



A French vocation in the Montfortian Family

PONTCHATEAU, France – On January 15, Sr. Christine PICHERY pronounced her perpetual vows in the Congregation of the Daughters of Wisdom in the Church of Pontchâteau. The Mass was celebrated by Mgr. Laurent PERCEROU, Bishop of Nantes. Sister Christine is French and works at Saint Martin College in Pontchâteau. She lives with three other sisters at the Calvary of Pontchâteau. We interviewed her about her vocation and her mission.

On the day of your Religious Profession someone said: “Today we are going to witness a miracle: the commitment of a young French sister. Why – in your opinion – is this life choice so rare??

Indeed, making a definitive commitment to consecrated life is becoming “extremely rare” in France. Through my Pastoral mission with young people, I see that our country is dechristianizing. Our young people no longer have Christian references, and the transmission of the faith is almost no longer ensured by parents or grandparents as was done before. And yet, according to the statistics, there have never been so many catechumens in recent years. Will religious life find future consecrated people in these people?

In Poulenc's opera “*Les Dialogues des Carmélites*”, there is the prioress who says to a young woman who wishes to enter the convent: “What God wants is not your strength, but your weakness”. How do you receive this sentence?

I find myself so much in these words. For my part, I was jostled by this Biblical verse in Mark 10:49 “*Cheer up! On your feet! He’s calling you*”. Yes, the Lord comes to me in the midst of my weaknesses, my fragilities, my vulnerability, and, in his generosity, He gives me the strength to get up again, to pursue my way of life with Him. I will fall once, twice, ten times... but I know that God

will always be by my side because if “men look at the appearance, the Lord looks at the heart. » (1 Sam 16:7) and He does not call the best for his mission but makes better those whom He calls.

Share with us the originality of your contribution to the mission.

To be a missionary in the world of today (like that of yesterday) is to have the audacity to carry out projects in an uncertain future. What will religious life be like in 10 years, 20 years in Europe and in the world? Nobody knows. On the other hand, the Lord asks me to be attentive every day to the world around me and to watch for the signs of the times, as Montfort and Marie-Louise of Jesus did. Thus, events are a source of life in me and for others. In my mission, this translates into welcoming and listening to the young people I meet (especially the most fragile). Starting from young people, from what they are, taking the time to listen to them, to accompany them to allow them to encounter Christ. On the site of the Calvary of Pontchâteau, it is also to offer times of creative healing adapted to young people. In the intergenerational community where I live, it means ensuring respect for each of my sisters and daring to bring my touch of youth.

To be a missionary today is to be God's gardener who takes the time to watch over the "young springs" and who some time later is in thanksgiving for the marvels that the Lord has accomplished in them and often this “work” escapes us.

A word on the missionary project of Pontchâteau as the Montfortian Family.

For the past few months, we have been thinking about the future of the Sanctuary, which is called to be one of the radiant poles of the diocese of Nantes. I collaborate with young committed lay people, a Montfortian missionary from Indonesia, a Brother of Saint Gabriel from Senegal and the Episcopal delegate on the "youth" pole. I like to compare our thinking work to a beehive. We are like those buzzing bees. Our team is motivated and contributes to the construction of a project that goes beyond us but with the desire to work, reflect and pool our ideas. Our work is intended to be synodal and we allow ourselves to be questioned about the youth of this world, their desires, their dreams. Together we look at how we can respond as an extended Montfortian Family.

We allow ourselves to dream of projects, some of which are feasible and others still need to mature. Our “unlimited” creativity leaves room for a lot of hope in what we will offer in the coming months. Our desire is to reach the young people of this world, in particular the most fragile, by offering them times of praise, various prayers, gratitude and awareness of creation, but also to transmit to them our Montfortian spiritual roots.

In his Pastoral Letter, the Bishop of Nantes makes three appeals to religious communities: to remain for the Church witnesses of Hope, artisans of encounter and companions of the wounded man. How are you answering this call?

My Pastoral mission with the youngest is this “sign of hope, being artisans of the encounter and companions of the wounded man” which wants to be concrete when, by chance of a discussion, I transmit Christian values that I received. I also respond to this triple call when I take the time to listen in simplicity and kindness to parishioners and colleagues who are looking for an attentive ear. Welcoming these pieces of life, carrying them in prayer and slipping a few "inspired" words to those I meet is my response to the call of Bishop PERCEROU.

During the Year of Consecrated Life, you set off with other young religious men and women on the roads of Vendée in an old Citroën 2CV, stopping in the village squares to meet people. What was the goal? What do you take away from this experience?

The “*Dodoche Tour*”: what a great adventure! This vocational project aimed to make consecrated life visible in an original way. The 2CV referred to our nursing sisters who used these cars to get around. A great experience that exceeded our expectations and allowed us to reach an audience that was

sometimes far from the church. These meetings and the proposed quiz helped to break down many *clichés* about religious life. Consecrated to the Lord, certainly, but in the real life!

It is always said that “Renewal comes through Formation”. Do you agree? In which way?

Indeed, in our society constantly in motion and evolving at high speed, it seems to me essential to be in ongoing formation. Personally, I can measure the benefits of the different training courses I have followed in my way of thinking, acting, relating and questioning myself. Jesus himself spent his time training the disciples and the crowd that followed him. Admittedly, these teachings and the training jostle me, but once again, they allow me to better understand, adapt and integrate my knowledge into the world in which I live.

Speaking to missionaries, especially those who are engaged today in Europe, what would you like to say?

“Keep the hope and the flame of our first call”. We can be tempted by discouragement, tired by the many crises that our Common House is going through (global warming, violence of all kinds, inflation, shortage of vocations...) which are beginning to our spiritual vitality. Have we forgotten these beautiful words of Saint Paul? : *“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ... For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8 :35-39).* This Christ who never stopped telling us that He is with us until the end of time. Do we believe it? Is it still a sign of hope for us? Twenty years separate me from the last Daughter of Wisdom who made perpetual Profession before me. Perhaps as much on the one who is currently in initial formation...but, I am sure, the Lord watches over our Congregation just as he watches over that of the Montfort Missionaries: *“Be reassured about the future of your community, the arm of God is not shortened and, as the institutes of M. de Montfort are works of God, he is interested in supporting and preserving them, and he will never abandon us while we are faithful to him”* (Letter 22, by Mary-Louise of Jesus).

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