



Gabriel DESHAYES Sower of Life: 300 Pilgrims celebrate his Arrival in Saint Laurent 200 years ago

SAINT-LAURENT-SUR-SÈVRE, France - "What do you want me to do for you?" This was the common thread in the life of Gabriel Deshayes, tireless founder of congregations and educational, health and social works. 200 years after his arrival in Saint-Laurent-sur-Sèvre in 1821, his many heirs lived on Sunday, October 24, 2021, in the Basilica of St. Louis-Marie Grignon de Montfort, a day radiant by the weather and luminous by the shared joy. Celebration, forum with testimonies from missionaries, official launch of the Gabriel Deshayes Album, before a symbolic dispatch marked this meeting of memory and fully turned towards the future on this World Mission Sunday. The religious and lay people of 5 congregations - Sisters of Christian Instruction, Saint-Gildas-des-Bois, Brothers of Christian Instruction - La Mennais, Ploërmel, Montfort Missionaries, Fathers and Brothers of the Company of Mary, Daughters of Wisdom and Brothers of Saint Gabriel - totaling a presence in 70 countries were also surrounded by members of the Association of Friends of Gabriel Deshayes and the network of pastoral care for the deaf of Morbihan and Loire-Atlantique. The day was also marked in memory of Father Olivier Maire, SMM.

"For me, Gabriel Deshayes was a great discovery!" Several participants in the meeting that Sunday were immediately showing the different aspects of Fr. Deshayes. Yes, the story of Fr. Deshayes' action in Saint Laurent and in the service of congregations was a surprise to many, as well as his many actions with the needy, the unemployed, prisoners, not to mention the hearing and sensory impaired. The life of Father Deshayes received less recognition in the formation houses of the congregations, and the historical works had not produced so much fruit.

On January 17, 1821, Gabriel Deshayes was elected Superior General of the Montfortian Family in Saint-Laurent-sur-Sèvre. During his 20 years of presence in Saint Laurent from 1821 to 1841, he was the one who managed, developed, gave an unequalled impetus to the Fathers

and Brothers of the Company of Mary known as Montfortians, to the Daughters of Wisdom and to the Brothers of Saint Gabriel. Born in Brittany in Beignon in 1767, he became interested in the realities around him very early on. He wanted to become a priest to respond to the difficulties observed in families: the lack of work, the difficulties of raising children and the lack of spiritual life.

Also, for 50 years, he launched construction sites and social activities with job seekers and prisoners. He was a pioneer for the deaf. He founded teams of teachers - religious and religious in new congregations. He was involved in heritage management in the service of educational, health, social and spiritual projects. He listened and reflected. And he was looking for support from donors and well-wishers.

A giant of compassion

The parish celebration at the Basilica was marked by the strong presence of the Montfort Fathers, many concelebrants, several deacons and the choir. In his homily, Father Marco Pasinato, SMM, assistant general of the Montfort Missionaries, highlighted the compassion of Father Deshayes.

"Why did Gabriel Deshayes arrive in Saint-Laurent-sur-Sèvre?", he asked. Yes, we know the historical circumstances, and even his answer: "*I am going to Saint Laurent to continue the work of Montfort*", but at the origin of this affinity with Father de Montfort, there was a meeting with Christ, a meeting which took place on the day of his baptism, December 6, 1767, in the church of Beignon - the very day of his birth. This encounter echoed throughout his life the same invitation from today's Gospel: "*Cheer up! Get up! He's calling you!*". "It is a call not to give up in the face of the miseries of your time, but to live, in turn, with confidence the same compassion, a call which is always found in Gabriel Deshayes, an enthusiastic, generous and formidable response!

"*Cheer up! Get up! He's calling you!*" "Here is the most beautiful instruction from Gabriel Deshayes, as well as from Saint Louis-Marie de Montfort, Marie-Louise of Jesus and the Marquis de Magnan each time we return to Saint-Laurent-sur-Sèvre every time we set foot in this Basilica to find inspiration and light.", concluded Fr. Pasinato.

Father Olivier Maire, SMM, who died last August, postulator of Gabriel Deshayes, presented in 2018, during two Deshayes days, the latter's action in Saint Laurent between 1821 and 1841. That Sunday, Bro. Claude Launay and Sr. Bernadette Coche gave a presentation of an audio-visual montage.

A tree for thousands of birds

During the forum on "Being a missionary today: what meaning and what challenges?", the public was thrilled by many testimonies of Mrs. Audrey LEMARQUAND, employee in a retirement home, hearing-impaired, residing in Nantes; Sister Pierrette BWANBA, General Councillor of the Daughters of Wisdom, a Congolese who is currently in Paris; Fr. Willi SELMAN, SMM, an Indonesian who is a member of the team of Montfortians of the sanctuary of Pontchâteau; Bro. Michel KIENTEGA, Brother of Saint Gabriel, of Burkinabé nationality, in training in Angers and Mr. Eric JOYEAU, professor of philosophy at the Lycée St. Gabriel in Saint-Laurent-sur-Sèvre.

Each guest presented an object symbolizing the mission in his eyes today: a photo of a bridge, a statuette of a woman from the Congo, gifts exchanged during international meetings, a photo showing smiles between generations, an instrument of traditional Indonesian music.

From their life itinerary and their personal history, the speakers shared their sensitive testimony. The participants were touched and challenged. The facts and experiences lived with women in D.R. Congo, in classes in Burkina Faso or in Saint-Laurent-sur-Sèvre, the presence with young people in Indonesia or with old people in a retirement home had so many situations described with heart, soul and passion by witnesses.

They also shared about their support and resources in the face of difficulties: for some a relationship with God and a prayer that gives strength, for others life in the community or in the family, contacts and relationships.

Sr. Pierrette Bwanba quoted on several occasions the Congolese proverb which describes well in her eyes the figure of Father Deshayes: "In a large tree, come to settle and shelter thousands of birds".

To be heirs to the spirit of Gabriel Deshayes! Valérie THÉAUD, descendant of the family of Gabriel Deshayes in the 7th generation, told with force and sensitivity how much she is touched by her proximity to this figure. "The action of our grandfather is not about to end, thanks to these women and men who have followed in his footsteps for two centuries. We are proud of it and we can give thanks to God for it every day."

A book about Gabriel Deshayes

New! 5 parts + 72 pages + 200 photos. Title: "Gabriel Deshayes. Sower of life". Here are the contents of the book: My logbook: Gabriel Deshayes tells his story; Man of action and coach: 6 management points inspired by him; Tireless Founder: Overview of Congregations and Works; Spiritual guide: 7 days with Gabriel Deshayes; A spirit for today: practical benchmarks for going further.

Symbolic sending: a fountain with the dimensions of the world

The participants left the Basilica to go to the memorial area on the Esplanade des Frères de Saint Gabriel. Around the fountain which became gushing at the time of the sending and the blessing, Fr. Paulin RAMANADRAIBE, SMM, rector of the Basilica, invited the 5 congregations and 2 associations to continue their mission in the world and gave them a bust in the earth.

Brothers of Ploërmel