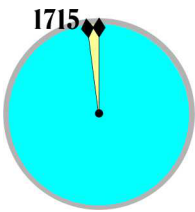
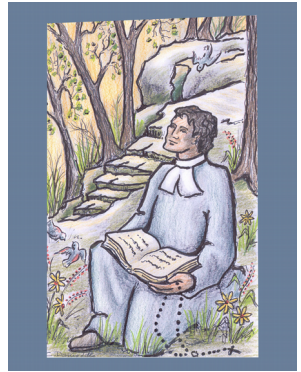


20. EVENT: Retirement to the cave in Mervent

- **DATE** : 1715, September-October
- **PLACE** : The cave in the Forest of Mervent
- **VALUE** : Prayer, contemplation, creation as a pathway to God
- **THE STORY** :



In June 1715, Montfort had preached a mission in Mervent, and had been attracted by the enchantment of the surrounding area. “The little town of Mervent looks out on the forest that climbs the hills and drops down into the valleys.” This forest, spread like a cloak over a solitary stretch of land, creates one of the most virgin and yet most grandiose landscapes that Louis Marie had been given to contemplate.

The land-owners of the area invited Louis Marie to construct a hermitage in the forest with which he had fallen in love. In the middle of some crevices in the rock, Father de Montfort discovered a cave, where he retired to pray, tired as he was. The hermit’s soul of Louis Marie was reawakened with the desire to take his repose with the infinite Good, healing the wounds that men had inflicted on him. In September, after an exhausting Summer that, as well as his labours in La Rochelle, had included the mission in Fontenay-le-Comte, he returned to Mervent. Abandoning the little hermitage that, in fact, was too close to the passing road, he came up with a bolder project: to penetrate into the forest as far as an unspoilt gorge wedged between two hills and rich in water, and there to build a little house of peace which, according to the plans whirling round in his head, might one day become that place of repose offered by the Rule of the Company of Mary to the missionaries who would no longer have the strength to work. Louis Marie knew very well how necessary it is to prepare for death by a deeper encounter with God, who speaks in solitude. The “cave of the fawns” is situated on a height, in the midst of the forest, that looks out over a wild and superb panorama: the slopes covered with trees, and the wide bend of the river that flows deep in the valley. An enormous rocky outcrop and, inside, a small space smelling of earth and wood. In this space carved in the rock and protected by a vestibule wall, he

put a bed, a table, a chair and a crucifix. The man who had cried out on all roads his voracious “God alone!” could not have found a more perfect symbol of dispossession than this humble dwelling lost in the midst of nature. All the silence of the forest seemed to guard and envelope the humble solitude of the cave. Within these walls of rock where one could only pray, there burned the quivering mystery of contemplatives and lovers of God.

Father de Montfort had plans also to build a chapel and to erect a cross in it; but in the Autumn of 1715, he was obliged to leave this place, faced with the intransigence and the meanness of government bureaucracy, which accused him of occupying the place illegally and having caused damage to it. The missionary, however, had found there the interior momentum that would serve him for the last six months of his life.

● **FROM MONTFORT’S WRITINGS:** (*Hymn 157:13, 16, 18, 21, 24, 28, 31, 33*)

The eloquent silence
Of rocks and forests
Only preach peace,
Breathe only innocence.

The rocks preach fidelity,
The woods, fruitfulness,
The streams, purity,
All things, love and obedience.

The Creator’s mighty hand
Which formed this universe,
Shines in these remote sites
Of innocent nature.

What happiness, even in this life,
And what marvellous rapture
We experience in these places
As the soul is recollected.

Solitude is the wise book

Which all the saints have read,
Drawing from it stunning secrets
On how to live this life well.

I am the One, says God, who
leads
A sinner to the wilderness,
To speak to his heart,
And submit it to my reign.

Sheltered from the world’s
concerns
Let us savour recollection,
Praying continually,
Tasting profound peace.

Zealous folk, Jesus calls you
To rest awhile,
To fill yourself with God
And His words of life.

● **LIGHT FROM THE BIBLE:** (*Matthew 6:26-34*)

As he was teaching on the mountain, Jesus said: “Look at the birds in the sky. They do not sow or reap or gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father

feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they are? Can any of you, however much you worry, add one single cubit to your span of life? And why worry about clothing? Think of the flowers growing in the fields; they never have to work or spin; yet I assure you that not even Solomon in all his royal robes was clothed like one of these. Now if that is how God clothes the wild flowers growing in the field which are there today and thrown into the furnace tomorrow, will he not much more look after you, you who have so little faith? So do not worry; do not say, 'What are we to eat? What are we to drink? What are we to wear?' It is the gentiles who set their hearts on all these things. Your heavenly Father knows you need them all. Set your hearts on his kingdom first, and on God's saving justice, and all these other things will be given you as well. So do not worry about tomorrow: tomorrow will take care of itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own."

(Psalm 148)

Alleluia! Praise Yahweh from the heavens, praise him in the heights.

Praise him, all his angels, praise him, all his host!

Praise him, sun and moon, praise him, all shining stars,

praise him, highest heavens, praise him, waters above the heavens.

Let them praise the name of Yahweh at whose command they were made; he established them forever and ever by an unchanging decree.

Praise Yahweh from the earth, sea-monsters and all the depths,

fire and hail, snow and mist, storm-winds that obey his word,

mountains and every hill, orchards and every cedar,

wild animals and all cattle, reptiles and winged birds,

kings of the earth and all nations, princes and all judges on earth,

young men and girls, old people and children together.

Let them praise the name of Yahweh, for his name alone is sublime, his splendour transcends earth and heaven.

For he heightens the strength of his people, to the praise of all his faithful, the children of Israel, the people close to him.

● **PERSONAL INTEGRATION/SHARING**

- Montfort sings of the silence and solitude of Mervent. What place does silence occupy in my own life?
- How can I organise my day to make space for silence?
- What aspect or element of nature opens me up to the presence of God?

- **PRAYER/CELEBRATION**

For the beauty of the world, that opens us to his mystery, let us praise the Lord.

- By the game of the stars and the constellations,
by the immensity of the universe which sings of your grandeur,

Praised be you, Lord.

- By the complexity of the infinitely small,
by the atoms and particles that make up our world,

Praised be you, Lord.

By the beauty of plants, by their peace-giving strength,

Praised be you, Lord.

- By the insects, fishes, animals and all living things that people our earth,

Praised be you, Lord.

- By our sister water, by her calm and her power, by her gentle clarity,

Praised be you, Lord.

- By the cultures, languages and traditions passed down from past generations, the wealth of our humanity,

Praised be you, Lord.

- **SYMBOL:** A rock or a branch.

- **COMMITMENT**

- I choose a moment in my day to be reserved for silence.

- I take the time to go and contemplate nature.

- I eliminate from my daily life any manner of acting that harms the environment.