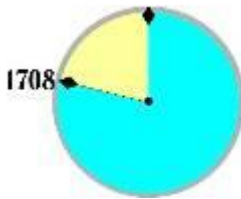


16. EVENT: The big missions

- **DATE** : 1708
- **PLACE** : The West of France
- **VALUE** : Evangelisation
- **THE STORY** :



Leaving Mont-St-Michel, Montfort preached several missions and retreats, with great success, in his native Brittany. During a large part of the year 1707, he was working as a member of the team led by M. Leuduger, the most famous missionary of that time, from whom he learnt the operating principles of a missionary team, and with whom he deepened his understanding of what a mission should be.

Then he was able to develop his own charism and inspiration. We will see later on how he adapted his activity and creativity to the people and their needs. For the moment, here is an idea of what characterised his work of evangelisation.

His apostolate would always be characterised by attitudes to which he clung throughout his whole life, particularly his efforts to relieve the miserable situation of the poor. Everywhere where he preached, he was concerned with them. It was at this time that his memorable cry of “Open up to Jesus Christ” took place. Care for the poor and the sick, in whom he saw the Sacrament of Jesus Christ, was always part and parcel of his proclamation of the Gospel. During those first years of preaching missions, as he had done in Poitiers, in line with the desires he expressed in his letter as a young priest in 1700, he himself taught catechism to the most deprived people. He introduced them to his secret of salvation, available even to the simplest people: meditation on the mysteries of the Rosary. One thing that was special to him was the renewal of the promises of Baptism and the signing of a “Covenant Contract with God”, done in public and signed as a solemn commitment to persevere in the good resolutions issuing from the mission. In this context, the consecration of oneself to Jesus Christ through the hands of Mary, and, more generally, devotion to the Blessed Virgin, was proposed as a privileged means for remaining faithful to one’s Baptism: to Jesus through Mary.



The whole thing was accompanied by the singing of hymns that he composed to popular tunes, on the themes of the simplest and clearest faith, on the moral principles guiding the Christian life, and on the holiest forms of devotion for the people and the Church, especially the Rosary. His preaching on the mystery of the Cross was crowned at the end of each mission by the erection of a cross—sometimes of a calvary—to perpetuate the memory of the moment of grace accorded by the Lord to the village and the parish. Father de Montfort would become famous for his grand celebrations of the closure of the mission.

● **FROM MONTFORT’S WRITINGS:** (*Hymn 22: 1, 5, 16*)

1. My choice is made! I’ll roam
through the world,
Living just like a vagabond,
To rescue my poor neighbour.
Could I see my dear brother’s
soul
Perishing everywhere through
sin,
My heart not being touched?
No, No, Lord, his soul is too
dear.

5. Grant me the gift of wisdom
And of fervent charity,
Creating a godlike man.

Great God, make my voice
thunder
So evil may be destroyed,
And your holy Will be done
On earth, and in heaven.

16. In the exercise of my zeal,
Make me always very faithful
To the duties of holiness;
May my spring gush forth night
and day,
Never leaving me depleted,
May I preach to transform hearts,
But by preaching, let me be
renewed.

The grace of touching hearts

“The mission in Bréal was so successful that M. Hindré [the rector] could not conceal his happy surprise. And Louis Marie replied: ‘I made a pilgrimage of more than two thousand leagues to ask God for the grace of touching hearts, and he has answered my prayer.’” (*Vilain, page 148*).

● **LIGHT FROM THE BIBLE:** (*Luke 4:16-22*)

Jesus came to Nazara, where he had been brought up, and went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day as he usually did. He stood up to read, and they handed him the scroll of the prophet Isaiah. Unrolling the scroll he found the place where it is written: The spirit of the Lord is on me, for he has anointed me to bring the good news to the afflicted. He has sent me to

proclaim liberty to captives, sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim a year of favour from the Lord. He then rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the assistant and sat down. And all eyes in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to speak to them, 'This text is being fulfilled today even while you are listening.' And he won the approval of all, and they were astonished by the gracious words that came from his lips.

● **PERSONAL INTEGRATION/SHARING**

- Christ was 'sent' by the Father, and in his turn he sent the Apostles. Montfort felt himself to be sent. And I, do I feel sent? To whom? Why?
- Montfort prays that his work as a preacher might be for himself, too, a source of holiness (cf. *Hymn 22:16*). How is my own work, for myself, a spring where I can 'drink' God?
- Montfort asked for the grace of 'touching hearts'. What is needed that a sermon might truly touch the heart and bear fruit in life?

● **PRAYER/CELEBRATION**

Lord, you confide a mission to each one of us. We pray with Montfort that you would accompany us on this mission that you have entrusted to us, saying:

Make me, Lord, your missionary. (*Hymn 22:31*)

- Enlighten us, Lord, that we might have a good understanding of the mission that you entrust to us at various times in our life:

Make me, Lord, your missionary.

- May your Spirit, Lord, give us strength and courage to accomplish our mission joyfully.

Make me, Lord, your missionary.

- Like Montfort, make us, Lord, attentive to the needs of the poorest of our brothers and sisters.

Make me, Lord, your missionary.

- So many young people are seeking a wisdom to guide their lives, and some meaning for their existence.

Make me, Lord, your missionary.

- So many suffering people feel themselves to be useless in a world obsessed with productivity.

Make me, Lord, your missionary.

- So many elderly people are alone with their memories and their solitude.

Make me, Lord, your missionary.

- **SYMBOL:** A shoulder pack containing the Gospel.
- **COMMITMENT**
- Recite the *Prayer for Missionaries* written by Montfort to ask for missionaries whose word will ‘touch hearts’.



Drawing of the procession at the end of the mission in La Rochelle, by an eye-witness