

Biography St. Louis Mary Grignion de Montfort, 21 pages

Introduction

As St. Louis Mary Grignion de Montfort is our father and founder, it is essential that we know him well. To know him one could 1. read about him, 2. study about him, 3. reflect on him, 4. pray over his life and spirituality, 5. start imitating him in our life.

1.1. The Sources:

- a. Biographies of Montfort
- b. The writings of Montfort
- c. Writing about Montfort

Biographies of St. Montfort:

1. by Fr. Joseph Grandet, Nantes 1724, 487 pages
2. by Fr. Jean Baptiste Blain, 1722-1724
3. by Fr. Charles Besnard, 1770
4. by Fr. Picot de Clorivieres, Paris, 1785, 587 pages

The first four biographies of Montfort, by Grandet, Blain, Besnard and Picot de Clorivieres could be termed as devotional biographies. Despite some limitations, these early biographies provide us with very valuable material. They have preserved for us numerous eye-witness accounts and original documents, and they offer a solid historical foundation for reconstructing many of the truths of Montfort's life. They also remind us of certain extraordinary or unusual traits in Montfort's personality and behaviour.

5. by Fr. Dalin, Paris, 1839, 582 pages
6. by Fr. P. Fontenau, Paris, 1887, 563 pages
7. by Fr. A. Pauvert, Paris/Poitiers, 1875, 684 pages
8. by Fr. J.M. Querard, Rennes, 1887, in 4 volumes, 580, 610, 621, 654 pages

These biographies could be termed as historical-psychological biographies dealing with Montfort, the spiritual man. For Querard, "the providential missionary work of Montfort made him an extraordinary ambassador of the Almighty, the leader of a new school..., a prophet, precursor, and an apostle of the great reign of Jesus and Mary or earth."

9. by G. Bernoville, Paris, 1946, 372 pages
10. by A. Crosnier, manuscript of 401 pages
11. by G. de Luca, in Italian, Rome, 1943, 317 pages
12. by Bro. Gabriel Marie, St. Laurent, 184 pages
13. by A. Laveille, Paris, 1907, 560 pages
14. by L. le Crom, Pontchateau, 1942, 479 pages
15. by Louis Perous, Tours, 1973, 214
16. by G. Rigault, Marseilles, 1930, 224 pages
17. by B. Papisogli, in Italian, Torino, 1979, 416 pages, in English, Rome, 1991

Though A. Crosnier clearly affirmed that Montfort "grew in virtue and in grace and entered more and more deeply into intimacy with Jesus and Mary," the author neither detailed Montfort's outer life story nor recounted the saintly missionary's interior life. He preferred to stop "at the threshold of the mystery of divine friendship." De Luca took into account the literary and spiritual milieu of the 17c France and attempted "an interpretation of his soul based on known events of his biography." In a discreet, synthetic way De Luca introduced his readers to

Montfort's "seasons of holiness" as he climbed the ladder of mystical ascent. "In fact, at Paris he must have had the first in a series of mysterious, dizzying high points that characterized his mystical life.

The Thesis of S. de Fiores studied the French school of spirituality and reconstructed Montfort's story: the mystique of liberating poverty, the saint's ascetical folloies, choice of the science of the saints, slavery of love of Jesus in Mary, etc. Louis drew on the mystical and missionary currents of the authors he preferred, i.e., Olier, Surin, and Boudon. Freeing himself from his Sulpician conditioning, Montfort passed through a contemplative and acosmic type of spirituality into a spirituality, where the apostolate became the most divine work (H 21:12). At Paris Montfort had already attained a high degree of union with Jesus Christ, "a unity of the spirituality of pure love, with a taste for God Alone and detachment from worldly distractions." This was a provisional path, since through his conversations with Blain, he uncovered two fundamental aspects of his spirituality: "the first, its experiential and mystical nature - the unity of the spiritual life through the grace of the presence of Jesus and Mary. This allowed Montfort to realize an intimate contemplative union with God through action. The second is the principle of following Christ, Incarnate Wisdom, by imitating his way of life through his example and counsel.

Fr. Louis Perouas used a historical-critical and psycho-sociological approach. He held that the Breton saint's path was a "tormented journey" because he had difficulty in dealing with a strained relationship with his father and because he had a violent temper. His long and arduous journey toward a balanced life came to a certain maturation for Fr. De Montfort, when he was in his forties. An analysis of factual events in Montfort's history allows us to conclude that through his increasing responsiveness to the Holy Spirit, he learned to accept himself despite the events that tormented his existence... We can, today, by turning back the clock of history, admire how, in the depths of his soul, God wrote straight with crooked lines." (L. Perouas)

Montfort' life was marked with crises: a vocational crisis, culminating in his "great forsakenness" at rue Pot-de-Fer in Paris in 1702; a crisis in his apostolic ministry, especially in 1710, when the Calvary of Pontchateau was destroyed; a personal crisis around 1713, when Montfort experienced "biologically and psychologically a turning point in his own existence"; and finally, when he was "supremely laid bare" by the precarious state of his two foundations. Montfort, however, never became a victim of his difficulties. "At every crisis he instinctively found himself and returned to his work among the people."

Montfort's preaching gave the Virgin Mary her proper place next to Christ in the economy of salvation and in man's personal response; his preaching insisted on Christian virtues, on the Rosary, and on the exigencies of Baptism. Montfort "manifested to a high degree a universal missionary vision, a preferential love for the poorest of the poor, along with his own 'radical poverty' and 'hope in God'." A biography must offer both the cultural and the spiritual aspects of a saint's life. (All taken from Montfortian Dictionary, p. 753-759, article by S. De Fiores)

1. St. Louis Mary, a student (1673-1700)

1. The political, economic and religious situation:

St. Louis Mary Grignon de Montfort lived in France during the reign of Louis XIV, King of France. France enjoyed prosperity from 1501-1630 because of the influx of precious metals from South America. The period between 1631-1730 experienced an economic depression because of static trade, poor crops and wars. Yet the King, between 1661&1685 developed industry and foreign trade. During the second part of his reign, he lived in the newly built Versailles Palace and did not care for the kingdom. Further he waged two wars. As a result famine and misery became the lot of the ordinary people. Out of a population 18 million, 80% were poor and there were many beggars, who were forced to stay in Poor shelter houses. France was Catholic country with a few Protestants. Some among the clergy were influenced by Jansenism. The clergy was well trained in good seminaries.

2. The family situation:

There was a small town known as Montfort-la-Cane (today known as Montfort-sur-Meu) in the Province of Brittany in Western France. A middle-class family known as the Grignon family lived there. Louis' father was Mr. John Baptist Grignon and he was a lawyer by profession. His mother Mrs. Jeanne Robert belonged a rich family in Rennes. Though John Baptist was a lawyer, yet he had to face financial problems. He was ambitious and hot tempered. Jeanne Robert was a meek and pious lady. She had three of her brothers as priests. This couple had 18 children, of whom only ten lived beyond the age of ten. Louis' elder brother died when he was five months old and so Louis was considered the eldest in the family. His two brothers became priests and two sisters nuns. It was really a very Christian family.

3. 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 in the farm house 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. Slowly Louis took an orientation quite opposite to that of his father. 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.

4. 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, 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, he used to pray before the statue 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. Frs. Gilbert and Descartes, who were his teachers, had great influence on him.

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. He used to paint holy pictures and he even took training in painting.

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. He completed the study of philosophy and towards the end of 1692, he started studying theology.

5. 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 a horse offered to him for the journey of slightly over 300 kilometers.

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. This crossing of the bridge was of great significance to Louis as he then gave up his own family and worldly wealth in order to belong to GOD ALONE. He knelt down and made a vow never to possess anything in his life. He then gave away the money he had to a beggar and exchanged his new clothes with the old ones on another beggar. This was to become a permanent rule of his life. "This trip, being the first, was also a model for so many others to come, which his zeal for souls saw him multiply in the future. He wanted to be apostolic, poor, humbled, accepting of pain and fatigue, and abandoned to Divine Providence. It was this last virtue which Blain admired the most in him when he departed." (Blain, 23-24) He possessed an absolute confidence in his heavenly Father. As a consequence, he became effectively detached from seeking security in earthly or material goods, in human power or influence. His sense of poverty had a directly theological dimension. It was a simple expression of his faith. One can speak of both his material poverty and his spiritual poverty. Montfort's attitude toward the poor had its root in the poverty of his own spirit.

6. 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 Barmondier'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. During this vigil he spent much time in prayer.

In September 1694, Fr. Barmondier died. Then Louis wrote a letter to his uncle Fr. Alain Robert, "I do not know yet how things will go, whether I shall stay or leave, as his will has not yet been made known. Whatever happens I shall not be worried. I have a Father in heaven who will never fail me." Actually, that hostel was closed down; but fortunately, 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. The doctors prescribed bloodletting as a remedy. In the process, 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 chaplaincy in Nantes.

7. In the Lesser Seminary of St. Sulpice:

At long last, early in 1695, Louis' ambition of joining St. Sulpice was fulfilled. Those who could pay more were admitted in the Greater Seminary and those who paid less were admitted in the Lesser Seminary. The difference was only in boarding and lodging. When the new academic year 1695-96, started, Louis gave up his studies at the Sorbonne University. He 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 the evening courses given by the Sulpicians and to use the library.

Louis read a number of spiritual books like 'The Spiritual Letters of Fr. Surin', and 'Holy Slavery of the Mother of God' by Fr. Boudon. He came to appreciate contemplation and a perfect devotion to Mary. 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 was rooted in the absoluteness of God and in the radical ways of the Gospel. He drew concrete conclusions without being preoccupied with how they might have impact on himself. His commitment to do God' will was absolute. St. Sulpice prepared him for the misunderstandings and rejections that he would later experience.

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. The mystery of the Incarnation became very dear to him. . This allowed him to integrate organically his exceptional Marian piety, to bring it to the very heart of his Christian life, and to discover its ultimate implications. It set in place the essential foundations of his spiritual life.

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 by the Bishop of Perpignan. After a week of prayer, he offered his first Holy Eucharist on the altar of Our Lady in the parish church of St. Sulpice.

2. St. Louis Mary's option for the poor (1700-1705)

1. 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. At the end of September 1700, Frs. Leveque and Louis set out for Nantes. In St. Clement Community, 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... 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." (L. 5) There was in Fr. Louis, a crystallization of his goals and option for the poor. Further, he wrote in that letter, "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."

2. 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. About this visit, he wrote to Fr. Leschassier, "I took it into my heart however to go the Poorhouse where I could serve the poor physically even if I could not serve them spiritually. I went into the little church to pray and the four hours I spent there waiting for the evening mealtime seemed all too short. However, it seemed so long to some of the poor who saw me kneeling there dressed in clothes very much like their own, that they went off to tell others and they agreed to take up a collection for me." (L. 6)

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. Fr. Louis preached some missions in Nantes successfully. Fr. Leschassier's reply to the Bishop was a testimony of praise in spite of certain reservations. 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. (Ref. L. 10 & 11)

3. 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. (Ref. L. 11) 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.

4. 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 grey 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.

5. 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.

6. His search for Wisdom and the Pot-de-Fer Street experience:

Montfort's letters written in 1703, reveal to us his search for Wisdom. At the Poorhouse of Poitiers, he started an Association of Wisdom and gave to them a Cross, on which he had written his spirituality of the Cross. On it he wrote, "Deny oneself, carry one's cross to follow Jesus Christ... Love the cross. Desire crosses..." Later he wrote, "Wisdom is Cross and Cross is Wisdom." (LEW 180). From Paris wrote to Sr. Marie Louise, "Keep on praying. Even increase your prayers for me; ask for extreme poverty, the weightiest cross, abjection and humiliations... What wealth, what glory, what happiness would be mine if from all this I obtained divine Wisdom, which I long for day and night!" (L. 15.)

Being sent out of the General Hospital of Salpetriere, Montfort met Fr. Leschassier; but the latter refused to see him. Finally he 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. He was very keen on getting united to Christ, which according to him was the quintessence of perfection. "All perfection consists in our being conformed, united and consecrated to Jesus." (TD 120) With great eagerness to get united to Christ, he wrote to Sr. Marie Louise, "I feel that you are still asking God that by crosses, humiliations and poverty I may acquire divine Wisdom... 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 a place of rest for Wisdom in a world where he is rejected and without a home?... So pray, entreat God, plead for me to obtain divine Wisdom. You will obtain it for me; of this I am quite convinced." (L. 16) A little later, 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." (L. 20)

Definitely during 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. It appears that it was also during these years, 1703-1704, that he wrote "The Love of Eternal Wisdom", the book that presents the most complete synthesis of Montfort spirituality." (Montfort Dictionary, p. 768) 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.

While Montfort was at Mount-Valerien, his sister Guyonne-Jeanne, whom he got admitted in a convent in Rambervillers, after recovering from a sickness, made her first profession on Feb. 2, 1704 under the name of Sr. Catherine of St. Bernard. To her Montfort wrote, "Be brave, take courage, enrich yourself and rejoice as you burn yourself out each day like a lamp. The more you give yourself, the more God will give of himself to you." (L. 19)

7. 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.

3. St. Louis Mary, a missionary (1705-1708)

1. 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 at the following churches in Poitiers: St. Simplician, St. Savin, St. Radegone, St. Catherine and the Resurrection. While hearing confessions in the Church of the Penitents, he noticed a young called Mathurin Rangeard, 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. 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. While Montfort was preaching at St. Catherine' Church, the Bishop, who had come back from Paris, ordered Montfort to stop preaching in his diocese.

2. 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 introduced. Montfort, after asking Bro. Mathurin to await his return, 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.

3. Missionary under the protection of Our Lady and St. Michael:

Montfort returned to France alone on foot and that too in summer. On Aug. 25, 1706, he reached the Abbey of St. Martin of Ligugé, 4 km from Poitiers. Bro. Mathurin met him there. The Bishop heard about his return and asked him to leave the diocese within 24 hours. Montfort and Mathurin immediately left for a nearby diocese. As Montfort wanted to place his future mission under the protection Our Lady and St. Michael, he and Bro. Mathurin left for Saumur and Mount St. Michael. At Saumur, Montfort entrusted his mission to Our Lady of Ardilliers. Montfort paid a visit to the convent founded by Sr. Jeanne Delanoue and met the foundress. On

Sept. 28, 1706, Montfort and Mathurin 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.

While at Dinan, Montfort and Mathurin paid a visit to the Dominican church. His own brother Joseph, then a Dominican priest, did not recognize him. 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.

4. 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. Inheritor of the work of Fr. Maunoir, disciple and follower of Fr. Huby, 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 the way they conceived of 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." (Montfortian Dic. P. 770)

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.

4. 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, and 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.

4. Montfort, apostolic missionary in the diocese of Nantes (1708-1710)

1. 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 an 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. In March 1709, Montfort preached a mission at Crossac. There too the church was in a miserable condition. He spoke to the people and got them convinced of removing the tombstones. They signed a document renouncing their right to bury the departed in the church. The church was then cleaned. Fr. Bastieres left Montfort and the latter felt it a lot.

2. 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.

3. 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.

4. 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. 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 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 Duke of Coislin died in May 1710, and his brother the Bishop of Metz succeeded to his title. Montfort asked a friend of his to request the new Duke for permission to build the Calvary on the Moor of La Madeleine. The permission was granted. But the Steward was not at all happy. He wrote to the Governor of Brittany 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. 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 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. Montfort went to

the Bishop's House and the Bishop informed him of 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. He felt happy at Fr. Bastieres' visit to him.

5. 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.

5. Montfort in the dioceses of La Rochelle & Luçon (1711-1716)

1. The initial Missions:

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.

One day during a mission, Montfort pushed out of the church three men who had come to laugh at God's word. One evening they ambushed themselves in a dark and narrow street to kill Montfort as he was going to the sculptor's house. Entering the street, Montfort stopped suddenly, unable to go forward. He took a roundabout way and thus saved himself from his enemies' attack. The Calvinists were furious at the conversions he made. They succeeded in adding poison to the porridge that was given to him. Montfort noticed it almost at once and took an antidote. His life was saved; but his health was spoiled.

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, 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. The mission on the island was a great success.

On May 5, 1712, Montfort went to La Garnache and blessed the chapel of Our Lady of Victory. Then he preached at Sallertaine and at St. Christophe. 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 Seguinierie 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.

In those two years, 1711-1713, a change took place in Montfort's life. His 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. 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.

2. 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 book his 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.

3. 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.

4. Montfort’s further missions and visit to his friend Fr. Blain:

While in Paris, he met Madame de Mailly, whom he had converted at La Rochelle. After his return to La Rochelle, he preached missions in Mauzé and Courçon. In June 1714, he preached a mission at Roussay. Then he went to Nantes and spent a week there visiting the foundations that he had founded in the town: the Hospital for the Incurables and the Association of the Friends of the Cross. Then he came to Rennes and made a retreat and at the end of it he wrote “The Letter to the Friends of the Cross”. He also met the lawyer Mr. Arot, whom he guided while in Poitiers and the Marquis of Magnannes, whom he had converted and Mr. D’Orville, a recent convert.

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 told Montfort about what he 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 other 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 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. As they were approaching Nantes, Bro. Nicholas was tired. Montfort with his one hand held him up to enable him to walk the next 15 km. As the Brother was ashamed as people looked on and he said, "What will those people say?" Montfort's answer was, "What will Jesus say?" They took rest at Nantes for a few days. Leaving Bro. Nicholas there, Montfort along with Bro. James went to Pontchateau to bring the Calvary statues to Nantes. He left the statues in the Hospital for the Incurables. Then he went to Rennes and paid a visit to Mr. d'Orville. After an absence of four months Montfort returned to La Rochelle to begin his missions.

5. 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. There already some were existing but not functioning properly. Hence there was the question of repairing, cleaning and in some cases, completely rebuilding. Montfort chose one such school and the work started in full swing under his supervision. 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.

6. 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. In 1714, he wrote to Sisters Marie Louise and Catherine Brunet, "Put all your affairs in order and be ready to leave the Poorhouse of Poitiers within six months." At the beginning of 1715, he wrote again and sent it through a messenger. He wrote, "I have spoken several times to the Bishop of La Rochelle about you and about our plans and he thinks you ought to come here and begin the work we want so much... I will send you Bro. John with some money and a horse to accompany you."

It was not easy for Sr. Marie Louise to leave Poitiers. The people in charge of the Poorhouse did not want to relieve her. Her mother also objected to her leaving. She consulted her confessor and made a novena. Her mother gave her permission; but the administrators in the Poorhouse raised all sorts of legal formalities to delay the departure of their irreplaceable bursar. With much tact she got permission from them and also from the Bishop. Then the government officials objected to her departure. Her confessor advised her to leave immediately. Accordingly the two Sisters left Poitiers in the company of Bro. John and reached La Rochelle on March 28, 1715. When the Sisters reached La Rochelle, they had no place to stay. Later they found a place called "Petit Plessis", not far from La Rochelle and Montfort met them there. The free school for girls started functioning under the supervision of the Sisters. Later on two candidates joined the Sisters and Montfort sent Sr. Catherine Brunet to the General Hospital of La Rochelle as assistant to the matron.

7. Montfort's final missions and death:

In February 1715, Fr. Adrian Vatel, an ex-student of the Holy Spirit Seminary, Paris, came to La Rochelle in a ship bound for the West Indies in order to become a missionary there. He had obtained permissions from the Archbishops of Paris and Rouen. The ship stopped at La Rochelle, and he wanted to consult the Bishop of the place to know whether he had a valid authorization to go to the West Indies. He met Fr. Montfort and the latter told him, "You must come with me. We shall work together." Fr. Vatel declined the request stating, "I am on my way to the Foreign Missions and I have given word to the ship's captain, who has lent me 100 crowns to buy missals and vestments." Along with Montfort, Fr. Vatel met the Bishop, who told him that the permissions were invalid and asked him to join Montfort and gave him 100 crowns to pay back the loan. Though the captain was angry, as he had to find another chaplain, 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 Vandeem 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 Seguinere. 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 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. 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.

On Aug. 25, 1715, he started the mission at Fontenay. There he wanted to preach for women and then another one for men. 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. Unfortunately after two weeks, in the afternoon when the captain came to the church and stood there in a disrespectful manner, Montfort asked him to leave; but the latter abused Montfort and tried to attack him. Montfort asked the women to protect him. The women tried to push him out; but he hit Montfort twice. 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. There 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.

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 rise 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:

"Let us go, my friends, so dear,
Up to heav'n with footstep sure;
Whatever things are worth down here,
On high their value is far more."

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!"

8. After Montfort's death:

When Fr. Montfort died, he had 4 Brothers with vows, 3 Brothers without vows, 3 Sisters with vows, 3 Sisters without vows and 2 Fathers without vows, of whom, Fr. Mulot was made the executor of Montfort's Will and Testament. On June 6, 1716, Fr. Mulot registered Montfort's Will with the notary in Nantes. He must have given up the properties in Vouvant. In Sept. 1716, he came to St. Pompain to stay with his brother priest. He brought with him Montfort's vestments, chalice, etc. Fr. Vatel too was at St. Pompain. As the friends of Montfort in Nantes wanted to construct a better tomb for Montfort, on Nov. 12, 1717, Montfort's body was exhumed and placed in a new tomb and two epitaphs were engraved.

Bro. Jacques came to St. Laurent latest by 1717. Bro. Mathurin came to St. Pompain in June 1718. Bro. Louis, who was in La Rochelle was replaced by Bro. Philip and Bro. Louis went to Nantes. Bro. Philip tried to become a Lazarist and finally died on Oct. 8, 1716. Bro. Louis died in Nantes on Jan. 3, 1731. Bro. Nicholas came to Nantes and died there on May 4, 1730. Bro. Mathurin always helped the missionaries and in St. Laurent on July 22, 1760. Of the others Brothers we do not have any records. In 1718, Frs. Mulot and Vatel started preaching missions. By the 1718, there were five Sisters in La Rochelle. In the winter of 1718, Madame Trichet came to La Rochelle. As the Poorhouse of Poitiers wanted to have the Sisters and as there was the possibility of starting a novitiate there, Sisters Marie Louise, Catherine Brunet and Joseph left for Poitiers leaving the rest in La Rochelle.

At Poitiers, Sr. Marie Louise found herself not able to found the novitiate. Mr. Jacques Goudeau, who was looking after the sanctuary at Montbernage, met the Sister and told her that it was better that she went to St. Laurent-sur-Sevre. He also suggested the name of Madame Bouillé, who could help her in buying a property there. Sr. Marie Louise wrote to her and the answer was immediate. Madame Bouillé got help from her uncle, the Marquis of Magnanne. She also got permission from the Bishop of La Rochelle. She bought an old inn called "The Long House" in St. Laurent for the use of the Sisters. Once again it was not easy for Sr. Marie Louise to leave Poitiers. Overcoming all obstacles, on June 20, 1720, she reached St. Laurent. The house was in a state of neglect; there were no funds to repair it; there was no furniture, no utensils, no provisions of any kind. She began to work and to get things ready. One René Joseau and his friends came to her help: the garden was cultivated; furniture was made and a stock of food was bought. Within two weeks the other two Sisters from Poitiers came to St. Laurent to start the first community of the Daughters of Wisdom.

The Parish Priest of St. Laurent started to show coldness towards the Sisters. At that time Madame Bouillé was staying with the Sisters. Sr. Marie Louise told her, "I think, Madame, we have the need of a superior." She also mentioned about Fr. René Mulot. Both Sr. Marie Louise and Madame Bouillé went and met the Bishop of La Rochelle. The Bishop asked Fr. Mulot to take charge of directing the Daughters of Wisdom. It was once again the Marquis of Magnanne and his niece, Madame Bouillé, who bought a property in the name of the Brothers, who were to teach in the parish school. This property known as "Chêne-Vert House" (The Holm-Oak House) was bought on April 7, 1721. Fr. Jacques le Vallois, a new comer, was the first one to occupy this house. On June 29, 1722, other priests and Brothers came to occupy the house. After some days of rest, they had a retreat and at the end of it, they elected Fr. Mulot as their superior. They made their religious vows in his hands. Bro. Joseau also made his vows. Bro. Jacques stayed on

in St. Laurent after Montfort's death and he looked after the education of boys. In 1719, he left for La Rochelle. He died in August 1727. From 1722 onwards, Bro. Joseau looked after the parish school at St. Laurent. At St. Laurent as the Sisters needed a bigger campus an interchange of properties took place: the Sisters moved to the Holm-Oak House and the Fathers and Brothers to the Long House.

From 1723 onwards, the Daughters of Wisdom and the Company of Mary had and still have their Mother Houses at St. Laurent. The teaching Brothers formed one unit with the missionaries. From 1821-41, Fr. Gabriel Deshayes was the Superior General and he started a number of schools and trained up a large number of teaching Brothers. In 1835, he sent the teaching Brothers and some others to stay in a house known as the Supiot House. Later on, it was called St. Gabriel's House. Fr. Deshayes prepared a separate Rule for the Brothers according which after his death a Brother Superior General was to be elected. He died on Dec. 28, 1841 and after him the Brothers got themselves separated from the Company of Mary and on Sept. 21, 1842, they elected a Bro. Augustin as their Superior General. Thus three Montfortian Congregations have their Mother Houses near the tomb of their Founder, St. Louis Mary Grignon de Montfort.

As we read and study the Biography of St. Montfort, we should stay in touch with the living experience of Montfort and assimilate his inner evangelical dynamism: 1. God, the Absolute, the goal of all peoples, 2. abandoning oneself to divine logic, to Christ Wisdom, 3. Marian devotion and regard for the feminine point of view of Christianity, 4. an apostolic life oriented toward the coming of the reign of Christ into the world.

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