

St. Montfort, apostolic missionary

From his youth, St. Louis de Montfort showed much interest to teach catechism and to speak about Jesus and Mary. Towards the close of Louis' studies in Rennes, he came into contact with Fr. Jean Leuduger, a great Briton missionary, who founded a missionary group. He became a model for Louis in missionary activities. A duty in which Louis excelled was as a teacher of catechism. He was asked to teach catechism to the children from the neighbourhood of La Grenouillère, "the most unruly children in all of Paris". (Joseph Grandet, Life of Grignon de Montfort). Louis used simple stories, which captivated the full attention of the children. He was able to touch their young hearts. He became a joyful hero among the urchins of the seventeenth century. He was a talented catechist appreciated by children.

Louis, while in seminary, started compiling with stubborn perseverance a voluminous file of notes for his future preaching. He also composed rhymed catechetical verses, expressing the truths of the faith in long hymns. He produced a large number of hymns. Later he published some of them. Actually 164 of his canticles have come down to us. After his ordination to priesthood, Fr. Leschassier invited Fr. Louis to stay at St. Sulpice and work together with the staff for the formation of the seminarians. The latter did not accept the invitation; but he requested Fr. Leschassier to send him to Canada as a missionary. Fr. Leschassier did not agree to it. "Fr. Leschassier does not allow him to go to Canada for fear that, carried away by his impetuous nature and his zeal, he will lose himself in the vast forests of that country in his quest for the barbarians." (Blain, nos. 199-200) Hence Fr. Louis stayed on 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. At the end of September 1700, Frs. Leveque and Louis set out for Nantes.

After spending the months of October and November in St. Clement Community, Fr. Louis found himself to be a disappointed man. 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... With conditions as they are, I find myself, as time goes on, torn by two apparently contradictory feelings. On one hand, I feel a secret attraction for a hidden life in which I can efface myself and combat my natural tendency to show off. On the other hand, 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) Fr. Louis had clear goals and options. He opted to serve the poor and his goal was to make Jesus and Mary known and loved.

By the end of October 1701, 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. (Ref. L. 10 & 11) After being chaplain in the Poorhouse of Poitiers and the General Hospital of Salpêtrie, and after spending a few months under the staircase on Pot-de-Fer street in Paris, he came to the

Poorhouse of Poitiers as its Director in April 1704. By the middle of 1705, he resigned from there and offered his services to the Bishop of Poitiers to preach missions in the town of Poitiers and its suburbs. The Bishop welcomed the offer and nominated him "Director of the Penitents' House". Thus Montfort was officially appointed Missionary in the Diocese of Poitiers. 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 there. More and more people came for the mission. The poor people of Poitiers knew him and loved him. He was very kind in the confessional. The people considered Montfort 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. A Cross was erected just opposite to the Chapel.

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 Vicar Generals, namely Fr. Villeroy, who did not appreciate Montfort. He came and ordered Montfort to stop the preaching and humiliated him. When he left, Montfort told the people, "we were planning to plant a cross at the entrance of the church. Our superiors forbid us. Let us plant it instead, each one, in the middle of his heart." Another V.G., Fr. Revol, intervened and temporarily solved the problem.

Fr. Montfort preached a mission in St. Saturnin's Suburb. It was a real success. Everything helped towards that result: his immense and sustained charity to the poor, his prolonged prayers in the silence of the night, and the prodigious austerities he practiced. Further he had other assets: solid and moving sermons, a powerful and penetrative voice, marks of sympathy arising from the depth of his heart, and wise and opportune decisions. Jan. 6, 1706, marked the end of the mission and the mission ended with a beautiful procession. Fr. Montfort began a retreat for the Sisters of St. Catherine of Poitiers. While he was preaching at St. Catherine's Church, the Bishop, who had come back from Paris, ordered Montfort to leave the diocese.

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. After asking Bro. Mathurin to await his return, Fr. Montfort along with a Spanish student, started for Rome on foot. On the way they visited the Marian Shrine at Loretto. On June 6, 1706, Montfort had an audience with Pope Clement XI in Rome and expressed his desire to work as foreign missionary. The Pope clarified a number of things. He finally 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. The Pope told Montfort especially to give a solid teaching in the Christian faith to children and to the common people and to restore the spirit of Christianity by the renewal of the Baptismal promises.

On his return to France Fr. Louis met Bro. Mathurin and they went on a pilgrimage to Samur and to Mount St. Michael. Montfort entrusted his missions to the protection of Mary and Michael. Then he came to Dinan. There he joined missionaries to preach a mission. He taught

catechism to the children and heard confessions and tended the sick. One evening, going along the streets, he 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 placed 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.

In Fr. Leuduger's Missionary Group (Feb. – Oct. 1707): In February 1707, Fr. Leuduger invited Fr. Louis to join his mission band in the diocese of St. Briec. Fr. Louis preached at La Cheze in Northern Brittany. He taught catechism and took care of the poor. His burning words, heavenly smile, movement with Rosary in hand and his boundless charity for everyone drew the attention of the people. He was told by many of the natives that, a long time ago, the great St. Vincent Ferrer had looked on the ruins of the ancient chapel of Our Lady of Pity, and had made a prophetic statement. "The chapel will be restored by a man whom the Almighty will bring into the world in due time. He will come as a stranger. He will be insulted and abused. But he will rebuild the chapel." "I am that man," Louis said. "Let's set to work." He drew up plans, engaged skilled workmen, ordered for statues, directed the transport of materials and supervised the work. The work carried on for several weeks after the mission. Then Montfort preached at Plumieux and Trinity-Prohoet. In order to preserve the fruits of the mission, Montfort 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. In August 1707, Fr. Leuduger and his team including Montfort arrived at Moncontour. Montfort took a collection to have Masses offered for the souls in purgatory. This initiate was interpreted badly. It was considered a gross breach of the Mission rules which forbade the Missionaries to seek any help from the people. Fr. Leuduger asked Fr. Montfort to leave the group.

At the Hermitage of St. Lazare (1707-08): With Bros. Mathurin and John, who had by this time joined Montfort, Montfort occupied the hermitage of St. Lazare in the town of Montfort. In this hermitage was born the first Montfortian community of men. "It is, symbolically, the Cenacle of the poor, united in pleading for graces from on high, together in handing on the Word; it is the little Church of the Acts of the Apostles, prayerful and mission-oriented." (Montfort, Prophet of our times, p. 316) Montfort with the required permissions settled down with Bros. Mathurin and John in this hermitage of St. Lazare. They worked hard and restored the chapel. Montfort carved the statue of Our Lady Wisdom and placed it on an altar. Above the main altar he hung the picture of a dove with outstretched wings symbolizing the Holy Spirit. Fr. Montfort and Bros. Mathurin and John led a life of prayer and penance. They relied on God's Providence. Often people provided them with food. Soon people started to come to listen to Montfort and he taught them. The Chapel became a centre of piety. When the chapel was too small, he preached outside under the trees. Some priests invited him to preach in their parishes and he obliged them. Towards the end of 1707, Bishop Desmarets of St. Malo came there and forbade Montfort to exercise his ministry. Some people did not like the ways of Montfort, went on accusing him to the Bishop. While Fr. Louis was giving a mission in Romillé, the Bishop finally forbade him to preach outside the parish churches of the town of Montfort. Montfort decided to leave the Diocese of St. Malo. Fortunately for him, his friend Fr. Barrin, one of the Vicar Generals of the Diocese of Nantes, invited him to the Diocese of Nantes.

Montfort's missions in the diocese of Nantes, (1708-1710): Fr. Louis and Bros. Mathurin and John reached Nantes. Mgr. Gilles de Bauveau was the Bishop of Nantes. Fr. Barrin decided to place Montfort under Fr. Joubart, a renowned Jesuit Missionary who was going to evangelize the Parish of St. Similien at Nantes itself. During the mission Montfort excelled himself in the mission activities. Fr. Barrin asked a distinguished Jesuit Father to listen to Fr. Louis' preaching. They were impressed with the unction with which he preached. He was able to touch the hearts of the people. Fr. Barrin henceforth conceived such a high notion of Fr. Louis' holiness that he declared himself his constant protector. At the end of the summer of 1708, Fr. Montfort went on his own to give a mission at Vallet, 15 kms away from Nantes. As it was the time of vintage the attendance was poor. Montfort sent Bro. Mathurin through the villages across the vineyards. Bro. Mathurin rang a small bell and sang in his beautiful voice, "Hey, hey, hey! / The Mission starts today! / If it's Paradise you'd win, / Good friends, come right in." Success was immediate. That very evening, people flocked from all sides. The whole parish attended the Mission. Fr. Barrin gave some ground to plant a cross at the end of the Mission.. Fr. Montfort taught the people how to pray the Rosary.

Montfort preached Missions at La Boissiere and at Landemont. Fr. Barrin sent Fr. Montfort to La Chevroliere in November 1708. He gave him Fr. Des Bastieres as his Assistant. The Parish Priest was not happy and he did not welcome the missionaries and insulted Montfort; the latter asked pardon and continued the mission. Many conversions took place. Planting of crosses and recitation of the rosary became part and parcel of the mission. The next mission was at Vertou in Nantes itself. Montfort spent a month there. There everything was smooth and Montfort told his Assistant, "How badly we are here!" "Not at all," replied the latter. "Where could we go to be better off?" "The matter is that we are too well off. Our Mission will bear no fruits. No Cross. What a Cross!"

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.

On Ash Wednesday, Feb. 13, 1709, Montfort was sent to Campbon to preach a mission there. 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. In March 1709, Montfort preached a mission at Crossac. The church was then cleaned. Fr. Bastieres left Montfort and the latter felt it a lot.

The construction of the Pontchateau Calvary: In April 1709, Montfort, with a new assistant Fr. Gabriel Olivier, and started a mission in Pontchateau. Montfort 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. He explained the plan. Montfort drew three concentric circles. The mud between the second and third circles was to be taken and put on the inner circle to raise it into a hill. The news about the construction of the Calvary spread far and wide. People from the surrounding parishes came to work on the Calvary. On the vast work-yard, a huge crowd were kept busy. On certain days even 500 people were there to work. Some were digging the ground, others loading the carts, while others carried the mud in baskets. All were satisfied with a crust of black bread, which they had brought in their pockets. Montfort often provided them with a simple meal. Montfort went round the villages in quest of food. People came to his help. The work continued for fifteen months or more. Montfort had organized it so well that he could go away for a week or more, to give missions. In the first week of September 1710 the work was completed. Montfort got suitable statues made. All the statues were big and well proportioned. The cross of Christ towered over the land of the Magdalene, inviting all those within two thousand square kilometres to come and pray.

The later missions in the diocese of Nantes: As the work on the Pontchateau Calvary was going on, Montfort preached missions in a number of parishes: Landemon, St. Saviour, La Boissiere, La Remandiere, Besné, Missillac, Herbignac, Camois, Asserac, St. Donatien and Bouguenais. Fr. Olivier helped him both in the missions and in the construction of the Calvary at Pontchateau. The two chief missions that they preached together were those of St. Donatien and Bouguenais. In June 1710, Montfort spent himself fully in the suburb of St. Donatien. The Mission at St. Donatien was a great success. He made 14 standards of white satin, which he made use of at Bouguenais. The next Mission was at Bouguenais. The Mission of Bouguenais ended with a grand procession in which 10,000 people participated. The 14 standards rose above the crowd, one at the head of each group. They bore the chief titles of Our Lord and Our Lady.

The Pontchateau tragedy: Montfort had obtained permission from the Bishop of Metz to build the Calvary on the Moor of La Madeleine. The Bishop was the brother of Mr. Pierre de Coislin, the owner of the place. As Mr. Pierre died, the Bishop succeeded to his title. The property was looked after by a Steward. The same steward was not happy with Montfort for removing the Duke's Crest from the wall of the church in Campbon. The Steward was waiting to take revenge on Montfort. He wrote to the Governor of Brittany stating that Montfort was constructing 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. Mr. Ferrand came, examined the works and wrote a report confirming the accusation. Montfort did not pay attention to Mr. Ferrand during the visit. The report was sent to Paris and the King ordered that the Calvary should be destroyed. This order was passed on to the Bishop of Nantes. Montfort did not know anything about these proceedings. When Montfort came back to Pontchateau from the Mission of Bouguenais in August 1710, the Calvary was up. 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. Everything was planned. 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 could not revoke his decision as the order had

come from the King. On the feast day the programme went on at Pontchateau as planned, but without the blessing. Montfort returned only at noon on the 15th. Most of the crowd was still there. He conveyed the message, consoled the people and resigned himself to that awful disappointment. Montfort went to St. Molf to preach. During the first week of the mission, Fr. Olivier brought a letter from the Bishop addressed to Montfort. On reading it, Montfort wept as the Bishop was forbidding him to preach and hear confessions all over his diocese. In 1748, the Governor of Brittany got permission from the King to rebuild the Calvary. The work was completed and it was reopened in 1758.

After the Pontchateau tragedy: The first months following the fatal day in September were among the darkest ever experienced by Montfort, 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 in Hauts-Pavés Street, 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 in a small house taken on lease. Montfort and his helpers rescued the incurables from the indignity of dying in the gutters. Two young women looked after them. On Nov. 10, 1710, Montfort became a member of the Third Order of St. Dominic. In January 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.

Montfort, a Missionary in the dioceses of La Rochelle and Luçon (1711-1716): 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 the 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 all throughout the mission.

Missions in the town of La Rochelle: During the first half of May, Montfort came to La Rochelle and Bishop Etienne de Champflour of La Rochelle received him warmly and granted him all possible faculties. Montfort preached a mission at the Hospital. Then he preached a mission at Lhoumeau, a parish two kilometres from La Rochelle. It was quite a success. After preaching a mission at L'houmeau, Montfort 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. The missions were preached in the church of the Dominicans, an immense edifice. Montfort conducted a series of things with great success. He involved the entire town in the activities of the mission. In the Men's Mission many conversions took place and many Protestants got converted to Catholicism. This angered the Protestants. Montfort did not enter into controversies; but applied himself to inspire devotion to the holy Rosary and to explain the mysteries which were proposed at the start of each decade. He spoke with such lights and unction on that subject that people were never tired of listening to him. He did not forget the great lessons of morality nor the leading truths of holy Faith. The whole town of La Rochelle was moved. Many made general confessions and conversions were many.

Nearly 3000 women participated in the Women's Mission. Montfort promoted the recitation of the Rosary, the renewal of the baptismal promises and the asking of questions for clarification. The third mission was for soldiers. Montfort's words touched their hearts. They felt sorry for their sins and made good confession. The change effected in them was so remarkable that Mr. de Chamilly, Governor of La Rochelle, conceived such an esteem for Montfort that he often invited him to his table. It was a moving sight to see Montfort in the streets of La Rochelle, always surrounded by officers and soldiers. When they went to his house to ask for advice, he answered them in a few words: "Be content with your pay. Harm nobody. Be faithful to God and to the King. Obey your commanding officers. In short, be Christian soldiers!"

The final mission ended with an imposing procession. There was a crowd. Soldiers joined this procession. 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. This painting by Mr. Claude Masse is preserved to this day in one of the archives in Paris. Further when Montfort was planting a cross at St. Nicholas' Gate, people saw crosses in the air.

Mission on the Island of Yeu: 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 was terribly afraid. Montfort asked the people to recite the rosary with him. When the rosary was over, Montfort said, "Have no fear, my dear friends, our good Mother, the Blessed Virgin, has heard our prayers; we are out of danger." The seamen did not believe him. Soon after, the wind changed its direction and the ships moved away. During the mission, Fr. Montfort paid a special attention towards the poor. He called the ladies of the parish, gave them a short talk on the merits of good works, especially of alms deeds. He got a house to prepare meals for the poor. Everyone was invited to contribute according to his or her means. The meals were prepared by pious volunteers. He was present everyday to say the prayers before and after meals and to read to them while they were eating. Before dismissing them, he reminded them that it was their duty to add holiness to poverty. He sent them to learn catechism or he taught them himself, to dispose them to gain much from the mission. During the mission the daily recitation of the Rosary was introduced and the mission on the whole was a great success.

Mission at Sallertaine: On leaving Yeu Island, Montfort came to Nantes and then to La Garnache. On May 5, 1712, he blessed the chapel of Our Lady of Victory. Then the people of La Garnache accompanied the missionary up to Sallertaine. The opponents of the mission forced the sacristan to give the keys to one of the opponents. After praying at the foot of the Cross, Montfort bid good bye to the people of La Garnache. As he was speaking the doors of the church opened by themselves. In the parish drunkenness, injustice and enmities were prevalent. Montfort instructed the people with kindness. They knew about his penances, long prayer and constant vigils. His hard work every day impressed the people. He succeeded in ending over 50 law-suits and making over 200 reconciliations. He constructed a small Calvary. More than 15,000 people participated in the closing procession.

Return to La Rochelle: In July 1712, Montfort left the diocese of Luçon and came to La Rochelle. Till then he had no house of his own where he could withdraw between his missions. Now a pious lady gave him one for his life-time. It was a house with a small garden enclosed by walls in the District of St. Eloi on the outskirts of the town. He called it "St. Eloi Hermitage". He had a table, a chair and a candle stick. During the last part of 1712 and during the first part of 1713, Montfort preached missions at St. Vivian, Esnandes, Courçon, Le Beugnon Bressuies and Argenton-Chateau.

Mission at La Seguniere: Towards the end of May 1713, Montfort came to La Seguniere to preach a mission there. There was a huge concourse for the opening sermon, and that concourse never thinned. There were many conversions. He spent a month there giving conferences, and instructions and hearing confessions. The whole parish was renewed entirely, fervour replaced laxity, good example pushed out scandals and enlightened piety drove away superstition. Further he started restoring the chapel of Our Lady of All Patience.

A change in Montfort: During the two years from 1711-1713, a change took place in Montfort's life. His robust physique showed signs of fatigue. 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. Experience, contact with people, years of self-mastery leading him gradually in the direction flexibility in his spiritual life, and the psychological suppleness that enabled him to survive in the rigid mould of St. Sulpice. In a prolonged process of gestation, a new man was born each day giving up explosive reactions and outbursts. 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.

Visit to Holy Spirit Seminary, Paris (1713): In July 1713, Fr. Montfort paid a visit to the Holy Spirit Seminary, Paris. He met the Superior and during the first interview, he informed the Superior of the purpose of his visit. He reminded him of the ties of friendship which he had with Fr. Des Places and of the latter's promise to give him recruits. The Superior invited Montfort to speak to his Seminarians. Montfort was happy to do that and during the two months that he spent in Paris, he came several times to the Seminary. The Directors of the Seminary met and approved Montfort's plans and renewed their Founder's promise to him. They selected Fr. Caris, the Community Bursar to join Fr. Montfort. Later it was found that it was impossible to find someone to replace Fr. Caris. Knowing the difficulties of the Seminary, Montfort accepted this

disappointment. Yet his visit was not useless as a number of seminarians came forward to join him later on.

Mission at Roussay: After the missions in Mauzé and Vanneau, Montfort preached a mission in Roussay. Roussay was a large parish on the Northern limits of La Rochelle Diocese, near Nantes. Fr. Griffon was a zealous Vicar. At his request Montfort came there in June 1714. Drunkenness was the main vice, causing quarrels, discords, ruin of families, swearing, etc. While the Cross was lifted up with ropes, the ropes snapped and the heavy cross fell on the people. Only one man was slightly hurt and all thanked God. Montfort established in the parish the habit of saying the Rosary at home. He further restored an ancient chapel dedicated to the Blessed Virgin.

Letter to "The Friends of the Cross": Montfort came to Rennes and made a retreat. He composed "The Letter to the Friends of the Cross" while meditating on the sufferings of Jesus.

Mission at St. Lo: Bro. Nicholas joined Montfort and along with him, Fr. Montfort reached the commercial town of St. Lo in the Diocese of Coutances on Aug. 17, 1714. People flocked from every side for the mission. Montfort had a prophetic look; his gestures were lively and expressive; his talks were solid and so moving that people got converted even the most hardened sinners. He practiced severe penance. In secret at the order of Montfort, the Brother had to strike the master hard with a discipline several times. The procession at the end and the planting of the Cross were very impressive. Admirable conversions took place. Daily recitation of the Rosary became a habit among the people of the parish.

Montfort's visit to his friend Fr. Blain in Rouen in 1714: From St. Lo in September Montfort came to Rouen to meet his friend Fr. Blain, who was then the Canon of the Cathedral and Director of 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 told Montfort about what had heard as regards Montfort's behaviour and manners. He also asked Montfort whether he ever hoped to find people to follow his life, which was so poor, so difficult, and so abandoned to Providence, a life meant for men of rare courage, grace, and virtue. Blain requested 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 and whether he could show him any way of life more like that of Jesus and his apostles than a life that was poor, mortified and founded upon complete abandonment to Divine Providence. Montfort said that he had no other plan but to follow Jesus and to persevere in that way of life. He added that if God wanted to give him good priests to share his way of life, well and good; but that was up to God and not up to him.

Fr. Blain told Montfort about the latter's odd and extraordinary practices and told him to give them up. Montfort answered that if his behaviour was odd or unusual, that was not at all his intention. If these expressions meant acts of zeal or mortification or charity or other heroically saintly practices which seemed unusual, he was quite content to be odd. Blain asked Montfort to imitate the wisdom of certain saints. Montfort answered him stating that there were different kinds of wisdom as well as different degrees of it. If one's concept of wisdom was limited to never undertaking anything new for God, nor attempting anything novel for his glory just because of fear of being talked about, the apostles certainly made a big mistake in setting out from Jerusalem. 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 he 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 came to Nantes.

Montfort, founder of free schools: During the first half of 1714, Montfort had several meetings with the Bishop of La Rochelle concerning free schools. There were already some schools existing but not functioning properly. Montfort got one that was not functioning. The building needed much repairs. According to Fr. Charles Besnard, the third biographer, Montfort appointed a construction team: "Masons, carpenters, roofers, locksmiths, glazers, and other labourers in numbers large enough to warrant Louis' constant supervision, for he gave each one a job to do and made it clear how he wished it to be carried out." The 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.

Girls 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. Montfort asked Srs. Marie Louise and Catherine Brunet to come to La Rochelle towards the end of February 1715. Soon after their arrival, a school for girls was started and the Sisters were put in charge of it.

Several short missions: After his return to La Rochelle, Montfort preached missions at Loiré and Le Breuil-Magné. Then he went to the Island of Aix, about 10 kms away from La Rochelle. The island was about 4 kms long and 2 kms wide. Montfort persuaded the officers to cooperate. They cooperated so well that they made all the soldiers attend the mission while they set them the example. The local people too were very eager to attend it. The success surpassed all expectations.

Mission at Taugon-la-Ronde: Fr. Montfort then preached a mission in Taugon-la-Ronde. It proved to be a great success. In order to sanctify souls and to remove the occasions of sin, he founded two Associations: the White Penitents and the Company of Virgins. He gathered the men who were impressed by his sermons. He gave them instructions to withdraw them from liquor shops, from debauch and the habit of using swear-words. He gave them Rules to follow and prayers to say, to secure their conversion and perseverance. On Sundays and feast-days they were asked to meet in a chapel and say their special prayers between the services. On some special feasts they were asked to come to church in a white alb. To the Company of Virgins too Montfort gave a Rule, exercises of piety and a form of life suited to their condition. Their only distinction was great piety and modesty. On some feast days they were asked to come to church dressed in white with a veil as symbol of purity. They gathered in a separate chapel dedicated to the Blessed Virgin. They made the vow not to marry for one year. They were on probation for some time before being admitted to make their vow. After the end of their year's vow, they were

quite free to renew it or to withdraw. They could also be removed if their conduct was not satisfactory.

The Mission at St. Amand-sur-Sèvre: In April 1715, Montfort started the mission in St. Amand-sur-Sèvre. Fr. Vatel and two other missionaries assisted him. Every morning, many sick people came to him. He welcomed them with kindness and took them to an altar on which he had placed a statue of the Child Jesus. He read the Gospel for them. Those who were cured offered a loaf of bread to the Child Jesus. Montfort fought against superstitions. Some families were accused of having devilish spells. He spoke against these false accusations and people came forward retract publicly their calumnious accusations. Real conversion took place in the parish.

Religious vows: Fr. Montfort felt extremely tired. He decided to take some rest. With one of his assistants and some Brothers, he left for La Séguinière. Sisters of Bishop De Beauveau of Nantes invited him to their place. He stayed with them for nearly 10 days. Still he preached several sermons in the church at La Séguinière. After taking rest Fr. Montfort preached to his Brothers in La Séguinière itself. The retreat got over on Pentecost day, i.e. June 9, 1715, and on that day Montfort and Bros. Nicholas, Philip, Louis and Gabriel made their vows of Poverty and Obedience for one year. They made their profession in front of the statue of Our Lady all Patience, statue carved by Montfort.

Mission at Mervent: The parish church at Mervent was in a bad condition and it badly needed a major repair. After the sermon, he received contributions by way of money or material from the people for the repair. The mission was a success and Fr. Montfort managed to repair the church. In June 1715, Montfort preached a mission at Mervent. The village of Mervent was isolated in the midst of deep forests. Someone told Montfort about the forest of Vouvant, which was close by. He was taken there in order to find out a proper place to meditate in silence and solitude, so that the great truths, which he was preaching to others, might penetrate into himself. In fact, he found there a very quiet place. He decided to build a hermitage and set to work. People in large numbers came to help him. He dug into a rock and prepared a place big enough for a bed, a table and a chair. This place came to be known as the Grotto of Mervent. Montfort loved contemplation and on the days of the mission he spent four hours in contemplation. On the other days he spent more time in prayer. During the sixteen years of his priestly ministry, he spent altogether a fourth of it in personal retreats and recollection. He is considered as one of the mystics of the 17th century.

Mission at Fontenay-le-Comte: On Aug. 25, 1715, Montfort started the mission at Fontenay-le-Comte. As the church was small, he wanted to preach separate missions, one for women only and the other for men only. Montfort started the mission for women. There was a garrison in the town. The captain, who expected his troop to be transferred before the men's mission, obtained permission for his soldiers to attend the women's mission. Montfort agreed willingly and nearly all attended with exemplary piety, morning and evening for a fortnight. One afternoon, the captain came to the church and stood there in a disrespectful manner with his hat on his head, taking snuff and laughing. Montfort asked him to leave; but the latter refused to do so. As he tried to attack Montfort, Montfort knelt down to beg God's pardon. Some women tried to protect Montfort and to push captain out. Then he became very angry and struck Montfort twice on the stomach. Then captain asked his men to get out of the church. Then the captain and his soldiers left the church. Then Montfort preached a sermon to the women, at the end of which the women accompanied the missionaries till the Providence, where they were staying. Then mission carried

on without the soldiers attending it. Then he preached the mission for men. He founded an Association of Virgins for women and an Association of White Penitents for men. He also established the daily recitation of the Rosary and erected a Calvary. After the mission, Montfort preached a retreat to the Sisters of Notre Dame.

Mission at Vouvant: A week after the mission at Fontenay, Montfort started the Mission at Vouvant. He was already known as a man mighty in words and deeds. Here he also proved to be a man of wisdom. Fathers Vatel and Mulot helped him. A girl possessed by devil was brought to him. He said some of the prescribed prayers and then his Assistants questioned her; but she refused to answer them. Montfort gave her some advice and sent her away. She seemed to read the secrets of hearts and through her words, she revealed the pitiable condition of a number of people. They repented and reformed their life. There were some scandals in the parish. Montfort tried to stop them discretely. As his efforts failed, he admonished the culprits publicly. They attacked him publicly and insulted him. They tried to bring a law-suit against him. Montfort accepted all these patiently. He prayed a lot and asked the people to pray. He ended the mission after repairing the church. Then Fr. Mulot took him to St. Pompain. 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.

The mission at St. Pompain: In December-January, Montfort preached the mission at St. Pompain. The local Lord's steward was on bad terms with the Parish Priest and with another person. Their enmity was great. Even the Bishop could not settle it. Montfort implored the Blessed Virgin's intercession by the recitation of the Rosary. One day, after a sermon at which the steward was present, he knelt down to announce the mysteries of the Rosary that was recited by the people in two choirs. When the Rosary was over, Montfort came down from the pulpit and went to the steward and embraced him, said how happy he was to see him attending the mission so assiduously and setting a good example to all the parishioners. Then he added, "Well, Sir, could it be said that Jesus Christ will also win a victory over the hatred in your heart? Will you not be willing to forgive the two persons whom you know?" The answer could not be heard, but soon after, the steward held a special dinner to which he invited the vicar and his other enemy. That was the beginning of their reconciliation which lasted all throughout their live. During the mission at St. Pompain, Montfort's father expired on Jan. 21, 1716. Montfort could not attend the funeral. The mission at Villiers-en-Plaine: The mission was held in February 1716. There were three sermons every day, one before dawn, the second at three in the afternoon and the third at sunset. His sermons were very evangelical and apostolic. There was a public examination of conscience, which he guided from the pulpit. He showed great meekness. He was always perfectly self-possessed.

Pilgrimage to Our Lady of Ardilliers, Saumur: 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, Saumur 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. They followed the rules made by Montfort. The pilgrimage lasted seven days. On their return, Montfort and some Brothers made the same pilgrimage. After fulfilling his devotion to the Blessed Virgin and entrusting to her care his soul, his body, his designs, his Missionaries, his Brothers and his Daughters of Wisdom, Montfort

went to visit the Sisters of Providence whom he held in high esteem. Then he left for St. Laurent-sur-Sèvre.

The mission at St. Laurent-sur-Sèvre: 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 rise again.

Fr. Montfort's death: On April 22, 1716, Montfort was seriously ill and he was forced to take complete rest. Medicines had no effects and his 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. 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.

Fr. Louis Marie Grignon de Montfort was a very talented person. As preached he used all his talents. His love for the poor and for children was great. He spread devotion to Mary among the people. He wrote many books: Love of Eternal Wisdom, True Devotion to Mary, Secret of Mary, Secret of the Rosary, Letter to Friends of the Cross, Ardent Prayer for Missionaries, Rule for the Company of Mary, Letter to the members of the Company of Mary, Rule for the Daughters of Wisdom, Personal Letters, Hymns, Letter to the people of Montbernage, Cross of Poitiers, Sermon Notes, Methods of praying the Rosary, Cross of Poitiers, Final Will, etc. He also founded the Company of Mary for Priests and Brothers, and the Daughters of Wisdom. He died young but he accomplished much. He wants his disciples to be daring, dynamic and zealous.

* * * * *