

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

The Montfortian charism

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St. Louis Mary Grignon de Montfort was born at Montfort in western France in 1673. In his boyhood days he exhibited a great love for God, for the Blessed Virgin Mary and for the poor. As a student in Rennes, not only did he stand first in the class and but also played a leading role in helping poor students and others. Visiting the poor became his daily routine. He decided to become a priest and towards the end of 1692, he left for Paris for his theological studies.

As Louis was leaving for Paris and after crossing the Cesson Bridge, he gave away to beggars the little money and the new clothes that he had. Then he walked 320 kms to Paris trusting in God's loving providence. At first he was admitted in a hostel meant for poor seminarians and he studied theology in Sorbonne University. When the director of that hostel died, he wrote, "I am not worried; I have a Father in heaven, who will never fail me." Finally he joined the famous St. Sulpice Seminary. During the five years that he spent there, he studied the Bible especially the Wisdom books and also the Gospels. He spent much time in meditation. He also read many books on the Blessed Virgin Mary. He composed many hymns and wrote sermon notes. His goal was to become a preacher. In 1700, he was ordained a priest.

Fr. Louis' first appointment was to be a chaplain for 500 poor people housed in the Poorhouse of Poitiers. Here he lived with the poor and for the poor. He worked hard for their physical and spiritual welfare. Then he left for Paris and there he was forced to stay under a staircase of a dilapidated building. During this period, (1703-04), though he lived in utter poverty, he spent much time in contemplation and he developed a strong desire to be united with God Wisdom. He was enamoured of Wisdom's love for mankind and he wrote his first book, "The Love of Eternal Wisdom". After a short stay in the Poorhouse of Poitiers, he became a preacher in the same town. Meanwhile some Sisters and Brothers joined him as disciples.

Fr. Louis thought of going to foreign countries as a missionary. He went to Rome to meet the Pope. On June 6, 1706, he had an audience with Pope Clement XI, who asked him to return to France and to preach there. He joined a Missionary Group and preached in Western France. While preaching at Dinan, one evening he saw a leper, he carried him to the Priests' house, knocked at the door and said, "Open to Jesus Christ". He always saw Jesus in the poor. He left that Group and spent some months along with Bros. Mathurin and John in St. Lazarus Hermitage near Montfort.

From 1708-1710, Fr. Montfort (he started to sign as Fr. Montfort) preached missions in the diocese of Nantes. He became the leader of a missionary group consisting of priests and brothers. In 1709, he started the construction of a huge Calvary at Pont-chateau. As the construction was going on, his enemies complained to the King stating that the Calvary could be used as a hiding place by the enemies of the kingdom. The blessing was

fixed for Sept. 14, 1710; but unfortunately the previous day the order not to bless the Calvary reached Fr. Montfort. Later the Calvary was destroyed, and later on it was rebuilt by the Montfort Fathers.

1711-16, was a very fruitful period in Montfort's life. Montfort preached a large number of missions in the dioceses of La Rochelle and Luçon. More Brothers and two Fathers joined him. Everywhere he preached about God's love for us, Christ's death on the cross to save us and true devotion to Mary. He wrote the world famous books, "The True Devotion to Mary", "The Secret of Mary" and "The Secret of the Most Holy Rosary". He founded charitable schools for poor boys and some Brothers taught in them. He also founded charitable schools for girls and the Sisters looked after them. He wrote the Rules for Fathers, Brothers and Sisters and got them approved by the Bishop of La Rochelle. He, four Brothers and two Sisters took their religious vows in 1715.

Montfort was an extraordinary preacher. He could use the language of the people very effectively and was able to touch their hearts. He led a very poor and mortified life. He daily spent four hours in meditation. His motto was "God Alone". His ministry was among the poor and daily he fed them. Many ecclesiastics did not like his ways and he faced many crosses. Finally he was exhausted and died on April 28, 1716, while preaching a mission in St. Laurent-sur-Sevre. His mortal remains were buried in the parish church there. In 1888, he was beautified and in 1947, he was canonized as a saint.

St. Montfort was God's gift to humanity. He served humanity in a unique way. He has bequeathed us his own spirit and dynamism and this we call his charism. The main features of his charism are:

1. a God-centred life in which one has great trust in Him, and works for God Alone; make Him known and loved is his goal in life
2. a Christ-centred life in which one realizes Christ's love for him and seeks to be united to Him especially through prayer and through deeds of love for others especially the poor
3. a life in which one appreciates the great role given to Mary by God himself, develops a tender and genuine devotion to her and consecrates himself to Jesus through Mary
4. a life in which, action and contemplation find an equilibrium in one's life
5. a life in which one accepts the crosses in his life serenely and offers the same to God along with the Cross of Christ
6. a life in which one lives for others especially for the poor; the whole life is dedicated for the welfare of humanity.

ST. LOUIS MARY GRIGNION DE MONTFORT (1973-1716)

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.

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, he had to face financial problems. He was ambitious and hot tempered. Jeanne Robert was a meek and pious. 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 here and child Louis was brought back to his parents. As a young boy, Louis learned prayers from his mother and his father taught him the three R's. Not only did he do the primary studies, he helped his father in teaching his younger brothers and sisters. He also taught them religion and prayer. Further he helped his mother and consoled her in her difficulties. He loved to be poor and helped the poor as much as he could. He developed a tender devotion to Mary and loved to recite the rosary.

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, and so the whole family came to stay at Rennes, in a property that belonged to his mother. Bois-Marquer became their summer residence. On his to and fro journey to the college, Louis used to pray before the statute

of Our Lady. Louis was a serious student and stood first in his class. John Baptist Blain and Claude Poullart des Places became his friends.

Fr. Julien Bellier, the Chaplain of the General Hospital, guided Louis in his service to the poor. Through this priest he came in contact with human misery. Louis met the poor in General Hospitals and helped them. The discovery of the poor was perhaps the most decisive event of his adolescence. One day he got an old woman admitted into St. Yves' Hospital, and this fact was told to his mother by that woman herself. He also used to help poor students in his class as well as those outside. Thus on seeing a poor student, who was made fun of by his classmates, Louis took a collection from those very classmates and got a new set of clothes stitched for him.

Louis was much devoted to Mary and joined the Sodality of Our Lady. After joining the sodality, he learned to work with others in common projects and found joy in friendship. While studying at Rennes, he had a deep experience of God and he spent much time in prayer and penance. While praying before a statue of Our Lady, he felt certain of being called to priesthood. By the end of 1692, after his philosophy, he started to learn theology.

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 the horse offered to him for the journey. On the day of departure, Louis bid good-bye to his parents and dear ones. His uncle Fr. Alain Robert, his brother Joseph and perhaps his friend John Baptist Blain accompanied him as far as the Cesson Bridge, some 3 km away from Rennes. They embraced each other and bid their final good-byes. After crossing of the bridge, Louis made a vow never to possess anything. He then gave away the money he had to a beggar and exchanged his new clothes with the old ones on another beggar. After covering 300 km on foot he reached Paris.

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. In September 1694, Fr. Barmondier died. His hostel was closed down and Louis was admitted into Fr. Boucher's Hostel. In this hostel food was very poor and during the winter of 1694, Louis became dangerously ill and he was admitted into a hospital. Louis was on the point of death. But miraculously he regained health and he was discharged. Madame d'Alègre came forward to pay the greater part of the fees to be paid in order to get him admitted into the Lesser Seminary of St. Sulpice. The balance amount came from a chapel in Nantes.

7. In the Lesser Seminary of St. Sulpice:

When the new academic year 1695-96, started, Louis gave up his studies at the Sorbonne University. He had already completed the courses required for a bachelor's degree in theology. Louis was not interested in a doctorate in theology and he preferred to study the science of the saints. He preferred to attend the evening courses given by Sulpicians and to use the library. He chose Fr. Leschassier as his spiritual director. St. Sulpice had its own image of a good seminarian, and Louis found it very difficult to conform himself to that established framework. His spiritual father misunderstood him and humiliated. Yet the inner Master continued to mould him into a saint and apostle. Louis' discovery of the holy slavery to Jesus in Mary led him use it as the best means to get united to Christ. He enthusiastically made it his own, giving it new dimensions. His devotion to Mary was centred on Christ.

In the Seminary, Louis was appointed the Master of Ceremonies, the librarian and a teacher of catechism to some unruly children in one suburban parish. He fulfilled his duties well. Further he composed hymns and prepared sermons, thus preparing himself for his future apostolate. He was also the librarian. During the summer of 1699, Louis and another seminarian were chosen to represent the Sulpician community at the solemn annual pilgrimage to our Lay of Chartres. There Louis spent much time in prayer. On June 5, 1700, Louis was ordained a priest. After a week of prayer, he offered his first Holy Eucharist on the altar of Our Lady in the parish church of St. Sulpice.

8. In St. Clement Community, Nantes:

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

9. Trip to Poitiers:

In April 1701, Fr. Louis received an invitation from his sister Sylvia for her vestition in the Abbey of Fontevault. He went there and met the Abbess' sister, Madame de Montespan, who advised him to meet the Bishop of Poitiers. When he reached Poitiers, as the Bishop was out of station, Fr. Louis went to the Poorhouse there. After meeting the Bishop of Poitiers, Fr. Louis returned to St. Clement Community, Nantes. The Bishop wanted to consult Fr. Leschassier before assigning work to Fr. Louis in his

diocese. Towards the end of August 1701, Bishop Girard wrote to Fr. Louis, "Our poor people continue to want you as their priest." By the end of October, Fr. Louis reached Poitiers without a penny in his pocket. As the official appointment was not made, he stayed in the minor seminary. He visited hospitals and prisons. He gathered beggars and children in the streets to teach them religion. He also gave conferences to 13 or 14 students from the colleges and started an association for them.

10. Chaplain at the Poorhouse of Poitiers:

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

11. The first disciple, Sr. Marie Louise Trichet:

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

12. 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.

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

Fr. Montfort took shelter under a staircase of a dilapidated house. Here he spent a good part of his time in contemplation. He meditated upon the love of the Eternal and Incarnate Wisdom for humankind. He meditated upon the Book of Wisdom and on the

Gospels, especially on the passion and death of Christ. Definitely during this period of 1703-04, Montfort had a mystical experience of being united to Jesus Christ. “Invited in 1703 to give several conferences at the Seminary of the Holy Spirit, founded by his friend Fr. Claude Poullart des Places, he presented a commentary on the Book of Wisdom. He also wrote his first book, “The Love of Eternal Wisdom”. While Montfort was at the Pot-de-Fer Street, the poor of Poitiers wrote to Fr. Leschassier, “We, 400 poor people, beg you most humbly, for the greatest love and glory of God, to send us back our venerable shepherd, he who loves the poor so much, Fr. Grignon.” The Bishop of Poitiers also wrote to him. Before he left Paris, Montfort was asked to bring order and peace to the hermits of Mount-Valerien. By his example and love, he was able to do it.

14. 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.

15. A Missionary in the diocese of Poitiers:

By the middle of 1705, the Bishop of Poitiers appointed Montfort director of the Retreat House and as a missionary in the diocese. Montfort lived at the House of the Penitents. He chose Montbernage, a poor quarter on the suburb, for his first mission. Here the people were workers: craftsmen, trench-diggers, bakers, fishmongers, etc. He bought a dancing hall, converted it into a chapel and dedicated it to Mary, Queen of All Hearts. He started to preach a mission. More and more people came for the mission. The poor people of Poitiers knew him and loved him. They considered him a saint. He had great influence over them. He organized processions and the recitation of the rosary. At the end of the mission, the people renewed their vows of Baptism, consecrated themselves to Jesus through the hands of Mary. Montfort then preached in a number of places. While hearing confessions in the Church of the Penitents, he noticed a young called Mathurin 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. While Montfort was preaching at St. Catherine’ Church, the Bishop, who had come back from Paris, ordered Montfort to stop preaching in his diocese.

16. Pilgrimage to Rome and audience with the Pope:

Once again Montfort thought of going to foreign countries to preach. But before doing anything, he planned to go to Rome on foot and meet the Pope. Before leaving he wrote an affectionate letter to the people of Montbernage requesting them to remain

faithful to the holy practices that he had taught them. Montfort along with a Spanish student started for Rome on foot. On the way they visited the Marian Shrine at Loretto. In Rome, Fr. Thommasi, a Theatine religious, arranged for Montfort an audience with the Pope. On June 6, 1706, Montfort had an audience with Pope Clement XI and expressed his desire to work as foreign missionary. The Pope said, "You have, Sir, a field large enough to exercise your zeal in France. Do not go elsewhere. Work always with perfect obedience to the Bishops in whose diocese you will be called to work. God, by this means, will bless your works." The Pope conferred on him the title of "Apostolic Missionary" and blessed his crucifix attaching a plenary indulgence.

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

Montfort returned to France on Aug. 25, 1706 and Bro. Mathurin met him. The Bishop heard about his return and asked him to leave the diocese within 24 hours. Montfort and Mathurin left for Saumur and Mount St. Michael. At Saumur, Montfort entrusted his mission to Our Lady of Ardilliers. On Sept. 28, 1706, they reached Mount St. Michael. They spent a fortnight there and Montfort entrusted his mission to the protection of St. Michael.

On his return from Mount St. Michael, Montfort came to Rennes. He met Fr. Bellier, who was his guide when he was a student there, and the latter advised him to join Fr. Leuduger's group of missionaries. He met also his uncle Fr. Alain Robert. At the latter's advice, he had a meal with his parents, who were then staying in Rennes. In Rennes, he preached in several churches. Then he along with Bro. Mathurin paid a visit to Montfort and had a meal with Mother Andrea. They moved on to Dinan, where a mission was about to start. At Dinan, he stayed with the missionaries. During the mission, Montfort did the duties of a catechist and took special care of the poor. One evening, going along the streets, Montfort found a poor man covered with ulcers. He took him on his shoulders and went to the Missionaries' House. He knocked at the door and cried out, "Open to Jesus Christ." He, who came to open the door, was much astonished at the sight. Montfort put the poor man on his bed and warmed him as much as he could. He spent the night in prayer. He saw Jesus in the poor.

18. In Fr. Leuduger's Missionary Group:

"After the mission at Dinan, Montfort, always in the company of Mathurin, headed for St. Brieuc in order to join up with the group of missionaries led by Fr. Dom Leuduger. Fr. Dom Leuduger continued the great tradition of the "Britton mission". His reputation and influence were both strong. About 20 priests worked with him on a permanent basis, and occasionally, as needed, others joined him. The collaboration between the experienced missionary and Montfort was fruitful from more than one point of view. But it did not last very long. In August of the same year, 1707, during the mission at Moncontour, the mission team broke up. He was asked to leave. There must have been a difference in their concept about mission. It was a difference more of spirit than practice. Montfort preferred to preach in the Apostolic way, i.e., "in a great spirit of simplicity, poverty, penance, and abandonment to Divine Providence." Montfort did not like funded missions.

With Fr. Leuduger's group, Montfort preached at La Cheze in Northern Brittany and rebuilt the Chapel of Our Lady of Pity. From there he went to Plumieux, and Trinity-Prorhoet. In order to preserve the fruits of the mission, he started an Association of Virgins, an Association of the Friends of the Cross and a Confraternity of the Rosary. For the success of the missions he spent much time in prayer and did penance. He excelled in helping the poor. To a lady, who wanted to give him money for a new cassock, he said, "My body can do without a new cassock, but Jesus Christ's poor cannot do without bread." Along with other priests he preached a mission at Montfort itself. Then came the mission at Moncontour. Montfort's popularity pushed even veteran missionaries into shade and they did not like it. There Montfort took a collection to offer masses for the dead. Fr. Leuduger did not approve of it and asked Montfort to leave the group.

19. At the Hermitage of St. Lazare:

Montfort was with Fr. Leuduger's group from Feb.-Oct. 1707. Being asked to leave the group, Montfort found himself without a ministry. He made use of the occasion for retreat, reflection and for training up his Brothers. With Bros. Mathurin and John, he occupied the hermitage of St. Lazare in the town of Montfort. Montfort restored the chapel, carved a statue of Our Lady Wisdom and placed it on an altar and above it a picture of a dove with outstretched wings symbolizing the Holy Spirit. People came to him and he taught them. Some priests invited him to preach in their parishes and he obliged them. During the spring of 1708, the Bishop of St. Malo came there and ordered Montfort not to preach. Understanding that his presence in the diocese was no longer wanted, Montfort decided to leave.

20. First missions in the diocese of Nantes:

Mgr. Barrin, one of the Vicar Generals and a schoolmate of Montfort, invited Montfort to the diocese of Nantes. At first Montfort preached a mission under the leadership of a Jesuit. Then he started to be the leader and Mgr. Barrin gave him Fr. Bastieres as assistant. At the end of summer in 1708, Montfort preached a mission at Vallet with great success. After that he preached at La Boissiere and Landemont. Planting of crosses and recitation of the rosary became part and parcel of the mission. In Nov. 1708, Montfort preached at La Chevroliere. His next mission was at Vertou and there everything was smooth and Montfort said, "No Cross. What a Cross!" In December 1708, he preached a mission at St. Fiacre.

In the diocese of Nantes, Montfort developed a personal method of structuring the missions. His spiritual orientation included: 1. living on Providence, dependent on the people; 2. paying a special care to the poor; 3. Mary's place in prayer, notably the practice of the Rosary; 4. Wisdom of the Cross; and above all, 5. renewing the vows and promises of Baptism. He knew how to insert his convictions into his sermons. With him, teaching took on the power of witnessing. He was given the grace to touch souls. Singing Hymns, organizing processions, founding confraternities, etc. added to the effectiveness of the missions.

At the beginning of the Lent of 1709, Montfort preached a mission at Campbon. The church was in a pitiable condition. On dirty walls spread a black mourning band

adorned with the crest of the Dukes of Coislin. The floor was obstructed by uneven tombstones. After the mission, Montfort spoke to the people of the neatness needed for God's House. He got the men to take the tombstones to the cemetery and got the floor redone. He removed the crest of the Dukes of Coislin from the walls and got the walls whitewashed. A few days later, the Steward of Pontchateau came with officers to have Montfort arrested for encroaching on the Duke's rights. The Duke was sick and his brother, the Bishop of Metz, did not object to Montfort's action and the Steward had to withdraw; but he kept a grudge against Montfort. Some people planned to kill Montfort on the day that he had planned to Pontchateau. Fortunately Fr. Bastieres came to know about the plot and the missionaries postponed their journey and thus saved themselves.

20. 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.

21. 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.

22. The Pontchateau tragedy:

By the second week of September 1710, the Calvary was ready for blessing. It was beautiful and grand. Montfort fixed its blessing for Sept. 14, the feast of the Exaltation of Holy Cross. The Bishop also gave his consent. Four famous preachers were appointed. On the eve of the Feast, while the last preparations were going on and while a huge crowd was gathering, a priest arrived at 4.00 p.m. with a letter from the Bishop of Nantes. The Bishop forbade the blessing. Montfort left the crowd there and walked the whole night and reached Nantes by 6. a. m. He met the Bishop; but the latter did not revoke his decision. On the feast day the programme went on as planned, but without the blessing. Montfort returned only at noon on the 15th. Most of the crowd were still there. He conveyed the message, consoled the people and resigned himself to that awful disappointment.

The Bishop of Metz, the new Duke of Coislin, gave Montfort permission to build the Calvary on the Moor of La Madeleine. The Steward was not at all happy. He wrote to the Governor of Brittany that Montfort was constructing a fortresses with moats and underground passages, which could be used by the enemy of the nation as hiding places. An inquiry was made by the Commissioner of Brittany, Mr. Ferrand. He came, examined the works and wrote a report confirming the accusation. The report was sent to Paris and the King ordered that the Calvary should be destroyed.

Montfort went to St. Molf to preach. During the first week of the mission, Fr. Olivier brought him a letter from the Bishop. On reading it, Montfort wept as the Bishop was forbidding him to preach and hear confessions all over his diocese. Montfort went to the Bishop's House and the Bishop informed him about the royal order to destroy the Calvary. He accepted this great trial with calm serenity. He went to the Jesuits' House and made a retreat.

22. After the Pontchateau tragedy:

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

23. In the Dioceses of La Rochelle and Luçon:

Mgr. Barrin of Nantes wrote to the Bishops of La Rochelle and Luçon recommending Montfort to their dioceses. Both the bishops were ready to receive him. At the beginning of the Lent of 1711, Montfort started a mission at La Garnache in the diocese of Luçon. He preached the mission, rebuilt a chapel and placed in it a statue of our Lady of Victory. He began a new method of feeding the poor. At his request each family adopted a poor person and undertook to look after him or her. During the first half of May, he came to La Rochelle and Bishop Champflour received him warmly and granted him all possible faculties. After preaching a mission at L'houmeau, he preached three important missions in La Rochelle itself: one for men, one for women and the third one for soldiers. His own brother, Fr. Gabriel Grignon, Fr. Bastieres and several Dominican Fathers were his assistants. Bro. Mathurin and some lay people also helped him.

Montfort conducted a series of things with great success. He involved the entire town in the activities of the mission. The final mission ended with an imposing procession. There was a crowd. Everything was beautifully planned and executed. The people marched in perfect order. Hymns were sung, band played the music, colourful banners were used and rosaries were recited. The procession was so impressive that a

contemporary has left a lively description as well as a meticulous drawing of its overall design. That painting by Mr. Claude Masse is preserved to this day in one of the archives in Paris.

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

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

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

24. Montfort, a spiritual writer:

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

25. Montfort, a founder of religious congregations:

In December 1700, Montfort wrote about founding a congregation of priests. In 1703, he gave a religious habit to Sr. Marie Louise Trichet and later Sr. Catherine Bruno joined her. In 1705, he recruited Bro. Mathurin to help the Missionaries and later more Brothers joined him and a few of them taught in the schools he founded. In 1713, he started writing two Rules one for the Company of Mary and the other for the Daughters. In 1715, both were completed and they were approved by the Bishop of La Rochelle. At the beginning of the Rule for the Missionaries, we find his Prayer for Missionaries, which is very appealing.

In July 1713, Montfort went to the Holy Spirit Seminary, Paris. Its founder, Fr. Claude Poullart des Places, before his death, had promised to train priests for Montfort. His successors were quite willing to help him. But at that time no one could be spared, and therefore Montfort had to return empty handed. On his return journey he paid a visit to Srs. Marie Louise and Catherine Brunet in Poitiers and spoke to them about the possibility of their leaving for La Rochelle. Early in 1715, Fr. Adrian Vatel joined Montfort and towards the end of year Fr. Rene Mulo. On June 9, 1715, Montfort and four Brothers pronounced their religious vows and on Aug. 22, 1715, the two Sisters mentioned above made their religious vows in La Rochelle.

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

Bro. Nicholas joined Montfort and along with him, Montfort came to St. Lo on Aug. 17, 1714 and preached a very successful mission. From there in September Montfort came to Rouen to meet his friend Fr. Blain, who was then the Canon of the Cathedral and Director of the Christian Schools. He had valuable experience regarding the organization of communities dedicated to the education of the poor. The two friends met after a lapse of ten years. Blain wanted Montfort to moderate the rigour of his own life. Montfort as an answer showed Blain a copy of the Gospel and asked him, whether he had any objection to what Jesus had taught and practiced. He concluded by saying, “There are several paths to reach God. I leave them to walk in their own way; leave me to walk in mine, and all the more so, because you cannot dispute its advantages.”

Montfort revealed to Blain that the former was granted the grace of being constantly in the presence of Jesus and Mary. Then they talked about the foundation of schools and about the rules to be followed in the schools. During the second half of October, Fr. Montfort and Bro. Nicholas started their return journey. Montfort from Nantes went to Pontchateau with Bro. Jamesto bring the Calvary statues to Nantes. After an absence of four months Montfort returned to La Rochelle to begin his missions.

27. Montfort, a founder of free schools for boys:

During the first half of 1714, Montfort had several meetings with the Bishop of La Rochelle concerning free schools. Montfort chose an unused school building and repaired it well. His school started functioning in the autumn of 1714. Montfort looked

into all organizational details. Only poor boys were admitted and many such joined the school. Montfort appointed a priest as its director. The teachers were dressed in a black uniform. The boys were arranged in nine benches raised up as an amphitheatre at various levels, so that the students could neither talk nor play without the teacher noticing it. He gave to those benches the names of the nine choirs of angels. There were about 150 students in each class. Reading, writing, arithmetic and catechism were taught. After class, the children returned home in an orderly manner under the supervision of the teachers. Montfort visited the school everyday, whenever he was in La Rochelle. Bro. Philip must have been one of the teachers. Later he was transferred to the school in Nantes as headmaster.

28. Montfort, a founder of free schools for girls:

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

29. Montfort's final missions and death:

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

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

In December-January, Montfort preached the mission at St. Pompain. Montfort's father expired on Jan. 21, 1716. After the mission at Villiers, Montfort returned to St. Pompain. During the first week of Lent, he sent 33 White Penitents from there on a pilgrimage to Our Lady of Ardilliers in order to pray to God to send him good missionaries. Frs. Mulot and Vatel accompanied them. All went on foot, bare footed, singing hymns and reciting the rosary and other prayers. On their return, Montfort and some Brothers made the same pilgrimage.

Montfort's last mission was preached at St. Laurent-sur-Sèvre. On April 1, 1716, Montfort and Bro. Gabriel reached the place. Fr. René Mulot and his brother, the parish priest of St. Pompain, joined them later. The mission started on April 5th. It went on well and Montfort got a Calvary ready for blessing. He was informed that Bishop Champflour would be visiting the parish on the 22nd. He got the parish ready to receive the Bishop and planned out everything well. The Bishop came on the appointed day and he was given a grand reception. Montfort was then tired and he had high fever. In the afternoon, he preached a sermon on the kindness of Jesus. Acute pleurisy set in and after the sermon he went to bed never to get up again.

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

By 4.00 p.m. on April 28, people came in large numbers to see Fr. Montfort alive for the last time and to receive his blessing. Montfort at first refused to give the blessing protesting that he was not worthy. Fr. Mulot suggested to him, "Bless them, Father, with your crucifix and it will be Jesus, who blesses them." Montfort accepted the suggestion and blessed the people with all his heart. People were weeping and to show them the Christian meaning of life and death, he sang one of the hymns that he had composed:

"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!” **Bro. Lawrence Joseph, s.g.**

St. Louis Mary Grignon de Montfort (Chronology)

- 31-01-1673: Birth at Montfort, baptism the following day in St. John’s Church
- 1673-1675: Stay with Mother Andrea
- 1675-1685: At Bois-Marquer in Iffendic
- 1685-1692: Studies at St. Thomas Becket College, Rennes
- 1686 onwards stayed with his parents in Rennes
- End of 1692: Leaving for Paris for Seminary studies
- 1692-1694: Stay at Fr. Barmondier’s Hostel and study in Sorbonne University
- 1694: Stay at Fr. Boucher’s Hostel, sickness towards the end of the year
- 1695-1700: Joining St. Sulpice Seminary and stay at the Lesser Seminary
- 1699: Pilgrimage to Our Lady of Chartres
- 05-06-1700: Ordination and stay at St. Sulpice
- Sept. 1700: Joined St. Clement’s Community, Nantes
- April 1701: Visit to Fontevault and meeting Madame de Montespan
Visit to Poitiers, meeting Bishop Girard and return to Nantes
- Nov. 1701: Appointed Chaplain at the Poorhouse of Poitiers
- 02-02-1703: Vestition of Sr. Marie Louise Trichet
- April 1703: Leaving Poitiers and stay at Salpetriere, Paris
- Sept. 1703: Leaving Salpetriere and stay under a staircase on the Fot-de-Fer Street
Spending time in contemplation, conferences in the Holy Spirit Seminary
Writing the first book “The Love of Eternal Wisdom”
Restoring peace among the monks at Mount Valerian
- 09-03-1704: The poor of Poitiers requesting for Montfort’s return & the Bishop’s letter
- April 1704: Back at the Poorhouse of Poitiers as its director
- May 1705: Leaving the Poorhouse for good and preaching in the suburbs of Poitiers
Recruiting Bro. Mathurin
- 1706: Mission in the Calvary Church, the V.G.’s stopping the burning of books

Mission at St. Saturnin, order from the Bishop to leave the diocese

Lent 1706: Pilgrimage to Rome, audience with Pope Clement XI on 6-6-1706

Aug. – Sept: Return to France, pilgrimage to Our Lady of Ardilliers and to Mount St. Michael

Oct. – Feb. Stay in Rennes, missions at Dinan, St. Suliac, and Becherel

Feb. 1707: Joining Fr. Leuduger’s Group, missions in the dioceses of St. Malo & St. Briec

Oct. 1707- June: 1708: Stay at the Hermitage of St. Lazare, teaching in and around Montfort

June 1708: Bishop asking Montfort not to preach, starting missions in the diocese of Nantes

1708: Missions at St. Similien, Valet, La Chevroliere, Vertou, St. Fiacre

1709: Missions at Campbon, & Pontchateau, commencement of the work on the Calvary

1710: Missions at St. Danatien, Bouguenais, interdict on blessing the Calvary on 13-09-1710

Oct. 1710-11: Mission at St. Molf, forbidden to exercise ministry, stay at Cathuy House, Hospital for the Incurables, Joining 3rd Order of St. Dominic, helping flood victims

Lent 1711: Leaving Nantes and preaching in the diocese of Luçon, La Garnache

May 11, 1711: Starting missions in the diocese of La Rochelle, Lhoumeau, La Rochelle, etc

1712: Missions at the Island of Yeu, Sallertaine, St. Christophe, St. Vivien, Esnandes,

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

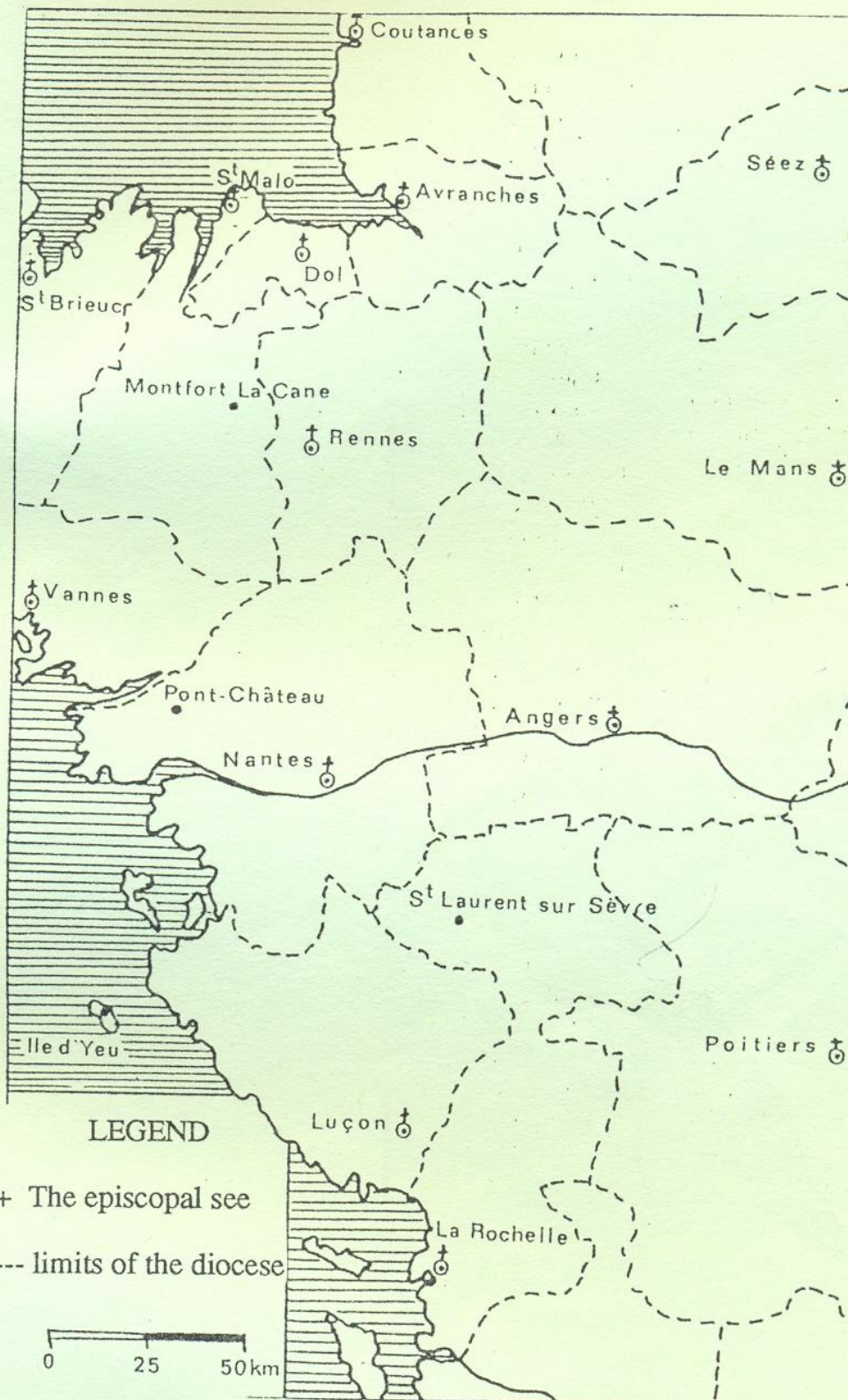
28-04-1716: Funeral service and burial

1838: Declared “Venerable” by Pope Gregory XVI

1869: Proclaimed his virtues heroic by Pope Pius IX

22-01-1888: Beatified by Pope Leo XIII

20-07-1947: Canonized Pope Pius XII.



LEGEND

- + The episcopal see
- limits of the diocese
- limits of districts
- Parish



MISSIONS and RETREATS
 preached in Western
 France by MONTFORT
 (1701 - 1716)
 according to the
 biographies by Besnard
 and Picot de Clorivière



St. Louis Mary Grignion de Montfort



Bl. Marie Louise of Jesus



H.H. John Paul II praying at the tombs of St. Montfort and Bl. Marie Louise