

St. Louis-Marie Grignion de Montfort

Feast Day, April 28

Sr. Ann Nielsen, DW



Many of you may already know St. Louis-Marie Grignion de Montfort as a long-standing patron saint of the Legion of Mary. Closer to home, at Lourdes in Litchfield, Connecticut his Consecration to Jesus through Mary has always been the source of grace and inspiration behind the pilgrimages, homilies, devotions, and liturgies so beautifully celebrated there.

What may not be so well known is Louis Marie de Montfort's ground-breaking ministry to ordinary parishioners like you and me. Though not a pastor or even a parish priest, he spent a month to six weeks in every parish where he preached the annual parish retreat. In his short life of 43 years, he came to know the people of more than a hundred parishes of western France.



Like other missionaries of his time, he sought the conversion of evil-doers. But where other preachers of his time often labeled both the poor and the illiterate as hopeless sinners, St. Louis tried to restore their dignity, trust in God, and joy. He empowered ordinary lay people to 'shine' a little as they used their natural gifts for the Christian community.

Where other missionaries relentlessly pounded the themes of sinfulness and the terrors of hell, Montfort, especially in his later years, found creative ways for them to experience how much God loved them. Where others spent almost the whole mission on the death, judgment, heaven, and hell, he stressed the attractiveness and power of God's love for the people and stimulated the ordinary earthy virtues that often thrive among them. The Christ he preached was tender, gentle, and loving; He was Eternal Wisdom who chose out of love to dwell among us. Mary, Mother of Jesus, was presented as the easiest and gentlest way to come to know and follow that very same Jesus.

He had carpenters and masons rejoicing in the shrines they repaired or built from scratch. He had ladies sewing banners and creating costumes for the gala processions he organized. He had them all singing what they had learned from his mission, for he wrote



roughly 150 hymns for this purpose. He had many of them acting in short plays or elaborately costumed dramas. At the end of the mission, each parish normally erected an impressive outdoor Calvary. His biggest Calvary, in Pontchâteau, France included a fifty-foot high man-made hill as well as a life-sized Way of the Cross and Mysteries of the Rosary. More than 300 years later, it still attracts hundreds of pilgrims every year.



He organized all kinds of groups for lay people – some for prayer and spiritual growth, others for mutual encouragement among penitents (something like AA), and still others for ministry. All of these were self-run and lasted many decades after his death, for they were designed to prolong the conversions experienced during the missions they had lived together.

At the time of Montfort's canonization on July 20, 1927, more than 200 years after his death, the people of these parishes in Western France were still speaking warmly of their '*good Father de Montfort.*'

