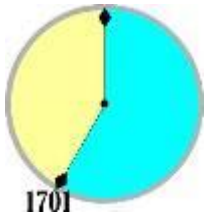
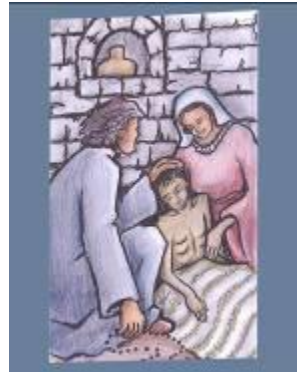


5. EVENT: Arrival at the General Hospital of Poitiers

- **DATE:** 1701, November
- **PLACE:** Poitiers, Hôpital Général
- **VALUE:** to be with the poor and to serve them
- **THE STORY**



The General Hospital, in the time of Montfort, was the place where all the miserable people of a town were gathered together: the sick, the poor, the homeless, the disabled, etc. At the suggestion of Madame de Montespan, a friend of the

Bishop of Poitiers, Montfort presented himself at the General Hospital of this town to offer his services. Before even meeting with the Bishop, he was noticed by the poor, who asked that he might be their director.

He had hardly taken up his role than he undertook an urgent task of “reanimation”. There was so much to be given back life and order in what he himself called “a poor Babylon”. He began by placing himself in their situation, refusing any stipend and choosing for himself the most miserable room. He re-established the daily begging around the town: he went with some of his new friends to collect the left-overs of the bourgeois families and load them onto a donkey. Then he re-organised the meals in the refectory, where he himself would serve at table, sharing the menu of the inmates when he did not content himself with their left-overs. He rearranged the daily rule, with a precise timetable for getting up, for prayer, meals and going to bed. He himself slept on straw, just like his flock, swept the rooms, showed a predilection for the most miserable, and gave up his own blankets to keep them warm. No, the poor “outcasts” of Poitiers had never seen a chaplain who was so close to them. He shared their life, their sentiments and their resentments, as is witnessed by one of his hymns—The Cries of the Poor—whose inspiration dates from this period: “You rich, wake up and hear!”

After a few months, due to the jealousy of those in charge, and also because he was upsetting the customs of the house, even if it was in the re-establishment of order, discipline and good management, Montfort had to leave. The inmates would write to the Bishop to ask for his return: “We, four hundred poor people, beg you most humbly, through the greatest love

and the glory of God, to get our venerable pastor, the one who so loves the poor, M. Grignon, to come back to us.”

● **FROM MONTFORT’S WRITINGS:**

Letter 6 to Monsieur Leschassier

I took it into my head however to go to the poorhouse [the general hospital] where I could serve the poor physically even if I could not serve them spiritually. I went into their little church to pray and the four hours I spent there waiting for the evening meal-time seemed all too short. However it seemed so long to some of the poor, who saw me kneeling there dressed in clothes very much like their own, that they went off to tell the others and they all agreed to take up a collection for me. Some gave more, some gave less; the poorer ones a denier, the richer ones a sou. All this went on without my knowing anything about it. Eventually I left the church to ask the time of supper and at the same time to ask permission to serve the poor at table. But I misconceived the situation for I discovered that they did not eat together and I was surprised to find out that they wanted to make me an offering and had told the doorkeeper not to let me go away. I blessed God that I had been taken for a poor man wearing the glorious livery of the poor and I thanked my brothers and sisters for their kindness.

Since then they have become so attached to me that they are going about saying openly that I am to be their priest, that is, their director, for there has not been a regular director in the poorhouse for a considerable time, so abandoned has it become.

Letter 11 to Monsieur Leschassier

The bishop of Poitiers, unable to resist the insistent appeals of the poor any longer, gave me up to them shortly after All Saints Day. I entered this poorhouse, or rather this poor Babylon, quite determined to bear in union with Jesus Christ my Saviour the cross that would not fail to fall to me if this work was really God’s work. All that I had been told by a number of experienced priests of the town to dissuade me from going to this ill-regulated house only increased my determination to undertake this work despite my own inclinations which have always been and still are for mission work.

● **LIGHT FROM THE BIBLE:**

Matt 25:31-40

‘When the Son of man comes in his glory, escorted by all the angels, then he will take his seat on his throne of glory. All nations will be assembled before him and he will separate people one from another as the shepherd separates sheep from goats. He will place the sheep on his right hand and the goats on his left. Then the King will say to those on his right hand, “Come, you whom my Father has blessed, take as your heritage the kingdom prepared for you since the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you made me welcome, lacking clothes and you clothed me, sick and you visited me, in prison and you came to see me.” Then the upright will say to him in reply, “Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? When did we see you a stranger and make you welcome, lacking clothes and clothe you? When did we find you sick or in prison and go to see you?” And the King will answer, “In truth I tell you, in so far as you did this to one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did it to me.”’

● **PERSONAL INTEGRATION/SHARING**

- Going back over the texts: what links do I see between them? What do they teach me about Montfort? And about my relationship with God and with others?
- How am I, personally, close to the poor and the deprived?
- How are my local community and my entity close to the deprived?
- The deprived are sometime closer than we think: a sick, fragile or difficult relative or confrere... How can I make them welcome?
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● **PRAYER/CELEBRATION**

Lord Jesus, who were so close to the deprived of this world, fill us with your compassion, that we may make the same concrete gestures after your example.

The poor are naked: teach us to clothe them in clothes and in dignity.

Thousands of children are hungry: teach us to give them food and a future.

Everywhere prisoners are humiliated: teach us to free them of their chains and their hatred.

Foreigners are judged and marginalised: teach us to welcome them into our hearts and our homes.

How many of the sick are forgotten: teach us to give them a presence and hope.

Lord, open our eyes, that we may learn to recognise you in our poorest brothers and sisters. Open our hands and our arms, that we may learn to act for them. Amen.

- **SYMBOL:**

A loaf of bread (or a dish with the common food of the country)

- **COMMITMENT:**

- Jesus enumerates six ways of helping others: food, drink, a welcome, clothing, visiting the sick, visiting those in prison. In which of these can I be involved?

