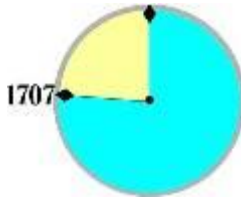


15. EVENT: Stay at Saint-Lazare

- **DATE** : September 1707
- **PLACE** : St-Lazare
- **VALUE** : Community life
- **THE STORY** :



“Louis Marie combs the countryside adjoining the town of Montfort for a suitable place in which to stay; he finds it in the hermitage of St. Lazare, which at one time had served as a leprosarium. He is not alone: Mathurin shares his life and another

recruit enlisted along the way, Brother Jean, completes the little group. “From the point of view of events soon to follow, the interval at St. Lazare takes on a particular significance. In this place is born the first Montfortian community of men. At St. Lazare, where Montfort's utopian dream is first lived in all its purity, the Company of Mary comes into being in embryonic form. It is, symbolically, the Cenacle of the poor, united in pleading for graces from on high, together in handing on the Word; it is the little Church of the Acts of the Apostles, prayerful and mission-oriented.

“The three men experience the awakening of the forest when the dawn sparks off the singing of the birds. Their days are passed in prayer, manual work (for they restore and decorate the small crumbling chapel of the hermitage), and preaching to the people round about who begin to come to St. Lazare as to a place of pilgrimage. The three hermits live a life of utter simplicity, stripped of all but the most elementary necessities, but they do not worry about the morrow. They live on the charity of people poor like themselves. Occasionally, they sit at table without even a scrap of bread before them while they wait for Providence's unflinching gift to appease their hunger.

“Louis savours the experience with its Franciscan delightfulness. He lives outside society's structures and experiences a borderline existence, yet he is, at the same time, very close to the poor. His uncompromising stance, so full of evangelical love, finds here a new incarnation. Saint Lazare where a priest and two laymen have only a stone for a pillow, achieves the one thing necessary: authentic communion. Perhaps this is why it is the best realisation so far of Louis' dream. It is a perfect embodiment of a life-style,

free because it is unencumbered by material things, effective because its prayer and apostolic life are motivated by only one value: love.

“The renewed walls of the chapel and hermitage are solid and rustic; their very solidity removes any hint of insubstantiality that Father de Montfort's dream might have had about it. At one stroke, in this little corner of the earth where life is intense and human, simple and varied, Louis succeeds in achieving a synthesis of the time spent with God alone and that given over to a tender closeness to the people. Above the altar of the chapel a few refreshing images that more or less summarise Montfortian spirituality are to be found: a dove, representing the Holy Spirit, spreads its wings over the name of Jesus written in large letters, and also over a statue of Mary, Our Lady of Wisdom, holding her child in her arms; the child holds in its tiny hand a sphere representing the earth.

“The quiet prayer of the three men becomes more and more interrupted by the needs of people. Peasants and vagabonds come in crowds; if the chapel cannot hold them all, Louis gathers them in the shade of the magnificent oak tree that protects the sanctuary. He speaks to them of God and prays the rosary with them. Behind them, the forest of Brocéliande serves as a majestic cathedral for this most primitive of missions.” (*Papasogli*)

● **FROM MONTFORT’S WRITINGS:** (*Rule of the Missionaries of the Company of Mary, 44-49*)

44. (1) Their charity to one another will be full of attention and good will, and they will look for opportunities to do one another a good turn. It will be marked by mutual respect which brings them to give precedence to others and by patience which will enable them to bear with one another's faults.

45. (2) This queen of all the virtues is the queen and superior who governs the Company with her golden sceptre. She is its life-blood, the bond which holds it together and its guardian; pride, self-conceit and self-seeking being banished from it. "Cross the threshold, life-giving love reigns within."

46. (3) Their charity towards everyone, especially towards their enemies, will be joyful and sincere. They will return good for evil and, far from complaining about anyone who has done them a notable injury, or speaking ill of him or taking revenge, they will pray to God for him for a week.

47. (4) Be it during the time of their missions or not, the poor are to be the especial objects of their care. They must never refuse to help them,

materially when possible, and spiritually, even if they say only one Hail Mary.

48. (5) After each catechetical instruction, they will provide a meal for all the poor of the parish who have attended the instruction and every morning and evening they will bring one of them in to eat at their table.

49. (6) They will strive to implement faithfully the words which express so well the charity of the great Apostle: "omnibus omnia factus sum" (I Cor. 9:22), becoming out of love all things to all men, even in indifferent matters, without getting caught up in the ways of the world or in any way becoming slack in the observance of their duty.

● **LIGHT FROM THE BIBLE:** (*Acts 2:42-47*)

[Members of the Jerusalem community] remained faithful to the teaching of the apostles, to the brotherhood, to the breaking of bread and to the prayers. And everyone was filled with awe; the apostles worked many signs and miracles. And all who shared the faith owned everything in common; they sold their goods and possessions and distributed the proceeds among themselves according to what each one needed. Each day, with one heart, they regularly went to the Temple but met in their houses for the breaking of bread; they shared their food gladly and generously; they praised God and were looked up to by everyone. Day by day the Lord added to their community those destined to be saved.

(*Colossians 3:9-15*)

You have stripped off your old behaviour with your old self, and you have put on a new self which will progress towards true knowledge the more it is renewed in the image of its Creator. (...) As the chosen of God, then, the holy people whom he loves, you are to be clothed in heartfelt compassion, in generosity and humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with one another; forgive each other if one of you has a complaint against another. The Lord has forgiven you; now you must do the same. Over all these clothes, put on love, the perfect bond. And may the peace of Christ reign in your hearts, because it is for this that you were called together in one body. Always be thankful.

● **PERSONAL INTEGRATION/SHARING**

- 'Living together' is always demanding, whether it be at a town level or that of a small community.

- What is it that makes this 'living together' difficult?
- What makes a community into a place of human and spiritual growth?
- What can I receive from the community and what can I offer it?

- **PRAYER/CELEBRATION**

Let us pray to the Lord that the newness of Christ may penetrate our hearts and our actions more and more.

- Look on our weakness, Lord, and through it build deep bonds of respect and friendship among us.

For where there is love, you are present there, Lord.

- Look at our differences, Lord, and transform them into an opportunity for encounter and sharing.

For where there is love, you are present there, Lord.

- See our personal riches, Lord, and teach us to put them at the service of our brothers and sisters.

For where there is love, you are present there, Lord.

- Look on our difficulties and crosses, Lord. Grant that we may live through them united to one another and to you.

For where there is love, you are present there, Lord.

- Hear our prayer, Lord, and pour into our hearts your Spirit of peace and communion.

For where there is love, you are present there, Lord.

- **SYMBOL:** Three places set at table, representing the community of St-Lazare.

- **COMMITMENT**

In a community prayer, offer to the Lord our riches and our poverty. Ask the Holy Spirit to renew our community life.