

17. EVENT: Erection and demolition of the Calvary at Pontchâteau

- **DATE** : Beginning: Summer 1709; Summer - 14 September 1710
- **PLACE** : Pontchâteau
- **VALUE** : The cross: that of Christ, and my own
- **THE STORY** :



We know the story of the Calvary at Pontchâteau, built by the faith of the people, and demolished through jealousy and the meanness of people in high places.

Louis Marie continued his preaching in the neighbouring villages and parishes, but himself managed, by frequent visits, several hundreds of the peasant folk who were making a concerted effort and raising a mighty hill on which the three crosses would be placed. During this time, the news of what was happening spread far and wide, and reinforcements arrived from all over the place, even from as far away as England... Montfort succeeded in finding the money necessary to provide food for all the volunteers who were working without ceasing.

Begun in the Summer of 1709, everything was ready in September of 1710 for its inauguration and blessing. The day had been fixed: 14 September, Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross. The chapels of the Stations of the Cross were finished, the life-size statues were in place. More than 20,000 people had arrived from all over. Montfort's father and some other members of his own family were among this number. But in the evening of Saturday 13th, there came, quite unexpectedly, a prohibition of the blessing of the Calvary. Stupefaction reigned, for the Bishop had given his authorisation. During that night, Montfort hastened to Nantes, and the Bishop received him next morning to explain to him the veto that had arrived from Paris, from the Ministry of War, which saw this construction as a possible fort that the English or brigands could occupy.

Montfort took this event with calmness, serenity and simplicity, with no air of being persecuted. He undertook a retreat in St-Molf, where he received a second blow: the prohibition of his ministry. Following this, he made a retreat at the house of the Jesuits in Nantes. Father Préfontaine wrote: "I used to see him as a good man ... but his calm, his equanimity and his tranquillity... made me look upon him as a SAINT." His friend. M. des

Bastières, hurried to console him, but it was Montfort who consoled *him*:
“His holy name be praised!”

Montfort was sharing the cross of Christ. The resemblance is striking:
Reasons of state... A man fearful of no longer being seen as a friend of
Caesar... An innocent victim... A place called Calvary... And in God’s
eyes, this was to be, yet again, the victory of life!

Nothing would be able stop Montfort anymore, freer and stronger than
ever, “raising up the cross in the depths of his heart,” higher even than on
the hill of the Madeleine, his only dream now was to continue the work of
the missions.

Three times the Calvary of Pontchâteau was to be demolished, and three
times rebuilt by the arms of faith of a population that Montfort had marked
with his love for Christ.

● **FROM MONTFORT’S WRITINGS:** (*Hymn 11: 36-37, 33*)

You desire then, Jesus my master,
That I be with you on the cross.

I am content, deign to place me
there,

It is for me too much honour by
far.

In putting me there, give me your
grace

And keep me there by your
might,

That I may walk in your footsteps
In suffering most gladly.

I am a poorly polished stone,
Crude and without adornment,

Shape it, Lord, I beg you,
To set it in your building.

I want to suffer in patience,
Cut, shape, strike, slice,
But help my helplessness
And forgive me my sins.

This amazing grace,
This joy in affliction,
We obtain through prayer
We make with humility.
To obtain it, let us pray to Mary;
Through her sorrow-pierced heart
She bestows life
And even the cross of the Lord.

● **LIGHT FROM THE BIBLE:** (*Luke 9:18-25*)

Now it happened that Jesus was praying alone, and his disciples came to
him and he put this question to them, 'Who do the crowds say I am?' And
they answered, 'Some say John the Baptist; others Elijah; others again one
of the ancient prophets come back to life.' 'But you,' he said to them, 'who
do you say I am?' It was Peter who spoke up. 'The Christ of God,' he said.
But he gave them strict orders and charged them not to say this to anyone.

He said, 'The Son of man is destined to suffer grievously, to be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes and to be put to death, and to be raised up on the third day.' Then, speaking to all, he said, 'If anyone wants to be a follower of mine, let him renounce himself and take up his cross every day and follow me. Anyone who wants to save his life will lose it; but anyone who loses his life for my sake, will save it. What benefit is it to anyone to win the whole world and forfeit or lose his very self?

(2 Corinthians 12:9-10)

It is, then, about my weaknesses that I am happiest of all to boast, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me; and that is why I am glad of weaknesses, insults, constraints, persecutions and distress for Christ's sake. For it is when I am weak that I am strong.

● **PERSONAL INTEGRATION/SHARING**

- Neither Jesus nor Montfort actively sought suffering. But the spiritual journey of Montfort caused him to experience the mysterious fruitfulness of the cross. As trials, difficulties and ruptures occur in my life, have I myself experienced the fruitfulness of the cross?
- What values underlie the stark language of the Wisdom Cross of Poitiers?
- If I had to make my own 'Cross of Poitiers', what words would I write on it?
- Going beyond words, how can I help and walk with someone who is suffering?

● **PRAYER/CELEBRATION**

We do not venerate just any cross; we venerate the Cross of Christ, for it is for us the sign of a love that gives itself to the limit. It reveals for us the powerful mystery of suffering.

- I offer you, Lord, the sufferings of people who have asked for my prayers.

By your cross, O Christ, give us strength and hope.

- I offer you, Lord, all the pain of people suffering from cancer.

By your cross, O Christ, give us strength and hope.

- I offer you, Lord, the anguish of parents in the face of their children's mistakes.

By your cross, O Christ, give us strength and hope.

- I offer you, Lord, the powerlessness of abused and ill-treated children.

By your cross, O Christ, give us strength and hope.

- I offer you, Lord, the suffering of believers who are troubled by doubts and spiritual dryness.

By your cross, O Christ, give us strength and hope.

- I offer you, Lord, my own crosses, those of the past, those of the present, and those yet to come.

By your cross, O Christ, give us strength and hope.

● **SYMBOL:** A crucifix, the Cross of Poitiers.

● **COMMITMENT**

- Make my own 'Cross of Poitiers': take the form of the Wisdom Cross of Poitiers, and write on it my personal crosses...

- Make myself present to someone who is going through a trial, either by writing, by my words, or by a visit...

