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### ***L'Osservatore Romano* publishes a testimony on Fr. Olivier MAIRE**

**ROME** – *“Father Olivier Maire (...) welcomed a brother by forgiving his past and embracing him without making calculations, desiring only to give him love, with maternal tenderness. We really need to learn to love like this, to grow in this love”. Following this mention of Fr. Oliver MAIRE, SMM made by Pope Francis during the audience of May 20, the “Osservatore Romano” asked Fr. Marco PASINATO, SMM, for the following testimony about our confrere, publishing it under the title “The welcoming smile of Olivier Maire, a missionary until the end”.*

About six months ago, on the very day that the Montfort Missionaries obtained the confirmation of the private audience of the Holy Father at the conclusion of their 38<sup>th</sup> General Chapter, they had not hesitated to invite the parents and brothers of Father Olivier MAIRE at this meeting. Thus, on May 20, they were able to thank the Holy Father together for his delicate closeness expressed by a personal message in the days which followed the tragic death of the missionary, killed on August 9, 2021, by the one who had welcomed, in Saint-Laurent-sur-Sèvre (France), the Vendée town where three centuries earlier Saint Louis-Marie de Montfort had died in full mission.

But who is Father Olivier MAIRE? A passionate disciple of Saint Louis-Marie de Montfort, he has been inspired by this saint since his childhood to make charity his rule of life. Born on November 19, 1960, in Besançon, France, to a father Gabriel who worked in precision watchmaking and a mother Claudine, a housewife, Fr. Olivier was able to develop his multiple intellectual and artistic abilities. Since the minor seminary, he has been a valued organist. The

parents' house keeps many memories of their son with care and affection and mother Claudine shows full of emotion to her closest colleagues the notebook in which Olivier, eleven years old, regularly wrote down the prayers he composed and spiritual thoughts, like this one: "Lord, put an end to all wars and reign peace in the world". After priestly ordination and specialized studies in Rome, he was sent in 1996 as novice master to Uganda, where we remember his regular visits to prisoners in Mbarara prison, bringing food and medicine, but above all spiritual consolation.

With a gentle touch, Fr. Olivier was welcoming to everyone, discreet, smiling and with sense of humor. He was a good and prayerful man, perhaps too much given to tasks that distracted him more than he wanted from his scholarly vein. In fact, on May 16, 2005, he was appointed Assistant General of the Congregation in Rome, where he also served as Archivist. How can we forget him, wearing white gloves, as he extracted the Montfort Manuscripts from the Historical Archives to show them with such delicate attention to anyone who was interested in them! He was without a doubt one of the most sensitive, the most cultured and the most profound experts in the Montfortian writings. But that did not prevent him from expressing himself in a simple and understandable way, so much so that he touched the hearts of his listeners each time he spoke of his beloved Founder.

Returning to France in 2011, he became provincial for two consecutive terms, but he never stopped leading retreats and conferences on Montfortian spirituality all over the world, writing articles and even a book entitled: "*Grignon de Montfort, the wandering of the pilgrim*". An initiative is underway to recover and write down his vast preaching activity, so that the wisdom that emanated from his words may continue to nurture many people. The Virgin Mary and Montfort had obtained him such gift!

Father Olivier always consumed himself in tasks often perhaps greater than what he wanted and ended his life by welcoming a fragile person, as he did with everyone. And no doubt in his Montfortian heart, he kept the cry of the Founder who, carrying a poor leper on his shoulders in the mission of Dinan in 1706, knocked on doors shouting "*Open to Jesus Christ*"!

Montfort, who loved, studied and preached so much, allowed him to end his days in ongoing mission and next to him in Saint Laurent-sur-Sèvre, where the Basilica of the holy missionary is located. Father Olivier Marie is buried today in the historic cemetery of the congregation and, according to the testimony of the Daughters of Wisdom who are its guardians, there are constant and discreet visits of people going to his grave to lay down their burdens and their intentions of prayer.

On May 20, at the end of the Eucharistic celebration in the Roman Basilica of San Bartolomeo apostle which preserves the memorial of the new martyrs, the Montfortian Missionaries, gathered in Chapter around the newly elected General, Fr. Dwi WATUN, SMM, accompanied the MAIRE family in the delivery of the Breviary of Fr. Olivier to the rector of the Basilica. A beautiful sign of his spirituality as a priest according to the heart of God and according to the heart of Montfort, who encouraged his disciples by writing: "*If we do not risk something for God, we will do nothing great for Him*" (Montfort, Letter 27).

*Fr. Marco PASINATO, SMM*