

Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of Mary

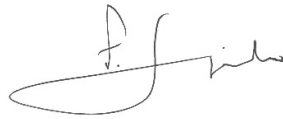


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Montfortian Heritage in Asia

hardships with trust, and fight poverty with hope. Suffering, decadence of morality, corruption, age of secularization and atheism do not mean that the world has reached the end times but it is a God-given opportunity for his true followers to manifest God's love with wholehearted commitment.

Inspired by this feast of the Immaculate Conception of Mary, let us help each other to make the practice of true devotion, according to St. Louis Maria de Montfort, a path of holiness, as a path of true commitment to the poor and marginalized.



Fr. Luiz Augusto Stefani, smm
Superior General

Rome, 8 December 2017

Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of Mary

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavens, as he chose us in him, before the foundation of the world, to be holy and without blemish before him. In love he destined us for adoption to himself through Jesus Christ, in accord with the favor of his will, for the praise of the glory of his grace that he granted us in the beloved.” (Eph. 1, 3-6)

Dear Friends,

Laity and Religious, who exercise different ministries in the Church, leaders of communities, priests and bishops,

Receive a fraternal greeting from the Montfort Missionaries spread throughout the world. Joy and Peace in him who is the reason for our hope, Jesus Christ our Lord.

On the occasion of the solemnity of the Immaculate Conception, 8 December 2015, Pope Francis offered the following reflection:

“Celebrating this feast entails two things. First: fully welcoming God and his merciful grace into our life. Second: becoming in our turn artisans of mercy by means of an evangelical journey. The Feast of the Immaculate Conception then becomes the feast of all of us if, with our daily “yes”, we manage to

overcome our selfishness and make the life of our brothers ever more glad, to give them hope, by drying a few tears and giving a bit of joy. In imitation of Mary, we are called to become bearers of Christ and witnesses to his love, looking first of all to those who are privileged in the eyes of Jesus. It is they who he himself indicated: "I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me" (Mt 25:35-36)."

The purpose of this letter is to offer some knowledge, albeit in a summary fashion, of what we find in the spirituality of the Marian Consecration of Saint Louis de Montfort; "*Jesus, our Savior, true God and true man must be the ultimate end of all our other devotions...*" (True Devotion, 61). Our wider desire is that Montfortian spirituality might help us to identify ourselves with Jesus Christ, with His unconditional love for humanity.

We know that some persons, some groups and some Institutes of Consecrated Life who promote the "*Consecration to Jesus through the hands of Mary*", according to the method of St. Louis Marie Grignon de Montfort, have caused serious pastoral problems for various parishes and dioceses. Some bishops have contacted us seeking clarifications: on the relationship of the Montfortian Congregation with certain specific groups and on the current state of Montfortian spirituality, especially in regard to the practice of the "*True Devotion to Our Lady*" proposed by St. Louis Marie de Montfort.

The early Christian communities also passed through difficulties of this kind and wrote: "*We have heard that some of our number without any mandate from us have upset you with their teachings*

They are indeed happy to draw strength from the life of Montfort and support from the writings of Montfort. Montfortians accompany them by giving them the needed instructions and by arranging frequent spiritual renewal programs.

Itinerant Missionaries

There are some Montfortians in India who have dedicated themselves to the task of itinerant mission. They move from place to place preaching the gospel and spreading Marian devotion. They carry out the mission in the manner the apostles carried out the mission. They depend on the providence of God and do not stay too long in a place. In their itinerant mission when they meet people who are wrongly motivated to believe in the arrival of the end times in the near future, they instruct the people to believe in the revealed truth that our God is a "God of surprises." They persuade them to listen to the voice of God by encouraging them to personally read the passages from bible and convince them insisting, "the ways of God are different from the ways of human beings and the thoughts of God are different from that of human beings."

Montfort relied completely on the providence of God and as an obedient son of the Church he also stirred the common people to obey the church. Thus, they warn the common people to be aware of the false prophets who may mislead them to put God into test by claiming to know the mysteries of God with complete certainty. Trusting on the providence of God means to say with St. Montfort, "I have a Father in heaven who will never fail me." Recitation of rosary is one of the powerful and effective means on our journey of faith. They encourage them to live as if they are the apostles of the last times by living out our Christian faith in a profound way with watchfulness and alertness. Thus, they help the people to face suffering with courage, challenge

technology and communication have generated opportunities for the lay people to engage themselves in work of evangelization besides their family responsibilities. Now, people are coming forward to offer assistance to priests to make evangelization and faith-formation more effective in the parishes. While many secular priests are still reluctant to let the lay people help in the pastoral work, Montfortians have invited lay people to become Montfort associates.

These Montfort associates cherish a special love for Montfortian spirituality. They enthusiastically help Montfortians in their undertakings of organizing Marian seminar, Marian hour, Marian retreat, and Marian day. These associates are given a Montfortian training by regular input sessions and they are also urged to read the writings of Montfort and his biography. Many of them express their profound admiration for Montfort and highly appreciate his visions. His life of providence is amazing and they draw inspirations from him to let go of their worries, fears, craving for wealth, scrupulous attachments and their unforgiving attitudes. And instead, they begin to nurture a strong sense of faith, confidence, love, hope and charity.

The number of lay associates is growing each day. And they want to identify themselves with the apostles of the end times and thereby make their life a living example to younger generations. Through their commitment to the work of evangelization carried out by spreading Marian devotion, they convincingly affirm how necessary and helpful Marian devotion is for nurturing Christian values in the family. They recommend rosary to the other Christian neighbors by indicating the fruits it produces in our pilgrimage of faith, such as, unity in the family, strengthening of family relations, selfless love for each other, engaging in charitable work, visiting the sick and preaching the gospel to the unbelievers and people of other faiths.

and disturbed your peace of mind” (Acts 15, 24). We do not send this letter to anyone personally, but rather to manifest our communion with all of you.

Despite the fact of being signed by me, this letter was written by various hands and in accordance with the reality of each Continent.

A LARGE FAMILY

The identity of each person is almost always linked with a someone, with a place, a past, in short, with a history. It is no different with the Montfort Missionaries.

It is difficult to introduce ourselves without making reference to someone very special, from whom we have received our name: *St. Louis Marie Grignion de Montfort*. He is much better known than his missionaries. We are known because of him, his passion for Christ, for Mary, for the poor and the missions.

Our Holy Founder wanted us to present ourselves thus: *“Liberos... men who are free, men filled with the Holy Spirit, who move like clouds in the sky wherever the Spirit leads them.”* I would also like that we be known as *“friends of the poor”*. Or even more, *“true children of Mary, who, with the rosary and the gospel, will bring the fire of the love of God to every place.”* (Prayer for Missionaries, 12)

We form part of a large family, the MONTFORTIAN FAMILY consists of the Montfort Missionaries, the Daughters of Wisdom and the Brothers of Saint Gabriel. We are at the service of the mission on the five Continents, present in more than 30

countries. Lay persons consecrated to Jesus through Mary share with us the same spirituality and the same mission.

The Montfortian charism and spirituality, however, surpasses the frontiers of the countries where we are; thus, there is an incalculable number of lay people who assume with enthusiasm the promises of baptism through the “Total Consecration to Jesus through Mary”, making the Montfortian Family more numerous still, and present in countries where the Montfortian Congregation as such is not yet present.

THE REQUEST OF A POPE AND THE PRESENT SITUATION OF MONTFORT’S PROPOSAL

June 21, 1997, commemorating the 50th anniversary of the canonization of St. Louis Marie de Montfort, Saint John Paul II made this request of us:

“Dear brothers and sisters of the great Montfortian Family, in this year of prayer and reflection on the precious heritage of St Louis-Marie, I encourage you: make this treasure bear fruit; it must not remain hidden. The teaching of your founder and master coincides with the themes that the whole Church meditates on at the approach of the Great Jubilee; it marks out for us the path of true wisdom that must be laid open to so many young people who search for meaning in their lives and for an art of living.”

He continued, in the same letter, to give us a mission:

“I welcome your initiatives at diffusing Montfortian spirituality in forms that are suitable to different

The purpose of these prayer meetings is to join the family in their joys and sorrows and thereby to encourage the families in their moments of pain and to glorify God in the moments of received-blessing. They view Mary and the rosary as a powerful means of unity and charity and they firmly believe that it spiritually strengthens the families. They consider Mary as the perfect model so that an imitation of her results in living a profound Christian life solidly embedded in scripture and in teaching of the Church. When they hear that a family has fallen into a state of faith-crisis, they do not hesitate to take quick steps to restore faith. These groups are strongly conceived that an imitation of Mary pleases God and thereby, God’s dwelling in their homes becomes a reality.

Mary is seen as the perfect disciple and mother of all the believers. They aver that anyone who believes in the powerful intercession of Mary shall never be lost rather reaches safely her Son. She guides and directs all her children to Her son and instructs them to wholeheartedly follow the teaching of her Son: “Love your God with all your heart, mind, body and soul and your neighbor as yourself.” These groups often invite Montfortians to deliver spiritual talks on Mary and ask them to teach them the right way to honor Mary. These groups are convinced that Mary exists to glorify her Son and therefore anyone who regularly partakes in the sacraments of Eucharist, Reconciliation and other spiritual activities join her in glorifying her Son and the Triune God.

Lay Associates

India is abundantly blessed with a large amount of vocations to priesthood and religious life. Even in these hard times of moral struggle and faith-crisis vocation to priesthood and religious life is on the rise. Advancements and remarkable developments in

attractive that people have begun subscribing for our Marian Magazine and order for the books of Montfort.

Montfort's lucid presentation of the role of Marian devotion for living a profound Christian life and its effective encouragement at the moments of despair, struggle and pain are convincing to people both who work in the academic field and who are common Marian devotees. Montfort's genius division of the true devotion from the false devotion serves as a powerful weapon against the growing exaggerations in Marian devotional practices. No doubt, the role of Mary in the work of salvation is indispensable, yet her committed life was for the purpose of the glorification of her Son, hence her mediatory role in our life is to urge us to do whatever her Son tells us to do. During the sessions the participants are given enough Montfortian spiritual input to distinguish false/scrupulous Marian devotional practices from that of true devotional practices.

Legion of Mary

Groups formed in the name of Mary are many in India and Legion of Mary among them functions remarkably effective. Some of the Legions of Mary have drawn lot of inspiration from the spirituality of Montfort and they also use the Montfortian consecration to Mary. Since Marian devotion is an integral part of Catholic life, every parish organizes a "day of Mary" or Marian hour or Marian retreat, normally in view of celebrating the coming Marian feast. When such activities are undertaken by the dioceses, Legion of Mary of the different parishes come together to help there out. And in their own parish they take care of the recitation of the Rosary before the Eucharist celebration and also voluntarily help out during the celebration. They go to the families and conduct family prayers. Thus, most of the groups gather weekly in different houses.

cultures, thanks to the collaboration of the members of your three institutes. Be also a support and a point of reference for the movements which take their inspiration from the message of Grignion de Montfort in order to give to Marian devotion an ever-surer authenticity. Renew your presence among the poor, your insertion into the pastoral activity of the Church, your availability for evangelization." Message of Pope John Paul II to the montfortian religious family on the celebrations." (Letter, June 21, 1997)

December 8, 2003, remembering the 160 years since the first edition of the *True Devotion to the Most Holy Virgin Mary*, published in 1843, Saint John Paul II wrote a letter to the Montfortian Family which bore the title: "*On the doctrine of your Founder*".

In this message of Saint John Paul II we find an excellent reflection on Montfortian spirituality. He walks among the texts of Saint Louis de Montfort: the *Treatise on the True Devotion*, the *Secret of Mary*, the *Hymns*, and explains the origin of the motto on his episcopal coat of arms, "*Totus tuus*" (Treatise on the True Devotion, 233).

The first observation made by him, now as Pope, was on the evolution of Marian theology and the necessity to read and interpret it in the light of the Vatican Council II:

"It is a lived teaching of outstanding ascetic and mystical depth, expressed in a lively and passionate style that makes frequent use of images and symbols. However, the considerable development of Marian theology since St Louis Marie's time is largely due to

the crucial contribution made by the Second Vatican Council. The Montfort teaching, therefore, which has retained its essential validity should be reread and reinterpreted today in the light of the Council.”
(Letter, December 8, 2003, Paragraph 1)

Saint John Paul II understood very well the meaning of the “slavery of love”, the expression used by Saint Louis Marie de Montfort to refer to the attitude of the Christian to realize the consecration to Jesus Christ through the hands of Mary. It is a devotion that ought to lift us to holiness, since it orients us to charity, to the challenge to make ourselves servants of Jesus Christ in the selfless service of the poor, the needy, and the excluded. Mary was consistent with her “yes” (Lk 1, 38) and went at once to aid her cousin Elizabeth (Lk 1, 39). Mary made her own the prayer of the whole people of Israel, recognizing the greatness of God in his love for the poor, the hungry, and those enslaved, through his merciful and liberating deeds (Lk1, 46-55).

This is why Saint John Paul II wrote:

“The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church Lumen Gentium states: “But while in the Most Blessed Virgin the Church has already reached that perfection whereby she exists without spot or wrinkle (cf. Eph 5: 27), the faithful still strive to conquer sin and increase in holiness. And so they turn their eyes to Mary who shines forth to the whole community of the elect as the model of virtues” (n. 65). Holiness is the perfection of charity, of love of God and neighbour that is the object of Jesus’ greatest Commandment (cf. Mt 22: 38). It is also the greatest gift of the Holy Spirit (cf. I Cor 13: 13). Thus, in his Canticles St Louis Marie presents to the faithful in

In this milieu of religiosity and devotion, Montfortian spirituality is an effective tool for spreading Marian devotion and to do the work of evangelization. Marian Centre, Legion of Mary, works of itinerant missionaries and groups of lay associates are the major mediums through which Montfortian spirituality is spread and practiced in India.

Marian Centre

The feast days of Mary are most popular among the catholic liturgical feasts in India. Almost every catholic family nurtures a special bond with Mary and is firmly devoted to Mary. Recitation of rosary is an integral part of family prayers and at times it is central among the other devotional practices. In catechism, children are taught how indispensable the role of Mary was in the economy of salvation and are encouraged to develop a true devotion to Mary in order to understand the mystery of God’s intervention in our day to day life.

However, recent developments in the field of education and growing consciousness of the people of the importance of education have renewed interest among the Catholics to learn more about the mysteries of Mary in God’s work of salvation. This new momentum necessitates the need of establishing Mariological study-centers. Marian Centre is Montfort Fathers’ response to this growing need of the time. Marian Centre organizes day-seminars, academic Mariological courses, Marian retreats, pilgrimages, Marian hours, Marian prayer-days and publication of Montfort Marian Magazine. Montfort Marian Magazine is already becoming popular and the number of its readers is growing because of the content which focuses on introducing Montfortian Marian Spirituality to the people. Marian content of Montfort’s spirituality has become so

When viewed from the goal to be achieved, it can be ascertained that Saint Louis-Marie indirectly took part in the formation of an ecumenical and dialogical Christian with other Churches and other religions. The "soul of the whole ecumenical movement" (UR 8) is the holiness of life or the renewal of the Church, the desire to be more like Christ, the conversion of heart and unity in prayer (UR 6-8).

"The consecration to Jesus Christ through the hands of Mary in the Holy Spirit" taught by Father de Montfort helps us to grow in maturity and as Christians, capable of "witnessing Christian faith and life" in dialogue and cooperation "wisely and lovingly" with the followers of other religions (cf. NA 2).

In particular with regards to Islam, with its significant presence in Indonesia, but also in the Philippines, it should be remembered that the Qur'an has references to Mary, the Mother of Jesus (cf. Surah 3: Surah Ali Imran and 19: Surah Maryam). Although the Mariology of the Qur'an is limited to the childhood of Jesus, almost as presented in certain Apocrypha books, its reference to the Blessed Mother of the Redeemer remains a field of dialogue that raises Mary as a sublime model of total obedience to God's will.

In short, the appreciation of Montfortian spirituality in Asia will help us to establish a "universal brotherhood" (NA 5) with all mankind, by "enkindling everywhere the fires of divine love" (TD 56).

Given the fact that India has the second largest population in the world with the presence of almost all the religions of the world, festivals of different kinds occupy the calendar of the year with recurring moments of celebrations. And what surprises is that at times the same feast is celebrated differently at different place.

this order the excellence of charity (Canticle 5), the light of faith (Canticle 6) and the firmness of hope (Canticle 7).

In Montfort spirituality, the dynamism of charity is expressed in particular by the symbol of the slavery of love to Jesus, after the example and with the motherly help of Mary. It is a matter of full communion in the kenosis of Christ, communion lived with Mary, intimately present in the mysteries of the life of her Son. "There is nothing among Christians which makes us more absolutely belong to Jesus Christ and his holy Mother than the slavery of the will, according to the example of Jesus Christ himself, who took on the status of a servant for love of us" - formam servi accipiens - "and also according to the example of the holy Virgin who called herself the servant and handmaid of the Lord (Lk 1: 38). The Apostle refers to himself as "the slave of Christ" (servus Christi) as though the title were an honour. Christians are often so called in the Holy Scriptures" (cf. Treatise on True Devotion, n. 72). Indeed, the Son of God, who came into the world out of obedience to the Father in the Incarnation (cf. Heb 10: 7), subsequently humbled himself by making himself obedient unto death, and death on the Cross (cf. Phil 2: 7-8)." (Letter, December 8, 2003, Paragraph 6)

At present there exist some Catholic groups with a strong tendency to part from reality and not assume responsibility for one's neighbor. They abandon the reading of the documents that refer to the Social Doctrine of the Church, do not interest themselves in the path of the Church post Vatican Council II and,

in many cases, they join together to recuperate pre-conciliar devotional practices, and they even use texts from some writings of Saint Louis de Montfort and practice the Montfortian consecration to justify their options.

The Montfortian Family does not find itself among these groups, and the Montfortian consecration ought to be what it is: the perfect renewal of the baptismal promises, which includes the solemn proclamation that *“I believe, as the Church believes and with the Church”*. We are in perfect communion with the Church. If those who practice this devotion do not accept the Pope as the visible sign of catholicity, they lose their bearings; they end up defending an ideology and they journey toward religious fundamentalism.

To those who dedicate themselves to spreading Montfortian consecration as a preparation for the “imminent end of the world”, we share with them these words of Saint John Paul II:

“This eschatological dimension is contemplated by St Louis Marie especially when he speaks of the “apostles of the latter times” formed by the Blessed Virgin to bring to the Church Christ’s victory over the forces of evil (cf. Treatise on True Devotion, nn. 49-59). This is in no way a form of “millenarianism”, but a deep sense of the eschatological character of the Church linked to the oneness and saving universality of Jesus Christ. The Church awaits the glorious coming of Jesus at the end of time. Like Mary and with Mary, the saints are in the Church and for the Church to make her holiness shine out and to extend to the very ends of the earth and the end of time the work of Christ, the one Savior.”
(Letter, December 8, 2003, Paragraph 8)

MONTFORTIAN HERITAGE IN ASIA

India, and Asia in general, is characterized by a plurality of religions. Is Saint Louis-Marie de Montfort relevant for this kind of continent? To answer this question, please do not forget that Saint Louis-Marie de Montfort lived in a period of counter-reformation spirit (with the Council of Trent: 1545-1563), in a predominantly Catholic country, experiencing the bitter threat of Islam to Europe. In the 17th century the "wounds of faith" caused by the domination of the Holy Land by Islam was still open. Then it is impossible to expect that from the pen of Father de Montfort will come out a teaching on ecumenism and dialogue with other religions.

However, Montfort captures exactly the basic call of the Church, which is to become like Christ, out of love. Christlikeness is what is meant by holiness. The whole Church is called to live her dignity as holy, because the "Holy One" dwells in her. Saint Louis-Marie begins his little writing, the Secret of Mary with an affirmation that becomes the soul of his entire preaching: God wants us to be holy like Him (cf. SM 3). It is this holiness or Christlikeness that is the sole purpose of "consecration to Jesus Christ through the hands of Mary" in the Holy Spirit (cf. TD 61, 120).

The Second Vatican Council, through its dogmatic constitution on the Church, Lumen Gentium, addressed the call to be holy to the whole Church, although lived in different ways according to their "gifts and tasks" (chapter V). So, one of the reasons why Saint Louis-Marie de Montfort is relevant for today's Church is that because his teachings are very harmonious with the spirit of the Second Vatican Council.