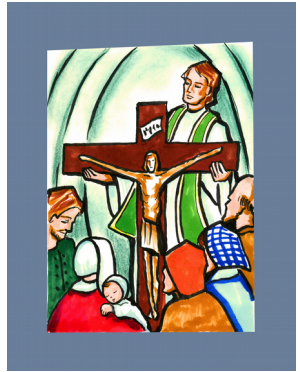
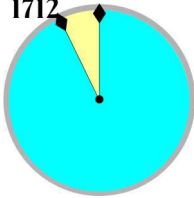


19. EVENT: La Rochelle

- **DATE** : 1711-1715
- **PLACE** : La Rochelle
- **VALUE** : Pastoral daring and creativity. An evangelisation that reaches out to everyone, using all possible means
- **THE STORY** :



1712



The original missionary pastoral project of Montfort was made more precise, was refined and brought to maturity over the years. Little by little, those traits were emerging that differentiate him from all the others.

If we had to condense the originality of Montfort, two adjectives seem to stand out: an audacious activity, and a popular activity. We rediscover in a different form the young priest who, in 1701, wanted to live poor with the poor. No doubt his manner is quite different since then, but the source is still the same: confidence in the Christian possibilities of the simple people. (Rey-Mermet).

It was noticed that the fruits of his missions persevered longer in those places where he had been than in those where other missionaries had laboured, either because he had more abundant grace, or because he made use of practices that favoured a follow-up to his presence there. His concern to involve the people of the place at all possible levels was no doubt an important element in this success.

We might think of the board and lodging of the missionaries themselves; the custom had been that missionaries could count on an assured method of finance. Montfort refused this arrangement and relied on Providence. It was the people of the place who would bring what was necessary. That brought about the involvement of everybody. The mission became the business of all, including the caring for numerous poor people who always finished up by profiting from the surplus of gifts made to the missionaries. During the missions, Montfort made use of all the means for evangelising: Preaching using visual aids, adapted to a population that could not read, question and answer sessions, spectacular processions...

He also established with the people of the place activities that prolonged the mission, for example, the establishment of the Roasry, associations and

confraternities, that corresponded with a healthy popular piety and that were to survive his going.

For a man who normally was just passing through, Montfort left surprising traces that demonstrate his influence. He followed up the project of Mgr de Champflour to restore the charitable schools of La Rochelle and open new ones. These were free schools.

In 1714, he asked Marie-Louise Trichet and Catherine Brunet, whom he had left in the hospital in Poitiers, to come to take charge of the school for girls. In 1715, schools for boys were opened. In these, Montfort applied a method that would permit a single teacher to occupy himself with a great number of children all at the same time. The results were excellent.

We might summarise by emphasising that Montfort put into practice the principle that, to touch the people with a message that will endure and bear fruit, it is necessary to know and love those one is addressing and to get within their reach. One must also know how to involve the population and make use of the resources of the area. Montfort did this with remarkable creativity.

● **FROM MONTFORT'S WRITINGS:** (*Letter 27, beginning of 1715*)
[To Mother Marie-Louise de Jésus and Sr Catherine Brunet]

My dear daughters in Jesus Christ, Marie Trichet and Catherine Brunet,
May Jesus and his Cross reign forever!

I have spoken several times to his Lordship, 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. He has rented a house for the purpose until another house can be bought and suitably furnished.

I know you are doing a great deal of good where you are, but you will do infinitely more away from home and we know that since the time of Abraham right up to the time of our Lord and even to our own day, God sends his greatest servants out of their own country because, as our Lord himself says, no prophet is accepted among his own people.

I know you will have many difficulties to overcome but an enterprise which is going to do so much for the glory of God and the salvation of men will have its way strewn with thorns and crosses. If one doesn't take risks for God, one doesn't accomplish anything great for Him.

Totally yours in God alone.

● **LIGHT FROM THE BIBLE:** (*Mark 1:21-28, 35-38*)

Jesus and his disciples went as far as Capernaum, and at once on the

Sabbath he went into the synagogue and began to teach. And his teaching made a deep impression on them because, unlike the scribes, he taught them with authority. And at once in their synagogue there was a man with an unclean spirit, and he shouted, 'What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are: the Holy One of God.' But Jesus rebuked it saying, 'Be quiet! Come out of him!' And the unclean spirit threw the man into convulsions and with a loud cry went out of him. The people were so astonished that they started asking one another what it all meant, saying, 'Here is a teaching that is new, and with authority behind it: he gives orders even to unclean spirits and they obey him.' And his reputation at once spread everywhere, through all the surrounding Galilean countryside.

In the morning, long before dawn, he got up and left the house and went off to a lonely place and prayed there. Simon and his companions set out in search of him, and when they found him they said, 'Everybody is looking for you.' He answered, 'Let us go elsewhere, to the neighbouring country towns, so that I can proclaim the message there too, because that is why I came.'

(1 Corinthians 9:18-23)

What salary do I get, then? That in my preaching I offer the gospel free of charge to avoid using the rights which the gospel allows me. So though I was not a slave to any human being, I put myself in slavery to all people, to win as many as I could. To the Jews I made myself as a Jew, to win the Jews; to those under the Law as one under the Law (though I am not), in order to win those under the Law; to those outside the Law as one outside the Law, though I am not outside the Law but under Christ's law, to win those outside the Law. To the weak, I made myself weak, to win the weak. I accommodated myself to people in all kinds of different situations, so that by all possible means I might bring some to salvation. All this I do for the sake of the gospel, that I may share its benefits with others.

● PERSONAL INTEGRATION/SHARING

- How can we be creative today in our way of evangelising?
- How are we to offer a first evangelisation to those who are in total ignorance of the Gospel?
- What quality or skill is most important to be a good evangeliser?
- How can we bridge the gap between the world of the Bible and the world of today (language, values, symbols)?

- What means can we come up with to walk with Christians in their spiritual development?
- How can we be a significant presence for the youth of today?
- What orientations, what special role, what resources can we offer Montfortian associates?

● **PRAYER/CELEBRATION**

Our world is thirsting for Good News. Let us ask Christ, the one Sent by the Father, to make us witnesses of his Gospel.

Lord, fill us with the joy of the Gospel.

- That our actions and our words may bring your presence to the world,

Lord, fill us with the joy of the Gospel.

- That we may be courageous in the face of the difficulties of evangelisation,

Lord, fill us with the joy of the Gospel.

- That we may learn to create new ways of reaching the youth of today,

Lord, fill us with the joy of the Gospel.

- That we may be able to speak the Good News in the various cultures and languages of today,

Lord, fill us with the joy of the Gospel.

- That our prayer may nourish our witness,

Lord, fill us with the joy of the Gospel.

● **SYMBOL:** The picture of the great procession of La Rochelle, or a banner representing Christ or Mary.

● **COMMITMENT**

- Does my style of life challenge; does it appeal to other values than those of success and consumerism? What can I change in this?

- I choose a group of people with whom I am in contact, and I find a way of evangelising them.