

Montfortian Spirituality

Bro. Lawrence Joseph, s.g.

1. Wisdom Spirituality

All his biographers have pointed out in clear terms Montfort's love for solitude, silence and contemplation. "In order to avoid worldly people and their amusements, young Grignon withdrew into some corner of the house to give himself to prayers or recite his rosary in front of a small picture of the Blessed Virgin. He continued this practice when he was more advanced in years." (Biography by Grandet, p.4). Montfort spent much time in meditation. Of course, his main book of meditation was the Bible, especially the Book of Wisdom and the Gospels. During 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. "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) On Oct. 24, 1703, he wrote to Sr. Marie Louise Trichet, "When shall I possess this loveable and mysterious Wisdom? When will Wisdom come and 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)

Montfort's goal is to get united to Jesus Christ. "All perfection consists in our being conformed, united and consecrated to Jesus." (TD 120) While Montfort was staying in utter poverty and misery at the Pot de Fer Street, Paris during 1703-04, he meditated a lot on the Wisdom Literature of the Old Testament and also on the mysteries of Christ. Further, at the invitation of his friend Fr. Claude Poullart des Places, he gave conferences at the Seminary of the Holy Spirit on Wisdom. Collecting together the themes developed during the conferences, he wrote for himself and for the whole Church the book, "The Love of Eternal Wisdom".

Meditation and contemplation are essential parts of Wisdom spirituality. Montfortian spirituality consists in getting united to Eternal and Incarnate Wisdom. To get united to Wisdom, one should know him intimately and love him passionately. The best way to know Eternal Wisdom is to contemplate Him. "If we wish to have roots of immortality deeply embedded in our heart, we must have in our mind knowledge of Eternal Wisdom. To know Jesus Christ incarnate Wisdom, is to know all we need. To presume to know everything and not know him is to know nothing at all." (LEW 11) Montfort invites us to contemplate Wisdom as Solomon did. "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." (LEW 9) "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)

Montfort daily spent four hours in meditation. Further he took time off to make his own retreat. Hermitage of St. Lazar near the town of Montfort, hermitage of St. Eloi in La Rochelle

and the Grotto of Mervent demonstrate Montfort's love for solitude and prayer. He celebrated the Holy Eucharist with much fervour. Mass and Meditation provided him with enough enlightenment and strength to preach the missions and to face his crosses.

2. Marian Devotion

All biographers have noted Montfort's great devotion to Mary. Blain, his classmate and geographer, has mentioned, "Love for Mary was almost as innate in M. Grignon. As a boy, what he enjoyed most was to speak of her or listen to other people speak of her, and later on, his greatest joy was to propagate devotion to her and increase the number of those dedicated to her service." In his first book, *The Love of Eternal Wisdom*, Montfort has proposed devotion to Mary as best means to get united to Wisdom. According to him, "True devotion 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)

Vatican II too has given us a definition: "Let the faithful remember moreover that true devotion consists neither in sterile or transitory affection, nor in a certain vain credulity, but proceeds from true faith, by which we are led to know the excellence of the Mother of God, and we are moved to a filial love toward our mother and to the imitation of her virtues." (LG 67)

According to Montfort "Perfect devotion consists in consecrating ourselves entirely to her and to Jesus through her as their 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 that we will acquire in the future." (LEW219) Those who make this consecration "must do everything through Mary, that is, they must obey her always and be led in all things by her spirit, which is the Holy Spirit of God." (TD 258) "The person who likes to be led by this spirit of Mary should renounce his own spirit, his views and his own will before doing anything... should give himself up to the spirit of Mary to be moved and directed as she wishes... and "from time to time during an action and after it, he should renew this same act of offering and of union." (TD 259)

"The essential practice of this devotion is to perform all our actions with Mary. This means that we must take her as the accomplished model for all we have to do." (SM 45) "In every action then we should consider how Mary performed it or how she would perform it if she were in our place." (TD 260) "We must always act in Mary, that is to say, we must gradually acquire the habit of recollecting ourselves interiorly and so forming within us an idea of a spiritual image of Mary. She must become, as it were, an oratory for the soul where we offer up our prayers to God without the fear of being ignored." (SM 47) "In all our needs it is to this oratory that we should go confidently, and more than that we must try to live in Mary, the true earthly paradise of the new Adam... We should rest there peacefully, rely on her confidently, hide ourselves there with safety, and abandon ourselves unconditionally to her, so that within her virginal bosom: 1. we may be nourished with the milk of her grace and her motherly compassion, we may be delivered from all anxiety, fear and scruples, we may be safeguarded from all our enemies... we may be formed in our Lord and our Lord formed in us." (TD 261, 264)

“Finally we must do everything for Mary. Since we have given ourselves completely to her service, it is only right that we should do everything for her as if we were her personal servant and slave. This does not mean that we take her for the ultimate end of our service, for Jesus alone is our ultimate end... We should undertake and carry out great things for our noble Queen.” (TD 265) Devotees of Mary are asked to be “ministers of the Lord who, like flaming fire, will enkindle everywhere the fires of divine love.” (TD 56) According to Montfort true devotees are the apostles of the latter times. “But who will be these servants, these slaves, these children of Mary? They will be a burning fire: ministers of the Lord, who will enkindle everywhere the fires of divine love... They will be thundering clouds, flying through the air at the least breath of the Holy Spirit. Attached to nothing, astonished at nothing, troubled at nothing, they will shower forth the rain of God’s word and of life eternal... Lastly, we know they will be true disciples of Jesus Christ, walking in the steps of his poverty.” (TD 57, 59) “If you don’t take risk for God, you don’t give him anything worthwhile.” (Letter No. 27)

3. An effective preacher

On Dec. 6, 1700, Montfort wrote, "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 arouse in sinners a devotion to our Blessed Lady." (L. 5) From 1708-1710, he preached a number of missions in the diocese of Nantes. From 1711-16, he was fully involved with missions in the dioceses of Luçon and La Rochelle. 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.

Montfort undertook many initiatives: 1. he tried to establish a true devotion to Mary and the daily recitation of the rosary 2. constructed Calvary in a number of places 3. organized processions 4. composed a large number of hymns to be used during the missions 5. painted pictures and banners 6. carved wooden statues 7. founded pious associations 8. organized the feeding of the poor 9. wrote a number of spiritual books especially on Mary, Wisdom and Cross 10. founded charitable schools for the poor, etc.

4. An Educator of children and youth

Montfort noticed that the children of the poor tended to be antisocial for want of instruction. The need to provide them with education was keenly felt by him. He loved children and was an excellent teacher. When Louis was studying at the college at Rennes, he was chosen by Fr. Julian Bellier to teach catechism and to visit the poor and sick in the hospitals. The College of Rennes left its mark on Louis: the deepening of the interior life and the beginning of an active, concrete and popular apostolate. While at the Seminary of St. Sulpice (1695-1700), the masters of St. Sulpice sent Louis to teach catechism to children. From 1701-03, Montfort was one of the chaplains at the Poorhouse of Poitiers. Like most poorhouses of the period, there was a charitable school and also a factory. There the children of the inmates between seven and

thirteen years old and a few illiterate adults, who wished to learn how to read and write, were taught their letters. The chaplain was by right their schoolmaster.

Montfort loved children and he wanted to teach them. Fr. Clorivière S.J., who wrote Montfort's Biography in 1785, tells us, "Being full of his Divine Master's spirit, he always loved little children tenderly and whether in town or in the country, he liked to be surrounded by a crowd of them to whom he was teaching the elements of the Christian faith... As Apostolic Missionary who wanted to extend God's Kingdom to its extreme limits, he used to say that 'Schools are the nurseries of the Church', that in them the children, being pruned and tended with care, became able to bear good fruits and that for want of this first culture, they would always remain sterile and unfruitful". Among the eleven means that made Montfort's mission fruitful, Fr. Joseph Grandet, the first biographer of Montfort (1724) has mentioned as the first "the establishment of Christian schools".

Montfort thought of starting a school in La Rochelle mainly because of the religious ignorance of the young and the strong influence of Protestantism. There were plenty of schools at La Rochelle, but they were paying schools and directed by teachers of suspect belief and beyond Episcopal control. During the second half of 1714, Montfort did not hesitate to buy a building in need of restoration. He himself became architect and entrepreneur. But the most important task was to find and train good teachers. That is why Montfort "himself went to the school every day to train the teachers in his methods of teaching and to provide a model for these disciples." The school was opened in January 1715. "Montfort" says Cloriviere, "put three masters with a priest at their head who was to watch over their conduct, say Mass for the children at the end of their class and confess them at least once a month". But who were those masters? Brothers surely, though in Montfort's time, only one can be identified with certainty, Louis Danto, mentioned in Montfort's Last Will as Brother Louis of La Rochelle.

Montfort took great care of his school; he drew up the rules for admission, the timetable of the various classes, the syllabus to be followed, the prayers to be said, a list of rewards and punishments. Fr. Cloriviere says, "The prudent Missionary entered into the smallest details, as if he had spent all his life in teaching children... The benches were placed in the form of an amphitheatre, so that the master could see everyone at a glance and that nothing could escape his watchfulness. Montfort visited his schools every day, to train the masters and the pupils according to his own method of teaching... For the Boys' School, Montfort could find, among the many persons under direction, the right men who would be able and zealous enough to do the work." He also started a school for girls. Besides La Rochelle and Nantes, there was only the school of St. Laurent-sur-Sèvre, where we could be sure that there was a Montfortian Brother during the Saint's life time. From Montfort's biography and from his Last Will, it is very clear that, if possible, a school was to be started at Vouvant.

5. Life of poverty and love towards the poor

St. Louis Mary Grignon de Montfort, from his early years, developed a special love for the poor. While studying at Rennes (1684-92), he joined the Sodality of our Lady which provided him with opportunity to help the poor. 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. Towards the end of 1692, Louis

left Paris to join St. Sulpice Seminary. After bidding goodbye to his dear ones at Cesson bridge, he gave away the little money that he had to a beggar and then his new clothes to another. He knelt down and made a vow never to possess anything. While in the Lesser Seminary of St. Sulpice (1695-1700), he prepared sermon notes in view of becoming a preacher of the rural poor.

In November 1701, Fr. Louis joined the Poitiers Poorhouse as chaplain. He did not accept any salary. He did not eat with the other 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. 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. During 1705-06, he preached at Montbernage, St. Simplician, St. Radegonde, etc. in Poitiers. Here were the little people, those who counted for nothing. "Montfort was very much at ease with their manners and their moods."

Montfort considered a poor sick person as Jesus Christ himself. Thus in Dinan he carried a leper to the House of Missionaries, knocked at the door and cried out, "Open to Jesus Christ." At La Garnache he "starts a new system, which is more discreet and also has the advantage of educating the people to service of the poor. He invites several of the needy to come and eat at his own table and asks each family of the parish to offer a complete meal to one poor person. This more delicate way of offering them charity leaves long-lasting effects among the believers." "If we follow Montfort into the slums of Poitiers, the suburbs of St. Donatien and St. Similien at Nantes, or the Loges de Fontney and Villeneuve at La Rochelle, we find ourselves in the midst of poor, humble folk and squalid bands of deprived, untutored children. We also know that Montfort visited frequently General Hospitals."

6. A Lover of the cross

Montfort had to face many crosses in his life. On Sept. 18, 1694, Fr. Barmondiere, who looked after Montfort in Paris, died and Montfort wrote, "Whatever happens I shall not be worried. I have a father in heaven who will never fail me." (L.2) When he was asked to leave from the General Hospital of Salpetriere, he sought help from his friends; but no one received him. "Those friends I once had in Paris have deserted me." (L.15) He was forced to take shelter under the staircase of dilapidated building on the Pot-de-Fer Street. Here he spent much time in meditation.

Montfort meditated upon the passion and death of Christ on the cross. In his wisdom, Christ chose to die on the cross. He asked his disciples to renounce themselves daily, take up their cross and follow him. Montfort wrote in *The Love of Eternal Wisdom*, "Among all the motives which urge us to love Jesus Christ, the strongest is, in my opinion, the sorrow which he endured to show his love... Cross is to my belief, the greatest secret of the King; the greatest mystery of Eternal Wisdom... Never the Cross without Jesus; nor Jesus without the Cross... The cross is good and precious for many reasons... Friends of Jesus Christ, drink of his bitter cup and your friendship with him will increase." (LEW 154, 167, 171, 176, 180)

During 1709-10, Montfort, with the help many people, constructed a big Calvary at Pontchateau. But unfortunately his enemies made a complaint to the King of France. The Calvary could not be blessed and it had to be destroyed. Montfort accepted this heavy cross with resignation. Later this Calvary was rebuilt. Montfort founded an association known as the

Friends of the Cross. To the members of this association he wrote a beautiful letter explaining Jesus' request to his disciples to carry the cross.

All of us face crosses at one time or another. We need to develop a correct attitude. I have developed one for myself. I know that crosses will come due to my mistakes, or to natural calamities or mechanical failures, sickness and sometimes due to the behaviour of others. I cannot control them. I accept them as they come and try to live as patiently as possible. I try never to blame others for my failures or difficulties. I check myself to see if I am the cause for the difficulty and if so, I try to correct myself. Often I cannot correct others; but I can always, if I take the trouble, adjust myself. I pray to God in a special manner during these difficult periods.

7. Faith in Providence

Providence played a prominent role in Montfort's life. When his superior, Fr. Barmondier died, Montfort wrote, "Whatever happens I shall not be worried. I have a Father in heaven who will not fail me." (L.2) Following the French School of Spirituality, Montfort firmly believed that God is love and that God alone guides the universe. "His tender Providence rules everything strongly, conducts everything wisely, without anyone else even thinking about it." (Hymn 51, verse 3) According to Montfort nothing escapes the rule of God. "Over each thing, He watches. And the fools do not think of it. Without Him, even the least leaf cannot fall to the ground. He rules the thunder, the wind, and the clouds un the air and the dust of the earth and the storm in the sea." (H 11, 29) Montfort wants all to have absolute confidence in Providence. "Hope in God so faithful. Repose in the bosom of his fatherly goodness, without worrying about tomorrow." (H.28, 8)

At the end of 1692, at Cesson Bridge Montfort gave up everything and decided to depend upon Providence. "From that time forward he gave himself over to divine Providence, leaving all his troubles behind, confidently and peacefully." (Blain, no. 24) During his missionary activities, he travelled on foot and totally depended ob Providence. During a mission, he stayed in out house, which he called Providence. In his Prayer for Missionaries, he prayed for disciples silver wings, "The silver wings of the dove will be theirs because of their total dependence on Providence and their devotion to Mary." (PM 24). "Their sole resource must be God's Providence." (RM 10) Montfort experienced painful sickness, extreme poverty, injustices, betrayals, apparent failures, etc. Yet he believed that God was guiding him. Though his dreams for the congregations were not fulfilled, he died in peace entrusting everything to Jesus and Mary, and died in their presence.

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Montfortian spirituality has different aspects and in my life I tried to follow him in my own limited ways. The main aspects are: 1. Getting united to Wisdom 2. Perfect devotion to Mary 3. Great desire to make Jesus and Mary known and loved 4. Love for the poor 5. Love of the cross.

1. Wisdom Spirituality

All his biographers have pointed out in clear terms Montfort's love for solitude, silence and contemplation. "In order to avoid worldly people and their amusements, young Grignon withdrew into some corner of the house to give himself to prayers or recite his rosary in front of a small picture of the Blessed Virgin. He continued this practice when he was more advanced in years." (Biography by Grandet, p.4). Montfort spent much time in meditation. Of course, his main book of meditation was the Bible, especially the Book of Wisdom and the Gospels. During 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. "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) On Oct. 24, 1703, he wrote to Sr. Marie Louise Trichet, "When shall I possess this loveable and mysterious Wisdom? When will Wisdom come and 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)

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shall see him glorious and triumphant in heaven. Finally we shall propose the means to acquire and keep him.” (LEW 14)

Montfort daily spent four hours in meditation. Further he took time off to make his own retreat. Hermitage of St. Lazar near the town of Montfort, hermitage of St. Eloi in La Rochelle and the Grotto of Mervent demonstrate Montfort's love for solitude and prayer. He celebrated the Holy Eucharist with much fervour. Mass and Meditation provided him with enough enlightenment and strength to preach the missions and to face his crosses.

We give importance to certain aspects of life and settle down to our own daily routines. As I left the novitiate, I decided never to miss my prayers. Well 58 years have gone by and I did not find it difficult to keep that resolution. Mass and Meditation are important to me. I was a teacher during 17 years, 11 at Palakurichi and 6 at Yercaud. I took many classes. Yet I could find time for prayer. I do not talk much nor do I make use of the mobile much. Save time is my way of life. Each one has to arrive at a useful type of daily routine.

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I have tried to cultivate devotion to Mary. I love to pray the rosary. The beads serve me well as a companion during my journeys and walks. Mother Mary helped me in my difficulties. I feel I can solve my problem with the Rosary as the Palmist said, "With the harp I will solve my problem." (Ps 48, 5) Well, once again, I can say that consecration to Mary "is the fundamental feature of the Marian life of its members." (C. 6)

3. Apostolic dynamism

On Dec. 6, 1700, Montfort wrote, "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 arouse in sinners a devotion to our Blessed Lady." (L. 5) From 1708-1710, he preached a number of missions in the diocese of Nantes. From 1711-16, he was fully involved with missions in the dioceses of Luçon and La Rochelle. 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.

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Montfort noticed that the children of the poor tended to be antisocial for want of instruction. The need to provide them with education was keenly felt by him. He loved children and was an excellent teacher. When Louis was studying at the college at Rennes, he was chosen by Fr. Julian Bellier to teach catechism and to visit the poor and sick in the hospitals. The College of Rennes left its mark on Louis: the deepening of the interior life and the beginning of an active, concrete and popular apostolate. While at the Seminary of St. Sulpice (1695-1700), the masters of St. Sulpice sent Louis to teach catechism to children. From 1701-03, Montfort was one of the chaplains at the Poorhouse of Poitiers. Like most poorhouses of the period, there was a charitable school and also a factory. There the children of the inmates between seven and thirteen years old and a few illiterate adults, who wished to learn how to read and write, were taught their letters. The chaplain was by right their schoolmaster.

Montfort loved children and he wanted to teach them. Fr. Clorivière S.J., who wrote Montfort's Biography in 1785, tells us, "Being full of his Divine Master's spirit, he always loved little children tenderly and whether in town or in the country, he liked to be surrounded by a crowd of them to whom he was teaching the elements of the Christian faith... As Apostolic Missionary who wanted to extend God's Kingdom to its extreme limits, he used to say that 'Schools are the nurseries of the Church', that in them the children, being pruned and tended with care, became able to bear good fruits and that for want of this first culture, they would always remain sterile and unfruitful". Among the eleven means that made Montfort's mission fruitful, Fr. Joseph Grandet, the first biographer of Montfort (1724) has mentioned as the first "the establishment of Christian schools".

Montfort thought of starting a school in La Rochelle mainly because of the religious ignorance of the young and the strong influence of Protestantism. There were plenty of schools at La Rochelle, but they were paying schools and directed by teachers of suspect belief and beyond Episcopal control. During the second half of 1714, Montfort did not hesitate to buy a building in need of restoration. He himself became architect and entrepreneur. But the most important task was to find and train good teachers. That is why Montfort "himself went to the school every day to train the teachers in his methods of teaching and to provide a model for these disciples." The school was opened in January 1715. "Montfort" says Cloriviere, "put three masters with a priest at their head who was to watch over their conduct, say Mass for the children at the end of their class and confess them at least once a month". But who were those masters? Brothers surely, though in Montfort's time, only one can be identified with certainty, Louis Danto, mentioned in Montfort's Last Will as Brother Louis of La Rochelle.

Montfort took great care of his school; he drew up the rules for admission, the timetable of the various classes, the syllabus to be followed, the prayers to be said, a list of rewards and punishments. Fr. Cloriviere says, "The prudent Missionary entered into the smallest details, as if he had spent all his life in teaching children... The benches were placed in the form of an amphitheatre, so that the master could see everyone at a glance and that nothing could escape his

watchfulness. Montfort visited his schools every day, to train the masters and the pupils according to his own method of teaching... For the Boys' School, Montfort could find, among the many persons under direction, the right men who would be able and zealous enough to do the work." He also started a school for girls. Besides La Rochelle and Nantes, there was only the school of St. Laurent-sur-Sèvre, where we could be sure that there was a Montfortian Brother during the Saint's life time. From Montfort's biography and from his Last Will, it is very clear that, if possible, a school was to be started at Vouvant.

I was much interested in school education, especially in teaching the poor. I tried to excel as a teacher and tried to educate the young to grow as upright men and women. As a Provincial Superior, village schools and schools for the poor were preferred: Kanakkankuppam, Kalugumalai, Alandur, Muttom, Chabua and Baghty and Tonga.

4. Life of poverty and love towards the poor

St. Louis Mary Grignon de Montfort, from his early years, developed a special love for the poor. While studying at Rennes (1684-92), he joined the Sodality of our Lady which provided him with opportunity to help the poor. 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. Towards the end of 1692, Louis left Paris to join St. Sulpice Seminary. After bidding goodbye to his dear ones at Cesson bridge, he gave away the little money that he had to a beggar and then his new clothes to another. He knelt down and made a vow never to possess anything. While in the Lesser Seminary of St. Sulpice (1695-1700), he prepared sermon notes in view of becoming a preacher of the rural poor.

In November 1701, Fr. Louis joined the Poitiers Poorhouse as chaplain. He did not accept any salary. He did not eat with the other 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. 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. During 1705-06, he preached at Montbernage, St. Simplician, St. Radegonde, etc. in Poitiers. Here were the little people, those who counted for nothing. "Montfort was very much at ease with their manners and their moods."

Montfort considered a poor sick person as Jesus Christ himself. Thus in Dinan he carried a leper to the House of Missionaries, knocked at the door and cried out, "Open to Jesus Christ." At La Garnache he "starts a new system, which is more discreet and also has the advantage of educating the people to service of the poor. He invites several of the needy to come and eat at his own table and asks each family of the parish to offer a complete meal to one poor person. This more delicate way of offering them charity leaves long-lasting effects among the believers."

"If we follow Montfort into the slums of Poitiers, the suburbs of St. Donatien and St. Similien at Nantes, or the Loges de Fontney and Villeneuve at La Rochelle, we find ourselves in the midst of poor, humble folk and squalid bands of deprived, untutored children. We also know that Montfort visited frequently General Hospitals." Personally I prefer a simple life style and I tried to educate poor children.

5. Love of the cross

Montfort had to face many crosses in his life. On Sept. 18, 1694, Fr. Barmondier, who looked after Montfort in Paris, died and Montfort wrote, "Whatever happens I shall not be worried. I have a father in heaven who will never fail me." (L.2) When he was asked to leave from the General Hospital of Salpetriere, he sought help from his friends; but no one received him. "Those friends I once had in Paris have deserted me." (L.15) He was forced to take shelter under the staircase of dilapidated building on the Pot-de-Fer Street. Here he spent much time in meditation.

Montfort meditated upon the passion and death of Christ on the cross. In his wisdom, Christ chose to die on the cross. He asked his disciples to renounce themselves daily, take up their cross and follow him. Montfort wrote in *The Love of Eternal Wisdom*, "Among all the motives which urge us to love Jesus Christ, the strongest is, in my opinion, the sorrow which he endured to show his love... Cross is to my belief, the greatest secret of the King; the greatest mystery of Eternal Wisdom... Never the Cross without Jesus; nor Jesus without the Cross... The cross is good and precious for many reasons... Friends of Jesus Christ, drink of his bitter cup and your friendship with him will increase." (LEW 154, 167, 171, 176, 180)

During 1709-10, Montfort, with the help many people, constructed a big Calvary at Pontchateau. But unfortunately his enemies made a complaint to the King of France. The Calvary could not be blessed and it had to be destroyed. Montfort accepted this heavy cross with resignation. Later this Calvary was rebuilt. Montfort founded an association known as the Friends of the Cross. To the members of this association he wrote a beautiful letter explaining Jesus' request to his disciples to carry the cross.

All of us face crosses at one time or another. We need to develop a correct attitude. I have developed one for myself. I know that crosses will come due to my mistakes, or to natural calamities or mechanical failures, sickness and sometimes due to the behaviour of others. I cannot control them. I accept them as they come and try to live as patiently as possible. I try never to blame others for my failures or difficulties. I check myself to see if I am the cause for the difficulty and if so, I try to correct myself. Often I cannot correct others; but I can always, if I take the trouble, adjust myself. I pray to God in a special manner during these difficult periods.

Conclusion

I have just taken five aspects of Montfort Spirituality. To me, we must consider seriously how we live out the Montfortian Spirituality and Charism. We make a steady and constant effort to live out this spirituality and we shall end up as happy people, helping others as much as we can. These days I have taken to writing. The History of the Institute and that of the Indian Provinces has been printed. I published the history of the Coonoor Novitiate and now I am preparing the history of the Eachinkadu novitiate. Soon the Biography of Montfort will be published by St. Paul's Publications. The Biography Fr. Deshayes is nearly ready. I keep myself busy, usefully occupied.

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