

Homily
for the 350th anniversary of the birth
of Saint Louis-Marie Grignion de Montfort,
Archbishop Pierre d'Ornellas of Rennes,
Montfort-sur-Meu, Sunday January 29, 2023

First Reading: Acts 1:6-14 Psalm 22 (21)

Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 1:17-25

Gospel: Matthew 28:16-20):

“My friends, what is love? Why is there love? What is love if not the love that loves for the sole reason that it loves. What is love if not, as the Tradition of the Church says, the good that spreads itself for the sole reason that it is good. This love is always there, growing in the heart of a mom or a dad, when a new child arrives. This love also grows in the heart of a grandfather or a grandmother when a new grandson or a new granddaughter comes. This love is always there to lovingly take on the ordeal, the difficulty of a child or a grandson or a granddaughter. How is it that this love in the human heart of a woman or a man does not diminish with the number of children or grandchildren? How is it that this love always grows, and is directed entirely as much towards one as towards the other who is the son, the daughter, the grandson, the granddaughter? Simply because it's love!

Outgoing love of God

This is the mystery of love! We can contemplate it in God who is Love (cf. 1 John 4:8). How is it that God came out of himself, as Jesus says: “I came out” (Mark 1:38)? Why did God come out of himself by sending his Son and by sending the Holy Spirit? Quite simply because he is Love for all of his children who constitute each man, each woman, each old man, each newborn, each child conceived in his mother's womb.

This Love of God for each one does not diminish according to the number of children in his humanity¹. In this humanity that he created out of love, the Love of God – I would dare say – grows for each of his children who comes to earth. More than that, this Love assumes the difficulty of each of his children: their sins and the fact that they are sinners.

Behold, this Love diffuses itself and does not allow itself to be stopped by what is contrary to it, the sin. This is the great mystery of the Love which comes from God and which constantly elicits this “going out” to reach every man, every woman, every child, every old person. This is the “exit” of the Good Shepherd who goes towards the sick, damaged, lost sheep; he takes her on his shoulders and brings her back to the fold (cf. Ezekiel 34:12-16). This Love is linked to the joy of having found the lost sheep (cf. Luke 15:5-7).

Pure Love and Evangelization

This love, it is pure! “Pure love”, we hear Saint Louis-Marie speaking to us about. First of all, Father de Montfort recognizes in the *True Devotion* that the one who is “infinitely pure” is Jesus. Why does Jesus go to the cross? Why does he go to the end to seek the sinner, embrace him and celebrate with him when he has been found, purified and forgiven (cf. Luke 15:11-

¹ Cf. Vatican Council II, Constitution on the Church in the modern world, *Gaudium et spes*, December 7, 1965, n. 18: “If man exists, it is because God created him out of love and, out of love, never ceases to give him being; and man does not live fully according to the truth unless he freely recognizes this love and surrenders himself to his Creator”.

24)? Quite simply because “Our Lord is infinitely pure”². This is love, the infinitely pure love which alone can reach the sinner and sanctify him!

In the Gospel we see the Apostles who are sent on mission (cf. Matthew 28:19-20). In fact, they are caught up in this infinitely pure love which seeks out every man and every woman. Why is the Church missionary? Why does the Second Vatican Council teach that the Church is missionary³? It only exists “to evangelize”⁴ because it is indwelt by the Holy Spirit, that is to say by the Love that the Spirit diffuses (cf. Romans 5:5).

Thus, those who take part in this mission of evangelization – Saint Louis-Marie was thinking above all of the priests of his nascent Company – that is to say, all the baptized, “will be, writes Saint Louis-Marie, true apostles of the last time, to whom the Lord of virtues will give speech and strength... They will have the silver wings of the dove, to go with the pure intention of the glory of God and the salvation of souls, where the Holy Spirit will call them, they will leave behind them, in the places where they have preached, only the gold of charity which is the fulfillment of all the law”⁵.

Thus, in celebrating the 350th anniversary of the birth of Saint Louis-Marie, we understand that we are all sent and that we must ask God for the grace of this “pure intention of the glory of God and the salvation of souls”. The pure intention of the glory of God in the care of the most fragile, the poorest, the most excluded! The pure intention of the salvation of souls is the love that pronounces no judgment or slanderous word on the sinner who has certainly committed evil. Because what is it? Of his soul and his salvation!

Here is that the “pure intention” of the Apostle which is part of the “going out” of the “infinitely pure” that is Jesus, is the salvation of the soul. For what? Because the soul always has a virgin place untouched by sin, where God dwells. Thus, evangelization is true only if it is inhabited by this “pure intention” of salvation, that is, of the expansion of the light of God in the soul.

Where to find purity?

Saint Louis-Marie then suggests that “we would die to ourselves”, in the sense that we have to die to our sins, to “our self-love”, to “our own will”, to all our justices which, in one certain way, are all defiled, as Scripture says (cf. Psalm 129,3-4). Thus, it is a death to oneself like the grain that has fallen to the ground and dies (cf. John 12:24). Dead to himself, the apostle will then be able to present himself with “a spark of pure love”⁶.

On this 350th anniversary, we are invited by the teaching of Saint Louis-Marie to ask for this “spark of pure love”. In this pure love, there is no longer any trace of self-reflecting. Then there is no point in trying to find joy in the love we give. It is a gratuitous love that has the added bonus of unsought joy. But where to find this purity? Indeed, Saint Louis-Marie asks himself: “Is our purity great enough to unite us directly to him”, to the infinitely pure, to participate in

² Saint-Louis-Marie Grignon de Montfort, *Traité de la vraie dévotion* (TD), n. 78.

³ Cf. Vatican Council II, Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, November 21, 1964, n. 17.

⁴ Cf. Paul VI, exhortation *Evangelii nuntiandi*, December 8, 1975 (EN), n. 14: “To evangelize is, in fact, the grace and the proper vocation of the Church, its deepest identity. It exists to evangelize” .

⁵ TD, n. 58. In evoking “the silver wings of the dove”, Saint Louis-Marie alludes to Psalm 67:14 where, according to the tradition of the Rabbis, the “dove” represents Israel. Keeping this tradition, we can also see the Church in it, and its “silver wings” can be interpreted as the treasure of faith, hope and charity, thanks to which we fly to God.

⁶ TD, n. 81.

his mission, because in truth, the only evangelizer is Jesus who is the Gospel itself⁷. “Is he not God in all things, equal to his Father, and therefore the Holy of Holies, as worthy of respect as his Father⁸? Jesus, the Holy of Holies! Wonderful formula! We sang it in Glory to God: “You alone are holy. »

Saint Louis-Marie continues to wonder: “If by his infinite charity, he has made himself our surety and our mediator with God his Father, to appease him and pay him what we owe him, is it necessary to why we have less respect and fear for His Majesty and His Holiness? How then can we be clean before God? Is it possible to be inhabited by this “pure love” to “go out” to announce the Gospel?

Well, we have no other solution but to do as the Apostles did. They are all poor sinners, as evidenced by the figure of Peter who denied Jesus. In the eleven Apostles that are mentioned in the First Reading, we see only one thing, sinners who are “sent” (cf. John 20:21). But behold, in the midst of them, in Jerusalem, on the hill of Zion, stands “Mary, the Mother of Jesus” (cf. Acts 1,12-14), who is the most pure, the Immaculate. She who is completely pure can intercede with the Apostles. They know that their intercession is carried by the purity of Mary and joins the “infinitely pure” who is Jesus.

The purity of Mary, the Mother

So the missionaries who are called “apostles”, that is to say “sent” while being poor sinners, find their *raison d'être* in the purity of Mary, because they know they are poor sinners. “In seeing it, writes Saint Louis-Marie, we see our pure nature”⁹, not our sin, but our pure nature coming from the hands of God. In Mary we see our pure nature which is inhabited by pure love.

Saint Louis-Marie gives us a magnificent description of it which invites us to have audacity, assurance, confidence and peace, when we are “out there”, in one way or another, whatever our mission, in catechesis, in the accompaniment of adults, in the concern of the most fragile, ... or more simply when we are fathers or mothers with our family, our children, our grandchildren. When we are “going out” to evangelize, we know well that we are “poor sinners”. But here we are putting Mary in our midst with her pure love and her purity.

Let us listen to Saint Louis-Marie: “She is not the sun, which, by the vivacity of its rays, could dazzle us because of our weakness; but it is beautiful and soft like the moon, which receives the light of the sun and tempers it to make it conform to our small reach. She is so charitable that she repels no one who asks for her intercession, however sinners they may be; for, as the saints say, it has never been heard, since the world began, that anyone has had recourse to the Blessed Virgin with confidence and perseverance, and has been discouraged. She is so powerful that she has never been refused in her demands; she has only to show herself before her Son to pray to him: as soon as he grants, as soon as he receives; he is still lovingly overcome by [...] the prayers of his dearest Mother”¹⁰.

⁷ Cf. Paul VI, EN, n. 7: “Very often during the Synod, the Bishops recalled this truth: Jesus himself, the Gospel of God (cf. Mark 1,1; Romans 1,1-3), was the very first and greatest evangelizer. He was so to the end: to perfection, to the sacrifice of his earthly life. Quoted by Francis, *The Joy of the Gospel*, n. 12.

⁸ TD, n. 85.

⁹ TD, n. 85.

¹⁰ TD, n. 85.

Thus, we who wish to carry the Gospel in one way or another out of love for the poorest, out of love for all, by announcing to them the Gospel of the Lord Jesus, ask for the grace to know how to with us, to “take home”, as Saint John says (cf. John 19:27) Mary, the all pure. If we take her home in our prayer, she will purify us. The all-pure is purifying because she is “mother” to her children (cf. John 19:27). Thus, we receive, as Saint Louis-Marie says, “the anointing of pure love”¹¹. “It should be noted,” he wrote, “that our good works passing through the hands of Mary receive an increase in purity”¹².

Echoing Saint Louis-Marie, in this year of the 350th anniversary of his birth, we hear the question constantly asked by the patroness of the missions, Saint Thérèse of the Child Jesus: “Is pure love really in My heart? She contemplates it in Mary”¹³.

Let us ask for each other the grace to love. Let us ask Saint Louis-Marie and Saint Thérèse to obtain for us the grace to love always more, because only love counts. Above all, let us entrust each other to the maternal intercession and to the maternal presence of her who is all pure, Mary, the Immaculate Conception, so that we are not afraid of our sins which tarnish our love. May she make us confident and daring so that we dare, with our love, to love always more because we take Mary into our home who makes our love a little purer, a little more disinterested, a little more in conformity with Gospel love, a little more humble, a little less proud. That thus, with this love, we can give our life for love. That we become apostles inhabited by “the pure intention of the glory of God and the salvation of souls”.

How beautiful it is to desire this inner purity! We can desire it only because we receive Mary as Mother, because we take her into our home. Thus, without fear, we can go forward to love like Jesus, he who is the “infinitely pure”, our Saviour. Amen”.

¹¹ TD, n. 154.

¹² TD, n. 172.

¹³ Cf. Saint Thérèse of the Child Jesus, Poetry Why I love you, O Mary! May 1897, stanza 5: "The mother's treasure belongs to the child / And I am your child, oh my dear Mother / Your virtues, your love, are they not mine? »