

Montfortian Spirituality – Handout 01

A Man consumed by the Fire of Charity



Traveller, what do you see?
A light quenched,
a man consumed by the fire of Charity,
who became all things to all people,
Louis-Marie Grignion de Montfort.

TO KNOW HIM

“Since his childhood, Louis-Marie got accustomed to dealing with those people that everyone avoided: the poor, the sick, the soldiers, the openly vicious, the libertines and the misguided of the worst kind: all those, in short, that "honest" society pushes to the corner and rejects like garbage. In the Missions, he went straight to them. It seemed like to him they were the only ones existing. Hence, great spiritual successes, but also incredible hardships with the "self-righteous", with the "good" ones

by profession, to whom Louis was no less severe than Jesus and delivered terrible blows; nothing annoyed him as much as that well accommodating Christianity that everyone had created for themselves, for their greater earthly comfort. Whatever he touched **melted** into mush like a dirty mask. He didn't act for the sake of acting. He didn't do so as to passively follow a rule, a tradition, out of mere disengagement. He arrived, with all his strength, where he had to arrive; and his didn't seem like strength, it seemed like violence. **He brought his fire there; and the lukewarm felt as if they were being burned alive.** He based himself on the immensity of God, on the absolute, in every circumstance; and all human measures seemed to be the toy of the lazy and the mockery of the cowardly. What there was of mere spectacle in the missions he **revived** so much that it made a profound impact on consciences. He was not a man who indulged in theatricality, in external representations. If anyone fled external religion as "world" (the world condemned by Jesus), it was him. According to him, the visible spectacle had to be the expression of a *novus ordo*, of a *redemptio*, of a recovery. In fact, all the witnesses agree in reporting the immense care he took for processions, adorations, songs, that is, for all the external apparatus of the missions."

(don Giuseppe De Luca, *Luigi Maria Grignion di Montfort*, Saggio biografico [*Louis Marie Grignion de Montfort*, biographical essay], Roma², 1985)

THE GUIDING WORD

Let us listen to the Word of the Lord from the Gospel of Luke (12:49-53)

"I have come to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were blazing already! There is a baptism I must still receive, and what constraint I am under until it is completed! Do you suppose that I am here to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division. For from now on, a household of five will be divided: three against two and two against three; father opposed to son, son to father, mother to daughter, daughter to mother, mother-in-law to daughter-in-law, daughter-in-law to mother-in-law."

LET US MEDITATE From PSALM 39 (38)

¹ I said: "I will watch how I behave
so that I do not sin by my tongue;
I will keep a muzzle on my mouth
as long as any sinner is near".

³ **My heart** had been smouldering within me;
but at the thought of this **it flared up**
and the words came bursting out.

⁴ Lord, let me know my fate,
how much longer I have to live.
Show me just how frail I am.

⁵ Look, you have given me
but a hand's breadth or two of life,
the length of my life is as nothing to you.
Every human being that stands on earth
is a mere puff of wind.

¹² Lord, hear my prayer,
listen to my cry for help,
do not remain deaf to my weeping,
for I am a stranger in your house,
a nomad like my ancestors.

¹³ Turn away your gaze
that I may breathe freely
before I depart
and am no more!

TODAY FOR ME

The contemporaries of Saint Louis, as we deduce from the one who wrote the epitaph, have used the symbol of **fire**, the flame, to synthesize his life and work. If, on the one hand, fire **heats, collects, illuminates and transforms** food, on the other hand, with its power, fire is devastating, unpredictable, uncontainable, destructive.

Jesus himself, referring to his mission, clearly manifests his desire to light on the earth the **fire of charity**; at the same time, he is well aware that his presence, his words, and his gestures will bring about division. Montfort experienced the same; he perceived himself as a man of contradiction with his words and his actions. He expresses it well in the letter to his dearest sister Louise (L 26):

“... Those who befriend me or support me suffer for doing so, and sometimes draw down upon themselves the wrath of the devil I am fighting against, as well as the world I am protesting against and the flesh I am chastising.

This veritable ants' nest of sinners against whom my preaching is directed cannot leave me or my friends in peace. I have forever to be on the alert, treading warily as though on thorns or sharp stones. I am like a ball in a game of tennis; no sooner am I hurled to one side than I am sent back to the other, and the players strike me hard. This is the fate of the poor sinner that I am and I have been like this without rest or respite all the thirteen years since leaving St. Sulpice.

However, my dear sister, thank God for me for I am content and happy in all my troubles. I think there is nothing in the whole world so welcome as the most bitter cross, when it is steeped in the blood of Christ crucified and in the milk of his holy Mother. Besides this inward happiness, there is the great merit of carrying the crosses. I wish you could see mine. I have never had more conversions than after the most painful and unjust prohibitions...”

After all, Montfort wants nothing more than the **fire of pure love** to blaze everywhere. When, in the *Treatise*, he describes "the servants, slaves and children of Mary", we cannot help seeing in them his self-portrait (TD 56):

“But what will they be like, these servants, these slaves, these children of Mary? **They will be ministers of the Lord who, like a flaming fire, will enkindle everywhere the fires of divine love.** They will become, in Mary's powerful hands, *like sharp arrows*, with which she will transfix her enemies. They will be as the children of Levi, thoroughly **purified by the fire of great tribulations** and closely joined to God. They will carry the gold of love in their heart, the frankincense of prayer in their mind and the myrrh of mortification in their body. They will

bring to the poor and lowly everywhere the sweet fragrance of Jesus, but they will bring the odour of death to the great, the rich and the proud of this world.”

This self-portrait becomes a sketch, an indication and a commitment for us who are eager to follow him (PM 17):

“When will it happen, this fiery deluge of pure love with which you are to set the whole world ablaze and which is to come, so gently yet so forcefully, that all nations, Moslems, idolaters and even Jews, will be caught up in its flames and be converted? None can shield himself from the heat it gives, so let its flames rise. Rather, let this divine fire which Jesus Christ came to bring on earth be enkindled before the all-consuming fire of your anger comes down and reduces the whole world to ashes. When you breathe your Spirit into them, they are restored and the face of the earth is renewed. Send this all-consuming Spirit upon the earth to create priests who burn with this same fire and whose ministry will renew the face of the earth and reform your Church.”

FOR PERSONAL AWARENESS

- Do I know any moments of Montfort's life lived with passion and zeal?
- Can I recall any of his writings that particularly awaken in me ardour and commitment?
- What do the images of “flame” and “fire” evoke in me?

LET US PRAY WITH SAINT LOUIS

(PM 28. 30)

How is it, great God, that although it is so glorious, so satisfying and so profitable to serve you, hardly anyone will support your cause? Scarcely, one soldier lines up under your standard. Scarcely, anyone fired **with zeal for your glory** stand up and cry out, like St. Michael: *Who is like to God?*

Let me then raise the cry of alarm: “The House of God is on fire! Souls are perishing in the flames! The sanctuary itself is ablaze! **Help! Help!** Good people! Help our brother who is being murdered. Help our children who are being massacred. Help our kind father who is being done to death!”

*Let the Lord arise and let his enemies be scattered. Arise, Lord. Why is it you appear to be like one asleep? Arise in **your might, your mercy and your justice** and create this bodyguard of hand-picked men and women who will **protect your house, defend your glory and save the souls that are yours**. Thus, there will be but one sheepfold and one shepherd, and all will make your temple resound with their praise of your glory. Amen.*

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