

Letter of Pope John Paul II to the Montfortian Religious Family

**On the occasion of the 50th Anniversary of the Canonisation
of St. Louis Marie de Montfort**



**To Reverend Father William Considine,
Superior General of the Company of Mary**

**To Reverend Brother Jean Friant,
Superior General of the Brothers of Christian Instruction of Saint-Gabriel**

**To Reverend Mother Barbara O'Dea,
Superior General of the Daughters of Wisdom**

1. The Montfortian Family is about to begin a year set apart for the celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the canonisation of Saint Louis-Marie Grignion de Montfort, which took place in Rome on 20 July 1947. With the Company of Mary, the Brothers of Saint-Gabriel and the Daughters of Wisdom, I am happy to offer thanks to the Lord for the growing influence of this missionary saint whose apostolate was nourished by a life of intense prayer, by an unshakeable faith in the Triune God and by a deep devotion to the Most Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of the Redeemer.

Poor among the poor, profoundly integrated into the Church despite the lack of understanding he had to face, Saint Louis-Marie adopted as his motto these simple words: "God Alone". He sang: "God alone is my tenderness, God alone is my support, God alone is my every good, my life and my wealth" (*Canticle* 55, 11). His love for God was total. It was with God and for God that he went towards other people and walked the roads of the mission. Constantly aware of the presence of Jesus and Mary, his entire being was a witness to the theological virtue of charity which he desired to share with everyone. His deeds and his words had only one aim, to call people to conversion and to motivate them to live for God. His writings are full of testimony and praise of the Incarnate Word and also of Mary, "masterpiece of the Most High, miracle of Eternal Wisdom" (*Love of Eternal Wisdom*, n. 106).

2. The message that Father de Montfort has left behind for us is inseparably founded on the meditations of the mystic that he was and the pastoral teaching of an apostle. Basing himself on the great theological currents in vogue at that time, he expressed his personal faith in tune with the culture of his time. By turns poetic and familiarly close to the language of his audience, his style can surprise our contemporaries, but that should not prevent us from being inspired by his fertile intuitions. That is why the work accomplished today by the Montfortian Family is precious: it helps the faithful to grasp the coherence of a theological and spiritual vision that is always oriented towards an intense life of faith and charity.

Before all else, Saint Louis-Marie impresses us by his theocentric spirituality. He has "a taste for God and his truth" (*Love of Eternal Wisdom*, n. 13) and knows how to communicate his faith in God, speaking at one and the same time of the majesty and of the gentleness of God, for God is a spring overflowing with love. Father de Montfort does not hesitate to unveil, even to the humblest persons, the mystery of the Trinity which inspires his prayer and reflection on the redemptive Incarnation, the work of the divine Persons. He wants us to grasp the reality of the divine presence in the time of the Church. In a notable way he writes: "The plan adopted by the three persons of the Blessed Trinity in the Incarnation, the first coming of Jesus Christ, they adhere to each day in an invisible manner throughout the Church and they will pursue it to the end of time until the last coming of Jesus Christ" (*True Devotion to Mary*, n. 22). In our time, his witness can help us base our Christian existence on faith in the living God, on a warm relationship with God and on a solid ecclesial experience, thanks to the Spirit of the Father and the Son, whose reign continues in the present (cf. *Prayer for Missionaries*, n. 16).

3. The person of Christ dominates the thought of Grignion de Montfort: "Jesus, our Saviour, true God and true man, must be the ultimate end of all our other devotions" (*True Devotion to Mary*, n. 61). The Incarnation of the Word is for him the absolute central reality: "Eternal and incarnate Wisdom [...], I adore you [...], dwelling in the splendour of your Father from all eternity and in the virginal womb of Mary, your most worthy Mother, at the time of your Incarnation" (*Love of*

Eternal Wisdom, n. 223). The ardent celebration of the person of the incarnate Son of God, which resonates in all Father de Montfort's teachings, retains even today its inestimable worth, for it represents a balanced vision from the doctrinal point of view, and it leads to adherence with one's entire being to the One who reveals to humanity its true vocation. If only the faithful could heed this exhortation: "Jesus Christ (the Eternal Wisdom) is everything that you can and should wish for. Long for him, seek him, [...] that unique and precious pearl" (*ibid.*, n. 9)!

Contemplation of the grandeur of the mystery of Jesus goes hand in hand with the contemplation of the Cross, which Montfort made the principal sign of his missions. Often subjected to harsh trials, he himself knew its weight as testified in a letter he wrote to his sister in which he requested her prayers "to obtain from Jesus the grace for me to carry the roughest and heaviest crosses" (*Letter 24*). Day after day, he practised the imitation of Christ through what he would call the foolish love of the Cross in which he saw "the triumph of Eternal Wisdom" (*Love of Eternal Wisdom*, ch. XIV). Through the sacrifice of Calvary, the Son of God makes himself little and humble to the very extreme; he shares the condition of his brothers and sisters who are subject to suffering and death. Here, Christ manifests his infinite love in an eloquent manner and opens to humanity the way to new life. Louis-Marie, who followed his Lord and "fixed his abode in the Cross" (*ibid.*, n. 180), gives a witness to holiness that his heirs in the Montfortian Family must pass on in their turn, so as to reveal to this world the truth of saving love.

4. In order to know the Eternal Wisdom, uncreated and incarnate, Grignion de Montfort constantly invited people to put their trust in the Blessed Virgin Mary, who is so inseparable from Jesus "that it would be easier to separate light from the sun" (*True Devotion to Mary*, n. 63). He remains an incomparable bard and disciple of the Mother of the Saviour whom he honours as the one who so assuredly leads towards Christ: "If then we are establishing sound devotion to Our Blessed Lady, it is only in order to establish devotion to Our Lord more perfectly, by providing a smooth but certain way of reaching Jesus Christ" (*ibid.*, n. 62). For Mary is the creature chosen by the Father and totally dedicated to her maternal mission. Having entered into union with the Word through her free consent, she is associated in a privileged manner with the Incarnation and the Redemption, from Nazareth to Golgotha and the Cenacle, in absolute faithfulness to the presence of the Holy Spirit. She "found grace with God for everyone in general and each one in particular" (*ibid.*, n. 164).

Saint Louis-Marie also calls on us to abandon ourselves entirely to Mary in order to welcome her presence in the very depth of our souls. "Mary becomes all things for the soul that wishes to serve Jesus Christ. She enlightens his mind with her pure faith. She deepens his heart with her humility. She enlarges and inflames his heart with her charity, makes it pure with her purity, makes it noble and great through her motherly care" (*Secret of Mary*, n. 57). Recourse to Mary leads one to give Jesus an ever greater place in one's life; it is significant, for example, that Montfort invites the faithful to turn to Mary before communion: "Implore Mary to lend you her heart so that you may receive her Son with her dispositions" (*True Devotion to Mary*, n. 266).

In our times when Marian devotion is quite alive but not always sufficiently enlightened, it would be good to recapture Father de Montfort's fervour and his correct tone, in order to give the Virgin her rightful place and to learn how to pray to her: "Mother of mercy, grant me the favour of obtaining the true Wisdom of God, and so make me one of those whom you love, teach and guide, [...]. Virgin most faithful, make me in everything so committed a disciple, imitator, and slave of Jesus, your Son, incarnate Wisdom" (*Love of Eternal Wisdom*, n. 227). No doubt certain changes in the language seem imperative, but the Montfortian Family must continue its Marian apostolate in the spirit of its founder, in order to help the faithful maintain a living and intimate relationship with her whom the Second Vatican Council honoured as a super-eminent and absolutely unique member of the Church, recalling that, "As St. Ambrose taught, the Mother of God is a type of the Church in the order of faith, charity and perfect union with Christ" (*Lumen Gentium*, n. 63).

5. The Montfortian year draws our attention to the main lines of the spirituality of Saint Louis-Marie, but it is also most appropriate to recall that he was a missionary of extraordinary range and influence. Just after his ordination he wrote: "I feel a tremendous urge to make Our Lord and his Holy Mother loved, to go in a humble and simple way to teach catechism to the poor". He lived in complete fidelity to this vocation, which he wished to share with the priests who were to join him. In the *Rule of the Missionary Priests of the Company of Mary*, he invites the apostolic missionary to preach with simplicity, truthfulness, without fear and with charity, adding: "His intention must be holy and centred on God alone. God's glory must be his sole preoccupation and he must first practise what he preaches" (n. 62).

Now that the need for a new evangelisation has become imperative in most parts of the world, Father de Montfort's zeal for the Word of God, his solicitude for the very poor, his ability to make himself understood by the simplest folk and to stimulate their piety, his qualities for organising, his initiatives to sustain fervour by founding spiritual movements and to involve the laity in the service of the poor, all that, with practical adaptations, can inspire the apostles of today. One of the constants in the numerous missions preached by Saint Louis-Marie himself deserves to be underscored today: he called for the renewal of the promises of Baptism, even making this exercise a prerequisite for absolution and communion. This takes on considerable topical interest, in this first preparatory year for the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, which is dedicated precisely to Christ and to the sacrament of Baptism. Montfort understood very well the importance of this sacrament which consecrates us to God and constitutes the community, as well as the need to rediscover, in a firm adherence of faith, the significance of the commitments of Baptism.

A Gospel wayfarer inflamed by the love of Jesus and of his holy Mother, he knew how to touch the hearts of the crowds, and how to make them love the Redeeming Christ, contemplated on the Cross. May he support the efforts of the evangelisers of our times!

6. Dear brothers and sisters of the great Montfortian Family, in this year of prayer and reflection on the precious heritage of Saint Louis-Marie, I encourage you: make this treasure bear fruit; it must not remain hidden. The teaching of your founder and master coincides with the themes that the whole Church meditates on at the approach of the Great Jubilee; it marks out for us the path of true Wisdom that must be laid open to so many young people who search for meaning in their lives and for an art of living.

I welcome your initiatives at diffusing Montfortian spirituality in forms that are suitable to different cultures, thanks to the collaboration of the members of your three Institutes. Be also a support and a point of reference for the movements which take their inspiration from the message of Grignon de Montfort in order to give to Marian devotion an ever surer authenticity. Renew your presence among the poor, your insertion into the pastoral activity of the Church, your availability for evangelisation.

Confiding your religious life and your apostolate to the intercession of Saint Louis-Marie Grignon de Montfort and Blessed Marie-Louise Trichet, I wholeheartedly impart to you, as well as to all those who are close to you and whom you serve, the Apostolic Blessing.

From the Vatican, 21 June 1997

Joannes Paulus II