



## 260<sup>th</sup> Death Anniversary of Brother Mathurin, The First Disciple of Father de Montfort

**ROME** - "On July 22 of this year [1760], the revered Brother Mathurin, 73, died after long suffering from an illness. He is the famous Brother Mathurin, who has been talked about so much in Father de Montfort's life and who has participated in many missions over the course of 55 years<sup>1</sup>." This is how Sister Florence, in her "Chroniques", announces the death of Brother Mathurin RANGEARD.

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<sup>1</sup> SISTER FLORENCE AND OTHER ANONYMOUS AUTHOR, *Primitive Chronicles of Saint-Laurent-sur-Sèvre*, Documents and research I, Montfortain International Centre, Roma 1967, [112], pag. 127.  
**SOURCES** : ANONYMOUS [J. GRANDET], *The life of Sir Louis-Marie Grignon de Montfort. Priest Apostolic Missionary composed by a clergy priest*, at Verger, Nantes, 1724; Yes Documents and Research X, Montfortian International Centre, Saint-Laurent-sur-Sèvre, 1994; CH. BESNARD, *Life Mr. Louis-Marie Grignon de Montfort*, Documents and research IV and V, Montfortian International Centre, Rome, 1981; P. EYCKELER, *The Testament of a Saint. Historical study*. Ed. Ernest Van Aelst, Maestricht, 1953; P. EYCKELER, *The Company Missionaries*, 1er volume :... *from the origins, to Mr. Mulot*, 164 p. 2nd volume:... *under René Mulot*, House Embarrassed, from the Coy of Mary, Rome 1972-1973; MR GUILLAUME (PIERRE PERROCHEAU), *Frere Mathurin Rangeard, 1687 - 1760 Montfort's first companion*, 1, Côte St Sébastien, Nantes; O. MAYOR, *3<sup>e</sup> centenary of The Call of Fr Mathurin Rangeard (1705-1716)*, The Kingdom of Jesus by Mary, October 2005 - November 2006.

*Looking at the expressions she used, one perceives the respect, familiarity and veneration of this first disciple of Montfort: "he died ... revered... famous... he's talked so much."*

### **His origin.**

Mathurin RANGEARD was born on 7 November 1687 in the hamlet of Bassées-Vallées in the municipality of Bouillé St-Paul. His parents had married in 1684 and had already had a first child, Carlo, who died prematurely at the age of only ten months. Later Luigi was born, very close to Mathurin. Educated to the faith by his mother and father, Mathurin's life was marked by the seasons of the countryside and the vineyards being the father a small agricultural owner. "Already as a boy, Mathurin helped his parents in the care of the vineyards and in the preparation of the wine. Conforming to the teachings of the sky transmitted by the sun and the seasons, Mathurin learns to prune in the cool March mornings; follows the plow furrow; rejoices in front of the vine leaves that open and the discreet perfume of the flowering. He knows the joyful grape harvests of autumn, when the grapes turned gold in color, fall into the presses from which the wine flows into boiling vats."

He has the opportunity to receive a good education, although elementary. This learning will then be very useful to him. His training probably comes from a school called "abbatial", that is linked to an abbey where children from the surrounding areas were received for free basic education. There was one not far from his home.

In June 1702, a misfortune comes to visit the serene family: the sudden death of the father in which the cause was unknown. Is it from that day that Mathurin's soul becomes fearful, restless and often invaded by scruple? His interests shift from the cultivated land to another ideal. In fact, Mathurin never missed an opportunity to retire in prayer and to listen to preachers. He was a bit like the lost wayfarer looking for his way. One day, a Capuchin came to preach in his country. The priest's words impressed him a lot and he thought he had an inspiration from heaven. A few days later, he left his mother and brother and went to Poitiers (about 80 kilometers) with the hope of finding the Capuchin again.

### **Disciple.**

Both Sister Florence J. GRANDET and Fr. C. BESNARD talk about the meeting of Mathurin with Montfort's father in Poitiers at the Chapel in Rue des Penitents. Louis-Marie is struck by this young man's way of praying and approaches him, telling him as our Lord at St. Peter's: "Follow me". The young man obeyed this voice as that of the Holy Spirit - the *Chroniques* remind us.

From that moment, Mathurin becomes the faithful disciple and companion of the missionary saint. He will be remembered as "*Brother Mathurin*" even though he never made the religious profession. The biographies report various events that have seen him witness and protagonist. At the abbey of Ligugé, Mathurin finds it hard to recognize the missionary returning from Rome, deeply consumed by the long journey he had in full heat, with hardships and unexpected events of all kinds. In Fontevault, in St. Brieuç, in Montfort-la-Cane by the nurse Françoise André, Mathurin becomes the spokesman of the missionary who asks for the charity of a piece of bread "in the name of God!". We know the answers ... In Dinan, he becomes an accomplice of the saint in the joke to his Dominican brother Joseph Grignion. We find Mathurin at the hermitage of Saint Lazare, not far from the town of Montfort-la-Cane, where with Jean, a young local, he starts that much desired, longed for, loved and prayed community by Saint Louis-Marie.

## **Collaborator.**

The letter that our Founder writes to Pierre HINDRE, pastor of Bréal-sous-Montfort to apologize for the impossibility of responding to his invitation reveals the valuable activity of Brother Mathurin: *"My dear Father and friend, I am very sorry that I cannot do what both you and I would desire. I am already booked for three different places on each of these three days and I must keep to my commitments. However, I will send Mathurin to you on Tuesday to say the Rosary in public and sing hymns and he will bring sixty little crosses of St. Michael for our soldiers. I trust you will have the kindness to distribute them after you have told them on Sunday to meet on Tuesday. This may help a great deal to restrain them from the excesses so frequent during these days. Please remember me to them on Sunday and tell them that I earnestly beg them to be faithful to their rule of life, especially next Monday. Tell them I shall come and see them on one of the Sundays of Lent. Yours devotedly in Jesus and Mary, L. Marie de Montfort, priest."* (Letter 21)

Recite the Rosary, sing the Songs, give small crosses to the soldiers. Here is the life of Louis-Marie. With him, we see him in La Chèze, in Trinité-Porhoët, etc. Above all, a splendid and extraordinary document presents him as the organizer of the famous procession of women in La Rochelle, on 16 August 1711. In the caption of the watercolor by Claude MASSE, a snapshot of the procession, the same painter with the letter F indicates *"Brother Mathurin, collaborator of missionary, while he walks the different Canticles in an orderly way"*.

Very faithful, he also shares all the sufferings of the missionary saint: contempt, rejection, contradictions, poverty. His sensitive and mild temperament will bind him strongly to his master until his death. Indeed, up to a murder attempt in La Rochelle and reported by one of the same bombers: "After this [three men had been driven out of a preaching by Montfort], we repeatedly looked for the opportunity to meet him alone, in an isolated place. Surely, we would have paid the bill. One day, by chance, we learned that he had to go on a Sunday evening with Brother Mathurin to the sculptor Adam and that he had to pass through a narrow street in La Rochelle. We prepared there from seven in the evening until eleven, but did not pass at all! "To the question of what would have happened if he had passed, the reply was clear : *"We would have smashed his head "*. And to Brother Mathurin? *"We would have sent him to the devil with his master"*.

After the various La Rochelle missions, we have no other news from Mathurin. Perhaps, the Father of Montfort celebrated a mission to the village of Mathurin in the period in which he preached in the area of Bressuire around 1713? Indeed Argenton-Château is only about ten kilometers from the village of Mathurin. And in Bouillé St-Paul, we can still see a granite cross that the locals call *"The Cross of Montfort and of Brother Mathurin"*. Was it perhaps erected on the occasion of a mission or their passage?

It is not reported where Mathurin was at the time of the death of Louis-Marie on the 8<sup>th</sup> of April 1716. But the missionary remembers him in the Testament dictated to his father, René MULOT, the day before his death: *"Mr. MULOT will give money in the cashier, 10 crowns to James, ten others to John, and even 10 crowns to Mathurin if they wish to leave and not take the vow of poverty and obedience"*.

## **Successor.**

We don't know if Mathurin received those 10 crowns. But we find him as a valid collaborator of Fr. René MULOT and Fr. Adrien VATEL at the presbytery of St. Pompain, after the events of St. Laurent. Several of his signatures appear on the parish registers as a witness of baptisms and burials.

From the moment in which the missions resume in 1718 after "the retreat in the cenacle of St. Pompain", we almost continuously find his presence reported to the missions. From the Sage's

Chronicles and from the precious registers of the missionaries with the almost complete list of all the missions held, it can be calculated that Mathurin participated in about 290 missions, until the last of Fontanay le Comte in April 1759. Returned tired from this mission, Mathurin feels his end close and fears his coming. One day, after a stroll in the community garden, he falls to the ground due to weakness. A priest, called in a hurry, gives him the last sacraments. In Saint Laurent, we find written in the act of death:

*"Mr. Mathurin RANGEARD, a tonsured cleric, about 73 years old, died on July 22nd 1760 and the following day, his body was interred near the large door on the left, in the presence of the undersigned." [5 signatures follow].*

In 1721 the auxiliary of the bishop of Poitiers, Mgr. FOUDRAS, had honored him with the clerical tonsure to reward him for his tireless service and to make him more authoritative. Unfortunately, with the construction of the Basilica in honor of St. Louis-Marie, all traces of our brother's tomb have been lost.

### **Heir.**

If we do not keep his tomb, besides the vivid memory of Montfort's first faithful collaborator, we have some documents that belonged to him. First of all, a small book *"Le Paradis ouvert à Philagie per cent dévotions à la Mère de Dieu, aisées à pratiquer"* composed by the Jesuit Fr. Paul BARRY in 1688. This book, recommended by the founder in the Treaty at 117, was probably entrusted to Mathurin because in a note inside it says: *"This book is precious from every point of view; we recommend that you do not lose it out of respect for the memory of our revered Father of Montfort to whom it belonged. Our Father later bequeathed it to Brother Mathurin whose civil name was RANGEARD "*.

In the Montfortian archives, the surprises are not over. In the manuscript of the Treatise on True Devotion, on p. 27, in the margin, is the name of Mathurin. The writing is not that of Montfort. Has the discreet and faithful companion thus become guardian of the treasure that "diabolical teeth and quivering beasts" (TD 114) wanted to destroy?

Finally, Mathurin has repeatedly written his name on the third of the four manuscript notebooks with the Canticles of Montfort. Certainly, it was the book of his apostolate, with which he animated the faithful during the missions of MONTFORT and those of his successors.

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