (LEW 107) From LEW 109-116, Montfort describes the different events in the life Jesus till his ascension, inviting us to contemplate each event and appreciate the love that Jesus has shown us. The habit of meditating upon the actions and teachings of Jesus must be a matter of daily routine. One should contemplate Jesus in his actions, passion, death, resurrection, ascension, etc., and try to be captivated by him. Jesus' love for us must responded by our love for him and by our desire to be united to him.

11. The gentleness of Jesus

In Chapters 10, Montfort presents **the eleventh tableau** the captivating beauty and the expressible gentleness of Jesus. **"1. Wisdom is gentle in his origin.** Jesus was born of the sweetest, tender most and most beautiful of all mothers, Mary, the divinely favored Virgin. To appreciate the gentleness of Jesus we must first consider the gentleness of Mary, his Mother, whom he resembles by his gentle nature. Jesus is Mary's child; consequently there is no haughtiness, or harshness, or unpleasantness in him, and even less, infinitely less, in him than in his Mother, since he is the eternal Wisdom and therefore pure gentleness and beauty." (LEW 118)

"2. He is declared gentle by the Prophets. The prophets, who had in advance been shown the incarnate Wisdom, referred to him as a sheep and a lamb because of his gentleness. (Jer. 11:19) They foretold that because of his gentleness 'He would not break the bruised reed nor quench the smoking flax' (Is. 42:3)." (LEW 119)

"3. He is gentle in his name. The distinctive characteristic of Jesus, the Saviour of the world, is to love and save men. 'No song is sweeter, no voice is more pleasing, no thought is more appealing, than Jesus Son of God.'" (LEW 120) .

"4. He is gentle in his looks. 'Gentle is Jesus in his looks, and in his words and actions' (Cf. St. Augustine). The face of our loving Saviour is so serene and gentle that it charmed the eyes and hearts of those who beheld it." (LEW 121)

"5. He is gentle in his words. Jesus is also gentle in his words. When he dwelt on earth he won everyone over by his gentle speech. Never was he heard to raise his voice or argue heatedly. The prophets foretold this of him (Is. 42:2)." (LEW 122)

12. The gentleness of Jesus in his actions

In Chapter 11, Montfort presents us the **twelfth tableau**, the gentleness of Jesus in his actions. Montfort wants us to contemplate the gentleness of Jesus in his actions. He tells us that Jesus was gentle in his dealings with the poor, the little children, the sinners, etc. One can choose a number of incidents in Jesus' life and meditate upon them in order to have an intimate knowledge of Jesus. Meditating upon Jesus in his actions and words is extremely important to understand his great love for us and for mankind. "Jesus loves me" is the theme of a number of hymns composed by Montfort. Montfort wants us to contemplate Jesus in heaven, where he continues to be gentle. "But how describe the gentleness of Jesus in his dealings with poor sinners: his gentleness with Mary Magdalene, his courteous solicitude in turning the Samaritan woman from her evil ways, his compassion in pardoning the adulterous woman taken in adultery, his charity in sitting down to eat with the public sinners in order to win them over?" (LEW 125)

Montfort concludes the chapter by asking each one of us a question, "With this knowledge of Eternal Wisdom, shall we not love him who has loved us and still loves us more than his own life; and whose beauty and meekness surpass all that is loveliest and most attractive in heaven and on earth?" (LEW 131) We must contemplate Jesus in his life and actions. Further we must meditate upon what he does in the Church. I must understand that he is also active in my own life. I need to recall the moments I encountered him in my life. I need to cultivate the habit of counting his blessings. This will develop in me an intimate love for him and a desire to love and serve my brothers and sisters.

13. The principal teachings of Jesus

In Chapters 12, Montfort presents the **thirteenth tableau** showing Jesus as the teacher of wisdom: Montfort, has collected sixty-two words of Jesus. "Montfort sees these words of Jesus as sapiential sentences. We know that present day exegesis stresses the sapiential character of many of the teachings of Jesus, who is the authentic master of wisdom... As for the sixty-two sentences quoted without commentary by Montfort, the first forty-nine are exactly as they occur in a book by Bonnefons, except the fortieth. In this place Bonnefons quotes Mt. 6:1. 'Be careful not to parade your good deeds before men.' Montfort substitutes Mt. 11:12 for this, 'the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence and men of violence take it by force', which is a text more radical in tone... Finally, the 'oracles' 55 (Mt. 20:16), 58 (Lk. 14:11), and 61 (the beatitudes according to Mt, 5: 3-10) stress the reversal of values according to the teaching of Jesus and of all the Bible: the first will be last, those who humble themselves will be exalted and the kingdom of heaven belongs to the poor. So it is indeed the radicality of Christianity that struck Montfort, this partly due to the trials he had to undergo, especially if this treatise was written about 1703-1704." (Maurice Gilbert, s.j., The Spiritual Exegesis of Montfort) When Montfort presents us

with sixty-two sayings of Jesus, he identifies Wisdom with Christ in his function of being a permanent revelation. "Since divine Wisdom is the Word of God throughout time and eternity, he has never ceased speaking and by his word everything was made and everything was restored." (LEW 95)

14. The passion and death of Jesus

In Chapters 13, Montfort presents the **fourteenth tableau**, the passion and death of Christ. In this chapter, Montfort invites us to meditate upon the love of the Incarnate Wisdom as shown by his passion and death on the cross. "Among all the motives impelling us to love Jesus Christ, the Wisdom Incarnate, the strongest, in my opinion, is the suffering he chose to endure to prove his love for us." (LEW 154) He quotes Rom. 5:8 and says, "Jesus Christ proved how well he loved us because though we were sinners – and consequently his enemies – he died for us." (LEW 156) Montfort wants us to contemplate upon the sufferings Jesus had to undergo even before his passion. Then Montfort invites us to spend a long time meditating upon the passion and death of Christ, which he has graphically described. "He chose rather to endure the cross and sufferings in order to give to God his Father greater glory and to men a proof of greater love." (LEW 164) "Our dear Saviour suffered in every member of his body. His head was pierced with a crown of thorns. His hair and beard were torn out; his cheeks were buffeted; his face was covered with spittle; his neck and arms bound with cords; his shoulders weighed down and bruised by the weight of the cross. His hands and feet were pierced by the nails, his side and heart opened by a lance; his whole body lacerated by more than five thousand strokes of the scourge, so that his almost fleshless bones became visible." (LEW 161)

"The important renewal currently taking place in the theology of the Redemption itself invites us to a deeper reexamination of what Montfort says on this theme in LEW. We know the importance he attaches to the Cross, and what he writes on this subject achieves great heights. LEW offers us a vision in which the theology of the Redemption is far from being an exaltation of suffering but is firmly anchored in the love God has for the world. Chapter 13, in fact, says clearly that it was not suffering that saved the world but the love Jesus Christ has shown for us in his sufferings. Montfort invites us to contemplate 'the sufferings he chose to endure to prove his love for us' (LEW 154). LEW 154-166 often return to this theme of love. In addition, this thirteenth chapter would benefit by being reread and reinterpreted in the light of what modern theologians call "the suffering of God'." (J.P. Prévost, *Jesus Living in Mary*, p. 647)

15. The triumph of Eternal Wisdom by the cross

In chapter 14, Montfort presents the **fifteenth tableau**, the triumph of Eternal Wisdom through the cross. Montfort gives us an inkling into his theology of the Cross, He was very much impressed by the wisdom of the Cross that St. Paul speaks of in the first two chapters of the First Letter to the Corinthians. Quotations from St. Paul are found in many places in the treatise. "The Cross is according to my belief the greatest secret of the King – the greatest mystery of Eternal Wisdom. How remote and how different are the thoughts and the ways of Eternal Wisdom from those of even the wisest of men. This great God wished to redeem the world, to cast out and chain up the devils, to seal the gates of hell and open heaven to men, and give infinite glory to his eternal Father... He wishes to become incarnate in order to convince men of his friendship; he wishes to come down upon earth to help men to go up to heaven... He perceives something which is a source of scandal and horror to the Jews and object of foolishness to the pagans. He

sees a piece of vile and contemptible wood which is used to humiliate and torture the most wicked and the most wretched of men, called a gibbet, a gallows, a cross." (LEW 167, 168)

"Montfort was very impressed by the wisdom the Cross that St. Paul speaks of in 1 Cor, 1-2. Although he does not quote the full text, he quotes part of it here and there even at the beginning of the treatise: In LEW 12 is the quotation 'For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified' 1 Cor. 2:2; against worldly wisdom there is in LEW 14 'Yet among the mature we do impart wisdom' (1 Cor. 2:16) and this is repeated against worldly wisdom in LEW 74; in LEW 75, 1 Cor. 1:19 is quoted: 'I will destroy the wisdom of the wise'; the inspiration behind LEW 168 is 1 Cor. 1: 23-24; 'but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to the Jews and folly to the Gentiles, but ... the wisdom of God', and Montfort then quotes Rom. 11:33: 'O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God!'. Now, according to Paul, the wisdom of the Cross is precisely this reversal of human values referred to in the 'oracles' mentioned above. And Montfort will conclude these two chapters (13 and 14) dealing with the Passion and the Cross (before introducing the means of obtaining Wisdom): 'Wisdom is the Cross and the Cross is Wisdom' (LEW 180). So we see that the principal themes of 1 Cor. 1-2 run through the whole treatise." (Maurice Gilbert, s.j., *The Spiritual Exegesis of Montfort*, p. 687)

Fr. Stefano De Fiores, smm, in his article on Montfort Spirituality says, "Fr. H. Frehen, smm, after establishing the Christocentrism of Montfort, firmly states, 'The principal mystery of the life and the personality of Christ is the Cross. Now Christ in his relationship to the Cross is called by Montfort Christ-Wisdom. Therefore this aspect, Christ Wisdom, constitutes the principal and specific aspect of the Christological vision of Father de Montfort.' The mystery of the Cross occupies the center of the mystery of Christ, since even the Incarnation and the other mysteries "are ordered toward the Cross." (De Fiores, *Jesus Living in Mary*, pp. 820, 821)

The result of these contemplations: As we meditate on the love of Christ for us, especially shown through his passion and death, love for Christ is kindled in our hearts. Eternal and Incarnate Wisdom has loved us and is loving us and we feel the need to respond to this with our own love for him. Hence there arises a mutual love and a love relationship between Christ and us. "The cross is in the first place a sign of God's love and nearness, a love and nearness which go so far that in the person of his Son, God gave himself for us, in this sense that we are loved at the deepest level even before we are capable of, or have arrived at, any responsive love or service, may persuade us that we are accepted as we are; that as such – as we are- we are loved and called. It is precisely this fact which can prompt our responsive love and furnish the strength to cope with the suffering that is inseparable from the course of our life and vocation." (Pierre Humblet, *The Mystical process of transformation*, p. 37)

16. The first means to acquire Wisdom - Ardent Desire

In Chapter 15, Montfort has mentioned ardent desire as the first means to acquire Wisdom. It is the starting point. We all know that we are called to be perfect as the heavenly Father is perfect. We like to be holy; but holiness will not be forced on us and only the valiant will attain it. In our spiritual growth, our greatest enemy is our own laziness. Montfort quoting Sir. 6:37 invites the reader, "Son, 'if you rightly desire wisdom, observe justice and God will give it you. Reflect on what God requires of you and meditate continually on his commandments and he himself will give you insight and your desire for wisdom will be granted' (Sir. 1:26). 'For Wisdom will not enter into a deceitful soul, nor dwell in a body subject to sin' (Wis. 1:4)."

(LEW 182) "Solomon, the model given us by the Holy Spirit in the acquiring of Wisdom, only received this gift after he had desired it, sought after it and prayed for it for a long time. 'I desired wisdom and it was given to me. I called upon God and the spirit of wisdom came to me.' (Wis. 7:7) 'I loved and sought wisdom from my youth, and in order to have her as my companion and spouse I went about seeking her.' (Wis. 8:2) Like Solomon and Daniel we must be men of desire if we are to acquire this great treasure which is wisdom." (LEW 183) Getting united to Wisdom must become a goal in our spiritual life.

17. The 2nd means - Continuous Prayer

To acquire wisdom Montfort tells us that we should continually pray for it. We need to grow in contemplation. Unless we are faithful to contemplation, it is foolhardy to think of getting united to Wisdom. Receiving of Wisdom occurs precisely in this mystical act of praying. Prayer is the usual channel by which God conveys his gifts, especially his Wisdom. "The greater the gift of God, the more effort is required to obtain it. Much prayer and great effort, therefore, will be required to obtain the gift of Wisdom, which is the greatest of all God's gifts. Let us listen to the voice of Wisdom himself: 'Seek and you shall find, knock and it shall be opened to you, and ask and it shall be given you' (Mt. 7:7)... Solomon received Wisdom only after praying most fervently for a long time: 'I went to the Lord and besought him, and I said with all my heart... Give me that Wisdom that sits by your throne' (Wis. 8:21). 'If any of you lacks wisdom let him ask God, and it shall be given him, for God gives his gifts to all men abundantly and ungrudgingly' (James 1:5)." (LEW 184) "First, we should pray for this gift with a strong and lively faith, not wavering, because he who wavers in his faith must not expect to receive any gift from the Lord (Jas. 1: 6, 7) ... Secondly, we must pray with a pure faith, not counting on consolations, visions of special revelations... Thirdly, we must pray perseveringly to obtain this Wisdom." (LEW 185, 186)

18. The 3rd means - Universal Mortification

Montfort did penance to obtain Wisdom and he is asking the readers to do the same. "The Holy Spirit tells us that wisdom is not found in the hearts of those who live in comfort (Ref Job 28:13), gratifying their passions and bodily desires, because 'they who are of the flesh cannot please God' and 'the Wisdom of the flesh is an enemy of God' (Rom. 8:8,7). 'My spirit will not remain in man, because he is flesh' (Gen. 6:3). All those who belong to Christ, the Incarnate Wisdom, have crucified their flesh with all its passions and desires. They always bear about in their bodies the dying of Jesus. They continually do violence to themselves, carry their cross daily. They are dead and indeed buried with Christ, (Ref. Gal 5:24, 2 Cor 4:10, Lk 9:23, Rom 6:4,8)." (LEW 194) "If we would possess wisdom: 1. We must give up actually possessions as did the apostles... 2. We must not follow the showy fashions of the world in our dress, our furniture, or our dwellings. Neither must we indulge in sumptuous meals or other worldly habits and ways of living. 'Be not conformed to this world' (Rom 12:2). Putting this into practice is more necessary than is generally thought. 3. We must not believe or follow the false maxims of the world or think, speak or act like people of the world.... 4. We must flee as much as possible from the company of others, not only from that of worldly people, which is harmful and dangerous, but even from that of religious people when our association with them would be useless and a waste of time.... 5. If we would possess, we must mortify the body, not only by enduring patiently our bodily ailments, the inconveniences of the weather and the difficulties arising from other people's actions, but also by deliberately undertaking some penances and mortifications, such as fasts, vigils, and other austerities practiced by holy penitents.... 6. For exterior and voluntary

mortifications to be profitable, it must be accompanied by the mortification of the judgment and the will through holy obedience." (LEW 197-202)

19. The 4th means - A tender and true devotion to Mary

In Chapter 17, Montfort says, "The greatest means of all, and the most wonderful of all secrets for obtaining and preserving divine Wisdom is a loving and genuine devotion to the Blessed Virgin." (LEW 203) Through fidelity to God's will at all times and through apostolic commitment to God, one can remain united to God. "If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love." (Jn 15:10) "I have been put to death with Christ on his cross, so that it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me." (Gal 2:20)

Montfort has differentiated **true devotion** from **perfect devotion** to Mary and he has defined both of them. "If I were asked by someone seeking to honour our Lady, 'What does genuine devotion to her involve?' I would answer briefly that it consists in a full appreciation of the privileges and dignity of our Lady; in expressing our gratitude for her goodness to us; in zealously promoting devotion to her; in constantly appealing for her help; in being completely dependent on her; and in placing firm reliance and loving confidence in her motherly goodness." (LEW 215) "But the most perfect and most profitable of all devotions to the Blessed Virgin consists in consecrating ourselves entirely to her and to Jesus through her as slaves. It involves consecrating to her completely and for all eternity our body and soul, our possessions both spiritual and material, the atoning value and the merits of our good actions and our right to dispose of them. In short, it involves the offering of all we have acquired in the past, all we actually possess at the moment, and all we will acquire in the future." (LEW 219)

"Mary is wise: let us place everything in her hands. She knows how to dispose of us and all that we have for the greater glory of God. Mary is charitable: she loves us as her children and servants. Let us offer everything to her and we will lose nothing by it; she will turn everything to our gain. Mary is liberal: she returns more than we give. Let us give her unreservedly all that we own without any reservation; she will give us a hundredfold in return. Mary is powerful: nothing on earth can take from her what we have placed in her keeping. Let us then commit ourselves to her care; she will defend us against our enemies and help us to triumph over them. Mary is faithful: she will not permit anything we give her to be lost or wasted... Let us, then, confide everything to the faithful Virgin Mary." (LEW 222) Montfort wants us to make the above mentioned consecration in all seriousness and live in constant relationship with Mary. After making the consecration we should completely depend on Mary so that she may form Jesus in us. In self-consecration to Mary, the issue is the renunciation of self-will and the surrender of ourselves, which will lead us to our transformation into Christ. "It serves no other purpose than, by giving Mary 'control' over whole being, to afford her the opportunity to transform us in him, to give birth to Eternal Wisdom in us." (Pierre Humblet, *The Mystical process of transformation in Grignon de Montfort's LEW*, p. 62)

20. Conclusion: We get united to Christ in order to bear fruit. Montfort tells us "Those who read LEW to be filled with a fresh desire to love you (Wisdom) and possess you, on earth as well as in heaven ... finally seek to acquire the light and unction you need to inspire others with that love for Wisdom which will lead them to eternal life." (LEW 2, 30) Montfort tells us, "Most blessed of all are those who believe them, put them into practice and teach them to others; for they will shine in heaven like stars for all eternity." (LEW 153) Let us "undertake great things for the glory of God and the salvation of souls." (LEW 100)

* * * * *

Letter to the Friends of the Cross

Cross occupied an important place in St. Louis Marie's concept of the Christian life. He founded associations of people who, attracted by love of the Cross, had taken to heart the words of our Lord, "If anyone wants to be a follower of mine let him renounce himself and take up his cross every day and follow me." (Lk. 9:24) He wrote the "Letter to the Friends of Cross" during a visit to Rennes at a time when he was not engaged in active work and was making a retreat. After preaching the mission in Roussay, in 1714, Fr. Louis paid a visit and then came to Rennes. Here "he spends eight days on retreat with the Jesuits. The fruits of this period of prayer are to be found in his Letter to the Friends of the Cross. These are among the most luminous pages written by Montfort. By means of this letter he maintains contact with the network of confraternities that he has founded, for he is unable to visit all of them personally." (Benedetta Papàsogli, Montfort Prophet for our times, p. 439) He composed it while meditating on the sufferings of Jesus and had it printed and circulated. The manuscript of the letter has not survived and the earliest existing copy was published in 1839 by Fr. Dalin, the Vicar General of the Company of Mary.

"On the last day of my retreat, I leave the delights of the interior life to develop on paper a few little points on the Cross with which to pierce your generous hearts. Would to God I could use the blood of my veins rather than the ink of my pen! But, alas, even if blood were required, mine would not be good enough. I pray rather that the Spirit of the living God may be the life, strength, and guiding hand of this letter; that his unction may be my ink, the holy Cross my pen, and your hearts my book." (LFC 1, hereafter only Nos. are given) "Do you listen to the voice of Jesus who, burdened with his Cross, calls out to you, 'Come after me; anyone who follows me will not be walking in the dark; be brave; I have conquered the world!'" (6) "Reflect well on these remarkable words of our Saviour, 'If anyone wants to be a follower of mine, let him renounce himself, and take up his cross and follow me' (Mt. 16:24; Lk. 9:23)." (12)

"The one among you who knows best how to carry his cross, even though in other things he does not know A from B, is the most learned of all. The great St. Paul returned from the third heaven, where he learned mysteries hidden even from the angels, and he proclaimed that he did not know, nor did he want to know anything but Christ crucified. Rejoice, then, you ordinary Christian, man or woman, without any schooling or intellectual abilities, for if you know how to suffer cheerfully, you know more than a doctor of Sorbonne University who does not know how to suffer as you do." (26)

"The Holy Spirit compares the cross to a fire which removes the rust from the iron by the intensity of its heat." (29) "If you are not willing to suffer gladly like Jesus, or patiently like the penitent thief, then you will have to suffer like the unrepentant thief." (33) "Carry your cross cheerfully and you will be filled with divine love; for only in suffering can we dwell in the pure love of Christ." (34) "You can be sure, my dear Friends of the Cross, that something wonderful is awaiting you, since the Holy Spirit has united you so intimately to that which everyone so carefully avoids." (40) "Take advantage of little sufferings, even more than of great ones. God considers not so much what we suffer as how we suffer." (49) "My dear Friends of the Cross, make the resolution to suffer any kind of cross without excluding or choosing any: any poverty, injustice, loss, illness, humiliation, contradiction, slander, spiritual dryness, desolation, interior and exterior trials, saying always, 'My heart is ready, O God, my heart is ready!'" (54) "Never willingly complain against any person or thing that God may use to afflict you." (59) "Whenever you receive any cross, always welcome it with humility and gratitude." (60) * * * * *

