

Lesson 15: St. Louis de Montfort

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St. Louis Marie Grignion de la Bacheleraie, was born on January 31, 1673 in the little town of Montfort-la-Canne, which is located in Brittany, France.

When he was 12 he was sent as a day pupil to the Jesuit College at Rennes, he never failed to visit the church before and after class. He prayed to Mary and asked her for all his needs both spiritual and temporal. He spoke constantly to his brothers and sisters and to all his small companions both by word and example about Jesus and Mary.

At the age of nineteen, Louis set out on foot to make a 200 mile journey to Paris to study for the priesthood. On his journey he met many poor people dressed in rags and with little food. He gave away all his money to the poor and exchanged his clothing with them. He then knelt down and made a promise to God to never possess anything of his own. He would follow Jesus and do as he did in the gospels.

As he journeyed on he sang songs and prayed to Mary and he wrote later how he was filled with joy and love.

When he arrived in Paris many people were starving. Louis and many of his fellow seminarians were starving too. They queued up with other beggars to whom an allowance of food was doled out on street corners. Louis still thought of others and often shared his small amount of food with others.

During the time he was training to become a priest he would visit the sick and dying and pray with them. He offered great comfort to many.

St Louis had an artistic gift and loved to paint, sculpture and draw. With practice these artistic gifts developed. Some of the statues he carved are still in convents in France today.

St Louis was always fond of children and he had the ability to win over even the most disruptive children in his catechism classes.

He was ordained a priest in 1700, at the age of 27. He said his first Mass at St. Sulpice Parish in front of an altar he had cared for and decorated for a number of years. His way of saying Mass made a strong impression with the people present.

St. Louis De Montfort had wanted to become a missionary in Canada, but he was told he had to remain in France. So he set about to see what good he could do for others.

He began as a chaplain at a hospital and cared for the sick and poor there, often giving what he had to those less fortunate than himself. However, seeing that holy young Priest dressed so shabbily; the paupers made a collection among themselves to provide him with better clothes.

It was during this time that St. Louis began a religious order of young women who he called Daughters of Wisdom. Nowadays there are over 3.500, scattered all over the world. They carry on, devoting themselves to the poor, to the sick and to educating children.

He travelled around the western part of the country, from diocese to diocese and from parish to parish, instructing the people, preaching, helping the poor, hearing confessions, giving retreats, opening schools and rebuilding church buildings. But he encountered great opposition from religious authorities about the work he was doing so he turned to God for help.

He prayed a lot and wrote books about praying and his love for Our Lady.

St Louis always helped anyone in need. Even when he was a hospital chaplain he nursed those that many would not treat. On one occasion a man who had ulcers all over his body and refused admission to a hospital, St. Louis took charge of him. He had him taken to a separate building. There he nursed, cleaned and comforted him all alone, till the man died a peaceful and holy death.

While in the hospital, he had 15 banners representing the 15 mysteries of the rosary made to cover the bare walls of the hospital. His preaching about Jesus and Mary became known throughout the areas he worked and as a result his fame grew daily.

He was troubled by the way the poor and crippled were treated. He found a grotto which became a refuge for these people. This grotto was also a place that St. Louis prayed. It was on this site that he set up a hospital for the incurable with the help of the Daughters of Wisdom.

St. Louis-Marie discovered his great gift for preaching at the age of 32, and committed himself to it for the rest of his life. He walked with a staff that had a cross at the top of it. He met with such great success that he often drew crowds of thousands to hear his sermons in which he encouraged frequent communion and devotion to Mary.

His years of ministering to the poor prompted him to travel and live very simply, sometimes getting him into trouble with church authorities St. Louis was a strong believer in the power of the rosary.

The next five years, until his death in 1716, were extraordinarily busy ones for Louis Marie. He was constantly occupied in preaching missions, always travelling on foot between one and another. Yet he found time also to write his devotions and many hymns which he used in his missions.

St. Louis De Montfort's work and simple life exhausted his great physical strength. Worn out by hard work and sickness, St Louis finally came in April 1716 to Saint-Laurent-sur-Sèvre to begin the mission which was to be his last. During it, he fell ill and died on 28 April. Thousands gathered for his burial in the parish church, and very quickly there were stories of miracles performed at

his tomb. It was only in 1888 that he was beatified and on 20th July 1947 Pope Pius XII declared him a Saint. His feast day is on April 28th. His devotion to Mary, love of Jesus and thinking of others is an example for us all.

