

Homily on St. Louis-Marie de Montfort¹

VENERABLE BROTHERS AND BELOVED SONS.

When Louis-Marie Grignon de Montfort, whom, by the Guiding Spirit of the Holy Ghost, we have just honoured with the title of Saint, came to this hallowed City to venerate the Tomb of Peter, he learnt from our late predecessor Clement XI that he was not destined, as was his wish, to preach the Gospel in foreign lands but rather to bring back his own country to the true Christian way of living.

Obedying wholeheartedly the instructions given him by the Holy Father, he returned to France and throughout his whole life did everything he could to carry out the wishes and counsels of Rome. The Apostolic Pilgrim covered the length and breadth of his native Brittany several times—on foot—visiting towns, cities, villages and out-of-the-way hamlets; and wherever this Apostle of Divine Truth, this keen propagator of virtue went, he brought about a complete renewal of Christian life: disputes were settled, discords reconciled, enmities suppressed; the smouldering embers of faith were rekindled and charity yielded most copious and salutary fruits.

Those who propagated error, very often under the guise of truth, always found in him a tireless and strenuous opponent; he fiercely opposed all who popularized erroneous pious practices or who upheld doctrine contrary to the teaching of the Church. As a result of his labours the integrity of Catholic Doctrine was safeguarded and the Catholic Faith shone not only in the minds of men, but also in private and public life alike.

The rule of life he had drawn up for himself and which he followed to his dying day, he bequeathed, as a sacred heritage, to the two Religious Congregations founded by him. And it is true to say that if these Congregations strive to follow him in his footsteps, which in fact they do, if they emulate his powerful love of God and neighbour, and like him honour the Virgin Mother of God with an ardent love, if they imitate his profound humility, his love of poverty, his passionate love of prayer, then there can be no doubt that like their Father and Founder, they will be working out, in the best possible way their own salvation and helping in that of their neighbour.

In this hour of rejoicing, there is no need to exhort you to imitate him in all his religious life . . . the facts speak for themselves. Let us simply recall to mind how he succeeded in converting so many souls, bringing them back to a life of penance and the practice of virtue, how he managed to make so many journeys, and how he triumphed over heavy opposition and the difficult times in which he lived.

All these things, Venerable Brethren and Beloved Sons, are easy to understand when we consider his burning love for Christ, his fiery, solid and true devotion to the Mother of God. For him, God was all; for him nothing was more preferable, nothing more pleasing than to see Him in all things and to know Him and love Him in all things; his one wish was to follow the will of God and to devote himself entirely to the spreading of His glory. His sermons reflected the love of God that burned within him; he preached with such force and clarity as to draw all men to him in one sweep, and win them over from error and vice to truth and penance, from indifference and lukewarmness towards divine things to zeal in the salvation of souls . . .

But not only his spiritual sons but all Christians have a duty to follow his example, especially in these days when Faith languishes, morals are offended and deplorable discords

¹ Summary of Homily given by Pope Pius XII, on 20th July 1947.

abound . . .

May the image of this Saint shining and resplendent in the eyes of men enter into their minds and hearts and teach them once again that they were not created for the things of this earth but for heaven; may it be an incentive to all to follow the divine precepts, to practise fraternal charity, and finally, to be masters of virtue so that with the help of God's grace they may one day enjoy the everlasting happiness of heaven. Amen.

Allocution of the Holy Father, Pope Pius XII²

MONTFORT, A SIGN OF CONTRADICTION.

Welcome to you, dear Sons and Daughters, gathered together here in such great numbers to witness the glorification of Louis-Marie Grignion de Montfort, a humble Breton priest who lived in the time of Louis XIV. His was a short life, a life amazingly active and rich in fruits, yet it was a singularly turbulent one. Misunderstood by some, highly praised by others, he was thus set before the world as a sign of contradiction: “in signum cui contradicetur” (Luke ii, 34). Posterity has made him popular, thereby unwittingly reforming the common appreciation of those who lived in his day, but over and above the verdict of men, the supreme authority of the Church has just raised him to the dignity of a Saint.

MONTFORT, ESSENTIALLY A BRETON.

Let me, in the first place, welcome you pilgrims from Brittany and the Atlantic seaboard. You claim him as one of your own, and rightly so. Breton by birth and by his early education, Montfort remained a Breton at heart and by temperament, in Paris, in Poitou and in Vendée: and so he will remain everywhere he goes and that right up to the time of his death. Even his missionary hymns are typical of this. By his pious ingenuity, which might easily have been less successful in a more critical and more quizzical age, he succeeded in setting religious words to the popular tunes of his native country. He is a Breton by his piety and his deep interior life, by his extreme sensibility and natural reserve not altogether free from scrupulosity, which unthinking youths and even some of his religious Superiors mistook for uncouthness and eccentricity. He is a Breton by his unswerving rectitude and by his blunt outspoken manner which were considered excessive by more accommodating and more pliable natures and taxed as absolutism and intransigence.

Watching him on the sly, surprising him in his dealings with the children and the poor, seeing and hearing him as he taught the humble and the ignorant, not a few people were surprised to discover, under the somewhat harsh exterior of a nature he had heroically mortified and moulded, the treasures of a rich intelligence, of unbounded charity and of delicate and tender kindness.

At times, certain people have thought it possible to point out the complete contrast between St. Louis-Marie and St. Francis de Sales. In so doing such people have shown themselves to be only slightly acquainted with the lives of the two Saints. That there are differences between them is certain. And this, precisely does away with the wrong idea that

² Given at the Vatican, 21st July, 1947, the day after the Canonization

many people have of thinking that all the Saints are just so many identical copies of a certain type of virtue all moulded on the same model. Such people seem to be completely unaware of the battle which Francis de Sales had to wage against himself in order to temper his naturally harsh character and of the exquisite gentleness with which Louis-Marie taught and helped the humble and the lowly. But neither the smiling amiability of the Bishop of Geneva nor the severe austerity of the Breton missionary shielded them from the hatred and the persecutions of the Calvinists and Jansenists. On the other hand, however, the gruff impetuosity of the one and the patience of the other in the service of Holy Mother Church gained for both of them the admiration and the devotion of the faithful.

The outstanding characteristic of Louis-Marie, the one which marks him as being essentially Breton, is his unflagging perseverance in the pursuit of that saintly ideal, the only ideal he ever had: that of winning over men's souls to God. In the pursuit of this ideal he brought into play all the qualities with which nature and grace had endowed him. This he did, in almost every sphere of activity, with such great success that he is in all truth the apostle "*par excellence*" of Poitou, of Brittany and of Vendée. Quite recently one writer was able to state without any exaggeration that "*the Vendée of 1793 was the work of his hands.*"

MODEL FOR PRIESTS.

Welcome to you priests from every rank of the hierarchy, you who carry in your hearts that care, that anxiety, that "tribulation" mentioned by St. Paul (ii Cor. i, 8) and which today, almost everywhere is the common lot of any priest worthy of the beautiful name of "Shepherd of Souls." Like thousands of your brethren in the priesthood you raise your eyes with pride towards the new saint. In his example you find confidence and zeal. By the high esteem in which he held his priestly vocation and by the heroic fidelity with which he lived up to that calling, he has shown the world the true type, often so little known, of the priest of Jesus Christ. He has shown what such a priest is capable of doing for the pure glory of God and for the salvation of souls, yes, and even for the salvation of society when he devoted his whole life to it unreservedly, unconditionally and unstintingly in the full spirit of the Gospel. Do not be afraid to look upon him, do not allow yourselves to be put off by his outward appearance which does not flatter him. His is the only beauty that matters—that of a soul all shining and burning with charity. In him you have an eminent model of priestly life and virtue.

THE PRECIOUS BIRTHRIGHT OF THE MONTFORTIAN CONGREGATIONS.

Welcome to you, members of the religious families of which Louis-Marie Grignion de Montfort was the Founder and Father. During his life and even up to the time of his premature death you were nothing more than an imperceptible grain of wheat. That grain, however, was hidden away in his heart as in the bosom of a fertile soul, it was dilated by the nourishing sap of his superhuman self-sacrifice, of his superabundant merits and of his exuberant holiness. And now that seed has germinated and grown; it has developed and thrown out its roots far and wide. The cruel winds of persecution have been unable to make it wither, violent persecutions and legal interference unable to stifle its growth.

Dear Sons and Daughters, remain faithful to the precious birthright bequeathed to you by this great Saint. Such a magnificent birthright merits that you should continue in the future, as you have so well done in the past, to devote to it unstintingly your labours, your sacrifices and your life. Show the world that you have truly inherited his tender love for the humble and the lowly, his solicitude for children, his charity for the poor, always remembering how he took the bread from his own table to feed them and the clothes off his own back to cover them. They were always very near to his heart as they were to the heart of

Jesus.

Yes, charity is the great secret, the only secret, which produced such amazing results in a life so short, so varied and so turbulent as that of Louis-Marie Grignion de Montfort! Charity will be for you too—rest assured of it, the strength, the light and the blessing of your existence and of all your activities.

MONTFORT, THE GUIDE WHO LEADS YOU TO MARY.

Welcome last of all to you pilgrims gathered together from different countries. The differences between you are only apparent for your common love of Mary creates between you all a bond of unity. In him whom you are here to honour, each one of you sees the guide who leads you to Mary and from Mary to Jesus. All the Saints, no doubt, were the great servants of Mary, all of them led souls to Her; Montfort is, without contest, one of those who has laboured most ardently and most efficaciously in making Her known and served.

THE TWO POLES OF HIS LIFE.

The Cross of Jesus and the Mother of Jesus were the two poles of his own personal life and of his ministry. And that is why his life, so brief in itself, was yet so full; that is why his ministry covering only Vendée, Poitou and Brittany and lasting scarcely twelve short years, has outlived him by more than two centuries and has spread over many countries. And that because Divine Wisdom, that Wisdom to Whose guidance he had committed himself, made fruitful all his labours and crowned all his activities, only apparently interrupted by death "*complevit labores illius*" (Sap. x, 10). The work is entirely the work of God, but it bears the stamp of one who was His faithful co-operator. It is only right that we should remark the fact.

THE SAINT'S NATURAL QUALITIES.

When we consider the figure of St. Louis-Marie, we are almost dazzled by the brilliance of the light emanating from it, and our gaze must needs analyze, as it were, its radiance. In the first place it falls upon his exterior. We are surprised to notice that in dealing with him nature was not so sparing of her gifts as might have been imagined at first sight. Our Saint was not graced, it is true, by that charm of outward appearance which at once commands sympathy. He was however endowed with an exceptionally vigorous constitution, an advantage in reality much more appreciable, which enabled him to bear the tiring hardships of his missionary life, and at the same time to impose upon himself severe, very severe penances and mortifications. Without wasting his time in trying to dazzle his listeners by the facile expedients of pretty wit, or by the phantasmagoria of a subtle and studied elegance, he knew how to adapt the treasures of a deep and solid theology to the needs of the most simple people. He excelled in the art of making the most of his learning, to enlighten and convince the minds of his listeners, to move their hearts and to shake their wills. Such was his strength of persuasion that he always ended up by obtaining from them strong and lasting resolutions. Due to his great tact and keen sense of psychology he knew how to choose and to temper his teaching to suit each particular case. In order to be able to devote himself more completely to study and the practices of piety, he had, out of self-sacrifice, renounced the pursuit of fine arts towards which he had strong leanings and for which he possessed remarkable talent. But he remained rich in language, and feeling, and the artist in him knew how to use these qualities to impress more vividly upon the minds of his hearers the image of the divine model. All these were human qualities, no doubt, but they were of help to him in his task of leading the sinful to repentance, the just to sanctity and those who had strayed, to truth; of winning back to the love of Christ those whose hearts had hardened

under the cold and arid breath of selfishness.

HIS SUPERNATURAL RESOURCES.

St. Louis-Marie brought into play that divine assistance which he obtained from a life of prayer, to a much greater extent than he did his own human activity. Forever on the go, ever in contact with people, he was at the same time always recollected, always conscious of the intimate presence of God, battling so to speak with Divine justice to obtain from His Mercy the grace to overcome the most hardened and obstinate sinners. Like the Patriarch wrestling with the angel, he seemed ever to be repeating that irresistible prayer: "I will not let thee go unless thou bless me" (Gen. xxxii, 27).

Nor was he unaware of the fact that without penance, self-sacrifice and continual mortification, prayer is not sufficient to overcome the spirit of evil: "in oratione et jejuniis" (Mark ix, 29). And so our missionary added to the hardships of the most intrepid apostles, the holy cruelties of the most austere ascetics. Did he not observe, almost to the letter, the instructions given by the Master to His disciples? "Take nothing for your journey, neither staff nor scrip, nor bread nor money, neither have you two coats" (Luke ix, 3). His one cassock well worn and patched was so miserable that beggars meeting him thought themselves obliged to come to his aid by giving him alms.

Having thus crucified his own flesh he was fully justified in preaching with authority Jesus Christ crucified (see I Cor. i, 23). Everywhere and in spite of all comers he built Calvaries, and with untiring patience rebuilt them when the spirit of this world, "inimicus Crucis Christi" (see Phil. iii, 18), had caused them to be destroyed. In his Letter to the Friends of the Cross it was less a programme of life he drew up than his own portrait which he painted. "A man chosen by God from the midst of ten thousand who live according to the senses and to human reason alone, to be a man all divine, lifted up beyond reason and totally opposed to the senses, by the life and light of pure faith and by an ardent love of the Cross."

HIS GREAT SECRET.

The mainspring of all his apostolic ministry, his great secret for drawing souls and giving them over to Jesus, is devotion to Mary. This devotion is the source of all his activity; the reason for all his confidence. And it would have been impossible for him to find a more telling weapon for the times in which he lived. To Jansenism with its joyless austerity, its sombre apprehensions, its proud depressions, he opposes the filial love of the devout servant of Mary; a love which is at once confident, ardent, expansive and effective for Mary who is the Refuge of Sinners, the Mother of Divine Grace, our life, our sweetness and our hope. She is also our advocate. Placed as she is between God and the sinner, Mary is ever busy invoking the clemency of the judge in order to move Him to pity, and she is ever trying to overcome the obstinacy of the sinner. The missionary was convinced of this part played by Mary, a conviction strengthened by his own experience, and so he used to say with picturesque simplicity "that a sinner had never resisted him once he held him by the scruff of the neck with his rosary!"

THE AUTHOR OF THE TREATISE OF THE TRUE DEVOTION.

But the devotion in question must moreover be a sincere and loyal one. The Author of the *Treatise of the True Devotion to Our Blessed Lady* makes a clear-cut distinction between this true devotion and that other one based more or less upon superstition, whose devotees put forward a few exterior practices and superficial sentiments as their authority for living as they please and remaining in sin, counting on a miraculous grace of conversion at the final hour.

True devotion, traditional devotion, that of the Church, that shall we say of Christian

and Catholic commonsense must essentially lead to a closer union with Jesus, under the guidance of Mary. The precise form and practice of this devotion can vary according to time, place and personal inclination. Within the limits of sound and safe doctrine, of what is orthodox and becoming, the Church leaves to her children a just measure of freedom, for she is aware that true and perfect devotion to our Blessed Lady is not so intimately tied up with these various forms, that any one of them can claim to hold a monopoly.

And therefore, dear sons and daughters, We ardently desire, that over and above the various manifestations of piety towards the Mother of God and our Mother, you take, all of you, from the treasure of the writings and example of our Saint, that which constitutes the essence of his Marian devotion: his strong conviction of Mary's powerful intercession, his firm resolve to imitate as closely as possible the virtues of this Virgin of Virgins, the overwhelming fervour of his love for Her and for Jesus.

APOSTOLIC BLESSING.

Confident that the Queen of our Hearts will obtain for you from the Author of all Good this triple favour, We bestow upon you as an assurance, for yourselves, for those you love, for all those who place themselves under the patronage of St. Louis de Montfort and pray to him in common with you. . . . Our Apostolic Blessing.