

SAINT LOUIS DE MONTFORT

January 31, 1673 – April 28, 1716

By Father David Skillman



All of the faithful are baptized into a share in Christ's threefold office of priest, prophet, and king. The priest, in a unique way, shares in each of these offices, sanctifying, teaching, and governing the People of God. Certain of these offices shine forth more in one priest than in another. Such was the case with Saint Louis de Montfort. He was a preacher/teacher par excellence.

Born in France in 1673, he was intensely prayerful from his childhood. As a twelve-year-old student at the Jesuit college in Rennes, he would stop by the church before and after class to visit the Blessed Sacrament. Always ready to follow the Holy Spirit's promptings, he walked on foot to Paris at the age of nineteen, giving away everything he owned along the way and vowing to live the rest of his life only on alms.

At the age of twenty-seven, he was ordained a priest. The Lord blessed Saint Louis with a gift for preaching, and this is how he spent his priesthood. He would travel from town to town proclaiming the Word of God. It has been said that his language was "simple but replete with fire and divine love."

Like every saint, Saint Louis knew his share of suffering. After exerting enormous effort to construct a large replica of Calvary at Pontchateau, he submitted to the king's orders to tear it down, when the king suspected him of harboring revolutionaries there. Saint Louis' response to the king's orders? *Blessed be God!* He often found himself run out of town by the Jansenists, a heretical group that denied free will. At least once, a plot was hatched for his assassination, and on another occasion he was poisoned and lived with the effects for the rest of his life.

Saint Louis is most renowned for his devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary and his eloquent exhortation to her "true devotion." Countless thousands of Catholics have embraced his method of Total Consecration to Jesus through Mary, in which the person makes himself a "slave" of Mary and through her finds more perfect union with Christ.

We priests have much to learn from this holy man of God. Like him, we are called to preach, and it is certainly the case that the Gospel is desperately in need of being proclaimed in our world today. At the heart of the New Evangelization, of course, is Pope Saint John Paul II's Theology of the Body, a teaching that we must share with language that is "simple but replete with fire and divine love."

We also must recognize our need for the maternal care of Mary. She loves all of God's children, but she has a special love for priests. She desires to make us more like her Son, more perfect instruments through which He can meet His people in the sacraments. In his general audience on March 24, 1982, the Vigil of the Solemnity of the Annunciation, Pope Saint John Paul said, "Mary's divine motherhood is...in some way a superabundant revelation of that fruitfulness in the Holy Spirit to which man submits his spirit when he freely chooses continence 'in the body,' specifically, continence 'for the kingdom of heaven'" (TOB 75:3). Devotion to Mary is indispensable for the priest. Called like her to celibacy for the kingdom, she will help us to live this call well and so to bear abundant spiritual fruit from our spousal union with the Church.

May Saint Louis de Montfort, the holy preacher of *true devotion* intercede for us, that like him we may devote ourselves to Mary and by the grace she wins for us proclaim the Gospel with simplicity and boldness.



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