



**Annual Retreat, Opening of the Initiation Year and Renewal of Vows
at the Montfort Scholasticate in Gitega, Burundi**
“Under the wake of the Holy Spirit, with Mary, let us become signs for our
brothers and sisters”

GITEGA, Burundi - It is under this annual theme dedicated to the Holy Spirit, with Mary, that the initiation year 2022-2023 at the Montfort Scholasticate in Gitega, Burundi opened on Saturday, September 24th. This opening ceremony was preceded by a week divided into two: the three days were devoted to the session about Montfortian Spirituality and the other three days to the annual retreat.

First, we had the session about Montfortian Spirituality. Started on September 15th, animated with a great Montfortian touch by Father Jean-Trésor BAFENGO, SMM, this session had as its theme "Montfortian availability", a theme of great importance in Montfortian Spirituality, and which is part of pillars of the Montfortian Charism. It ended on September 17th, 2022.

At first glance, the Father Animator of the Session began by insinuating that availability is first of all the capacity that a person has to be quickly used. This term goes hand in hand with adaptability. Availability is a virtue that honours God. It is a sign of the trust that God places in us, and a sign of the faith that we have in God.

In addition, availability and the spirit of belonging go hand in hand. To belong is to be someone's property. "I belong to Jesus, to God..." To say that someone is Montfortian is to say that one is a property of the Company of Mary. The ability to live availability depends on our apostolic fruitfulness.

Finally, the last point in this Session consisted in seeing the availability in the Montfortian charism. Here, Father Animator pointed out that the notion of availability at Montfort was in the foreground. The latter conceived of availability as an interior freedom that God gave him to always listen to him while responding to the needs of the Church. Availability implies unavailability. This allows us to better live detachment, as underlined in number 91 of Montfortian Constitutions.

We concluded this session, in light of the theme of the next General Chapter, by emphasizing that Montfortian availability allows us to risk for God. And as a final recommendation, Father Animator let us know that, as Montfortians, we are new Davids (Prayer Embraced 8), called to face new challenges. The virtue of availability must be at the center of the life of a Montfortian. Montfortian availability is rooted in docility to the Holy Spirit.

In a second moment, after a day of break, came the turn of the annual retreat which took place from Monday 19th to Wednesday, September 21st. It was animated also by Father Jean-Trésor BAFENGO, SMM. Its theme was: "*Montfortians, let yourselves be formed by the Holy Spirit in order to become his products*". The numbers 15 and 16 of the Prayer of Missionaries and the Gospel of Luke 4: 16 to 19 served as references for understanding and meditation of this theme.

Indeed, since our baptism and our confirmation, we have received the Holy Spirit. Because of this, we can know that the Holy Spirit is using us if we are able to convert the pagans (Rom 1:16); if we are able to touch the hearts of others (2 Tim 1:7); if we are able to meet the challenges (1 S 17, 1-54); if we do not hesitate to try (Mt 14, 27-33); if we have the Word of God on our lips (Mt 4:1-14); if we have the spirit of discernment. Finally, if we are able to positively influence the lives of others.

However, we can only be under the protection of the Holy Spirit if we live our time of fidelity with the Virgin Mary. To conclude this retreat, the numbers on the vows in the Montfortian Constitutions (82-115) were read and meditated on to allow the participants of this retreat to recapture the meaning of their religious profession.

Ultimately, this week of spiritual exercises ended with a Mass for the opening of the initiation year 2022-2023 during which the three scholastics of the DGAF renewed their religious vows. It should be noted that these wishes were received by the Delegate Superior of the DGAF, Fr. Louis-Guélord ASEME, SMM, who left the DR Congo to receive them and also to make a canonical visit to the Montfortian confreres working in Burundi.

May the Holy Spirit assist each of us so that the mission of evangelization bears fruit in abundance.

Bro. Emmanuel KWASIA, SMM