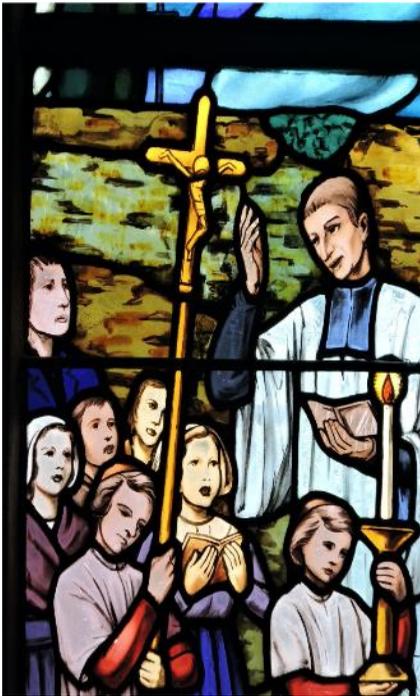




His zeal: none more ardent



Stained glass window:
Parish Church of La Séguinière

TO KNOW HIM

“Louis' whole life, his choices, his penances, the concrete expressions of his availability, up to the one that brought him to the feet of the Pope, took place on a high tone: the action of the missionary knows the same intensity. If the words are fiery, the initiatives are bold and overflowing with passion.

Some scenes narrated by Father de Bastières sufficiently describe the explosive style of Father de Montfort: “He often took me to places of crime without telling me, fearing, with reason, that I would not want to go there, if I knew...

When we entered those disgraceful places, he first got down on his knees in the middle of the room, with a small crucifix in his hand. I followed his example, we said a Hail Mary, and after

kissing the ground, we got up again. He then **preached** with **such force** that those people in the room did not know what to say or what to do; they were totally dismayed. The majority went out without saying a word, and the women remained; some wept bitterly, others remained motionless like statues; but Father de Montfort made them kneel and he himself knelt down... It happened once that while Father de Montfort was reciting his *Hail Mary*, among nine or ten people from the underworld, there was one who also fell on her knees to pray to God. All the others went out except one, who threw himself on Father de Montfort, like a wolf on a lamb, took him by the hair with his left hand, drawing his sword with the other, and told him, swearing horribly, that if he did not leave the place immediately, he would stab him with the sword. Father de Montfort, not at all intimidated, gave him this answer: «I accept, sir, that you take my life and I will gladly forgive you my death, as long as you promise to convert; because I love the **salvation of your soul** a thousand times more than ten thousand lives like mine». These words were like a strong thunderbolt to the wretched man; he was so scared that he trembled from head to toe, so much so that he had difficulty sheathing his sword and even more so finding the door to get out. We remained alone in the room with that miserable woman who was on her knees like us and who was more than half dead like me; Father de Montfort took her with us... This impetuous man who exposes himself, a priest, defenseless, at the risk of his own life, ignoring the "what will people say", into a den of crime; this man who makes prostitutes cry, possessed towards souls – beyond the influence exerted by his courageously non-conformist personality – the **communicativeness of love**. Love-sweetness: such is the surprise, the conquest, the maturity of Father de Montfort.

Many testimonies, indeed, confirm that Louis was, in personal contacts, the **sweetest of fathers**... He himself usually said that he would prefer to suffer in purgatory for having been too gentle rather than too rigorous with souls”.

(Benedetta PAPANOGGI, Montfort un uomo per l'ultima chiesa [Montfort, a man for the last Church], Roma 1991², 312-314.)



THE GUIDING WORD

**Let us listen to the Word of God
from the Book of the prophet Isaiah
(59: 14-21)**

Our courts oppose the righteous, and justice is nowhere to be found. Truth stumbles in the streets, and honesty has been outlawed. Yes, truth is gone, and anyone who renounces evil is attacked.

The Lord looked and was displeased to find there was no justice. He was amazed to see that no one intervened to help the oppressed.

So, he himself stepped in to save them with his strong arm, and his justice sustained him. He put on righteousness as his body armor and placed the helmet of salvation on his head. He clothed himself with a robe of vengeance and wrapped himself in a cloak of divine passion.

He will repay his enemies for their evil deeds. His fury will fall

on his foes. He will pay them back even to the ends of the earth. In the west, people will respect the name of the Lord; in the east, they will glorify him. For he will come like a raging flood tide driven by the breath of the Lord.

“The Redeemer will come to Jerusalem to buy back those in Israel who have turned from their sins,” says the Lord. “And this is my covenant with them,” says the Lord. “My Spirit will not leave them, and neither will these words I have given you. They will be on your lips and on the lips of your children and your children’s children forever. I, the Lord, have spoken!”

LET US MEDITATE

From PSALM 119

Your commands give me delight.

Your statutes are wonderful;
therefore I obey them.

The unfolding of your words gives light;
it gives understanding to the simple.

My soul longs for your commands.

Direct my footsteps according to your word;
let no sin rule over me.
Redeem me from human oppression,
that I may obey your precepts.

Make your face shine on your servant
and teach me your decrees.
Streams of tears flow from my eyes,
for your law is not obeyed.

My zeal wears me out,
for my enemies ignore your words.
Your promises have been thoroughly tested
and your servant loves them.

Though I am lowly and despised,
I do not forget your precepts.
Your righteousness is everlasting
and your law is true.

Trouble and distress have come upon me:
but your commands give me delight.
Your statutes are always righteous:
give me understanding that I may live.

TODAY FOR ME

In the dictionary, I have found this definition of **zeal**: “Fervid engagement in carrying out a task, an activity, a duty: working, serving with zeal; attending one's duties zealously; zealously doing the utmost to help the marginalized. It's often associated with a more or less accentuated sense of emulation, the zeal to surpass others, to stand out among everyone”. And further on: “In the language of the Catholic Church, zeal is the **fervent working for the glory of God**, which is mainly expressed **with the practice of prayer and the apostolate of word and deeds**, as well as with the ardent **desire to save souls**”.

I believe that whoever applied this word to the portrait of Montfort in the epigraph, really hit the center. Moreover, in Canticum 22 we have what I define as his self-portrait. “My choice is made! I'll roam through the world / living just like a vagabond / to rescue my poor neighbor (1). To convert souls, O Lord, bestow / your holiness into my soul / the truth into my mind / and pure fire in my heart (4). 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 (5). I cannot take an hour's rest / or stay that long within one house / seeing Jesus so offended (12). In the exercise of my zeal / make me always very faithful, O God, / 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 (16).

His example challenges us very powerfully. To us who often act out of “precept”, or driven by the idea of a God as executioner and judge, to us who love our comfort... the words of the Seer

of the Apocalypse who writes to the church of Laodicea should stimulate and make us reflect: “To the angel of the church in Laodicea write: «These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God’s creation. I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are **lukewarm** – neither hot nor cold – I am about to spit you out of my mouth»” (3:14-16).

FOR PERSONAL AWARENESS

- What guides me in my being a Christian: the force of habit, the fear of judgement, feeling embraced by His love ...
- “Zeal for your house devours me...”.
In which aspect of my life could I put more energy, passion, determination ...
- Sometimes, I identify my being Christian with being faithful to practices and prayers. But, perhaps, more than saying prayers, I need to “be prayer” ...



LET US PRAY WITH SAINT LOUIS

(from Canticle 22)

My Jesus, I want to be wise,
I want you alone for my lot,
For my possession and my worth.
My God, you alone and souls’ salvation!
No penny, then, of recompense.
What great wealth in my vocation,
For with your fire my heart is rich.

Grant me, Lord, I entreat you,
A very **ingenious zeal**;
Please instruct me **in all your truth**;
Enkindle me with new flame,
Teach me heavenly secrets,
So I may be more perfect,
More vigilant, more faithful.

Keep me from the great precipice:
From scruples concerning justice,
From a spirit of novelty
In my faith, my zeal, behavior.
Guard me then from all illusion
And from insincere devotion,
To follow you alone.

I am ready, Jesus, my Lord,
To turn to preach anywhere,
Supported by your power.
Make me, Lord, **your missionary**;
Even though it has no income
But only insults and rebuffs,
I am content, dear Model.

O Mary, O my good Mother,
Help me with a full army,
Hasten, I am now attacked.
May my word increase and bear fruit,
May I destroy iniquity,
May I grow in holiness,
And **may God be always glorified.**

