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Saint Benedict Center

To Our Readers:

In publishing this magazine we have a two-fold purpose: to teach and to defend Catholic doctrine in the manner suggested by our Scriptural title—"from the housetops."

We mean, of course, that same doctrine which Our Lord gave to the world in His three years of public life, and which has been handed down to us *unchanged* through the centuries. It is that body of Revealed Truths contained in Scripture and Tradition, which we call the Deposit of Faith and which is "faithfully guarded and infallibly declared" by Holy Mother Church.

In teaching, we wish to share this Catholic heritage with as many men and women of good will as we are able, with God's help, to reach. For our foremost ambition, quite frankly, is to convert America to the One True Faith.

In defending, we are painfully aware, like everyone else, of the present crisis in the Church. And we are determined never to give up our fight against the unprecedented attacks that have been made against our Faith and its Traditions in recent years.

It is hoped, therefore, that this publication will become an effective weapon of defense, as well as a vessel of salvation for many. And, in the appropriate poetic phrase of Saint Bernard, we also hope that it will make of us and of our readers "first reservoirs of the Faith and then aqueducts."

Faithfully, in the Immaculate Heart of Mary,

Brother Francis, M. I. C. M.

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st. louis marie de montfort



*If you ask what was
his life, there was
none more holy.*

In all the annals of human endeavor there are no examples more inspiring, more worthy of remembrance and esteem in every age, than those of saints like Louis Marie. This in itself, we think, would be sufficient reason for presenting the life of one of these glorious figures in each issue of our new HOUSETOPS magazine, as we shall be doing. But our purpose in offering such a series runs to greater considerations. By way of introduction, we would like to take a moment to explain some of them before beginning the story of the holy priest from Montfort.

So many souls are lost because they simply do not believe or do not live by the primary and, in many ways, most important lesson which the catechism gives us. That is, God made each one of us to know Him, to love Him, to serve Him in this world, and to share with Him the unending, unimaginable bliss of Heaven. Regardless of whatever else we sometimes may prefer to believe, we have no other purpose for existing. Father Feeney reminds us in his article, "Is Faith A Gift?" that Our Lord gave this same lesson as His greatest commandment when He said, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with thy whole mind." So it is more than a

mere lesson; it is an obligation that every one of must meet—or risk that our souls perish in hell. It can be said in other words, therefore, that we are all born with a call to try to become saints.

Who, better than those who now wear the crown of sainthood, then, can inspire us zealously to fulfill this duty in our own daily lives? Who, better than those upon whom the Church has conferred the highest attainable recognition, can, by their illustrious examples, teach us humility and obedience to the Divine Will? Who, better than those pious souls so near to the Heart of Our Saviour, can help us, through their powerful prayers, to conquer worldly distractions and temptations and to strive toward the Christian perfection of saints?

And at what time in all the history of the Church has there been greater need for saints? Or in what land, more than in America? We have said that ours is a crusade—a crusade to convert America to the Catholic Faith and to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, to whom this country is consecrated under the title of the Immaculate Conception. Realistically, such a challenge, in a time and place where all manner of error is flourishing, will have to be met with the unflinching determination, courage, and confidence of saints. It is that challenge of sanctity which we now wish to present to all American Catholics.

At Fatima some sixty years ago, Our Lady promised the world: "In the end my Immaculate Heart will triumph." Two centuries earlier, a holy Marian apostle prophesied the coming of great saints in the latter times—the Age of Mary—who would be "valiant soldiers" in the army of the Immaculate Heart. We are pleased, therefore, to offer the lives of the saints in the hope of inspiring our fellow Catholics of twentieth-century America to be the fulfillment of these prophecies.

With that purpose, it is only fitting that we begin with the Marian prophet of the latter times just mentioned—the magnificent saint who taught that the surest and easiest way to sainthood is through Mary, and who is the holy patron of our crusade.

* * *

Between the years 1399 and 1419, a holy Dominican missionary from Brittany traveled throughout western Europe on foot, converting souls to the Faith and teaching the necessity of penance. This was the great "Apostle of the Last Judgment," Saint Vincent Ferrer. Once, while preaching at La Chèze in France, he came upon the old chapel of Our Lady of Pity that had long since fallen into ruin through total disuse and neglect. Saddened by the pitiful sight and the thought of the heartless disregard that had caused it, Saint Vincent foretold that the chapel "will be restored by a man whom

the Almighty will bring into the world at a distant date. He will appear as a stranger, will be insulted and balked, but he will achieve his purpose."

That man did come to La Chèze, almost exactly three hundred years later. He too was a Breton who, like his early herald, tirelessly traveled on foot. And like another saint, Alexis, he lived as a beggar, sleeping under staircases or in open fields. Like Saint Bernardine of Siena, he was a powerfully compelling preacher; like Saint Bonaventure, a brilliant theologian; like Saint Vincent de Paul, he loved God's poor; and like Saint Francis of Assisi, nursed the diseased. He was, in fact, so much like many of the great saints in their special virtues that he indeed was a very special saint himself. He was Saint Louis Marie de Montfort.

Early Years

The name Jean Baptiste Grignion was well respected in his community. He was Crown lawyer of Montfort and the Parliament, as well as treasurer to the factory of St. Jean. Typical of country gentlemen of the time, Monsieur Grignion was a man of recognized position and no money. But he and his wife, Jeanne Robert, were rich in other treasures, for as many as eleven of their eighteen children became saints. Ten were taken into Heaven in infancy. The other, the greatest of the Grignion saints, was born on January 31, 1673. On the following day he was baptized and given the name Louis Marie.

Monsieur Grignion was known for his fiery temper which, with the hardships of raising a large family in near poverty, found frequent occasions to be vented. Young Louis, we are told, not only was often the victim of his father's explosiveness, but also inherited the trait. In fact, he confessed in later years that his most difficult struggle against passions of the flesh was in subduing his violent temper.

Be that as it may, those who knew him in life only witnessed remarkable docility in his nature. Rather than human weaknesses, Louis Marie displayed extraordinary qualities of virtue, even from the early age of four years. "This angelic boy," Père de Clorivière recalled, would console his mother "by words so full of unction and so beyond all material knowledge he would have, that it seemed as if the Spirit of God Himself gave them to him." Apostolic zeal also was fully evident in his childhood, by his teaching catechism to other children and encouraging their devotion to the Blessed Virgin. For he himself had such strong devotion to his "good Mother" that he would spend hours at a time in the chapel praying to her. In childlike simplicity, he would lay before her all his spiritual and temporal needs, confident that he then had done everything necessary to obtain them.

The boy's maternal uncle was the Abbé Robert, who said of him, "He showed such a horror of vice and such an inclination to virtue, that you would have thought him immune from Adam's sin." Indeed, a close friend of Louis Marie de Montfort, Jean Baptiste Blain, relates this example: "His whole childhood was spent in the most wonderful innocence. He knew so little of what may tarnish purity that when I was speaking to him one day of temptations against that virtue, he told me that he did not know what they were." But he did know what would violate purity. He once found in his father's library a book containing what he considered to be indecent illustrations. Monsieur Montfort saw nothing wrong with the pictures, for he did not have the boy's sensitive conscience. Louis threw the book into the fire, knowing full well that his father would be outraged.

An exceptionally brilliant student, Louis was twelve when he entered St. Thomas's, a Jesuit college in Rennes where schooling was given free to an enrollment of some three thousand students. The devout Jesuits at the college exercised an edifying influence on their pious student. After their example, and out of his own unbounded charity, he eagerly devoted himself to the care of the poor and the infirm. It was here also that he began his lifelong practice of rigorous penance and mortification with scourges, chains, hair-shirts, and fastings. And it was here too that he received his vocation to the priesthood.

But to Louis Marie Grignon the priesthood meant much more than a vocation; it was to be total servitude and self-sacrifice to God. So in his priestly calling, he gave himself entirely to Jesus through Mary, vowing never to hold any personal possessions. Upon setting out for the Seminary of Saint Sulpice at Paris, for example, he promptly gave to some needy soul the ten crowns provided him for the trip and traded his new suit for a beggar's rags. Moreover, he chose to make the seven-hundred-mile journey on foot, begging for his food along the way. So complete was his abandonment of worldly attachments that he even gave up his family name, to be known simply as Louis Marie of Montfort.

Since he was never one to voice even the slightest complaint, we learn only from classmates that Louis Marie's attendance at Saint Sulpice was a punishing experience. For while he performed brilliantly in his studies, the young saint continually found his pious exercises under suspicion and criticism. Such practices as his visits to the chapel before and after every class, his spontaneous conversations with the Blessed Virgin wherever he came upon one of her statues, his acts of grueling mortification, and his forming an "absurd" association called "Slaves of Jesus in Mary"—all were jeered at and treated with scorn. Even his confessor and the superior suspected Louis of spiritual pride and tried, by every conceivable

kind of humiliation, to break him down, but with no success.

His Works

In the year 1700, when Father de Montfort was ordained, the Church in France never seemed healthier, by physical appearances. There were over 100,000 ecclesiastics in the country, 130 bishops, more than 1,000 abbeys, and "a veritable galaxy" of lesser monasteries. All the great Orders, as well as forty-two new religious congregations founded in the previous century, were flourishing there. Paris alone, whose population was just half a million, boasted forty-six parishes, ten seminaries, eleven abbeys, one hundred religious communities, and twenty-six Catholic hospitals. All of which prosperity certainly would indicate that the Faith in France was vigorously alive and well. So often it is found, however, that the Church outwardly may never look healthier as an institution than when she is being ravaged internally by the malignant growth of error and heresy. And we usually discover in those instances that the root cause of the contradiction is a disproportionate attention having been placed on material endowment, to the tragic neglect of spiritual growth.

In this case, the body of the French Church had become critically undernourished through the spiritual ignorance of both the people and much of the clergy. Thus she was rendered dangerously susceptible to the three-fold disease that attacked her, in the forms of Protestantism, Gallicanism, and Jansenism. By far the most contagious and destructive of the three was Jansenism, a condemned heresy which not only refused to acknowledge its separation from the Holy Church, but maintained an audacious pretension of rigid Catholic orthodoxy. Though anything but orthodox, its doctrines certainly were rigid. In general, they placed Divine mercy and grace so far from the reach of all but the holiest souls that even the most ordinary human frailties were cause to despair of hope for forgiveness and salvation. With the extensive but subtle spread of this cold poison, vast multitudes were encouraged to withdraw from the Communion rail, believing their confessed unworthiness to receive Our Lord was a greater act of Christian humility. Hence they denied themselves of the most magnificent Gift that God, in His sublime condescension, so eagerly offered to mankind for its salvation—Himself. Many priests would even allow the faithful to die without the Sacraments. And, of course, devotion to the Merciful Heart of Jesus was considered to be a sin of presumption. To the Immaculate Heart of Mary, a sin of idolatry.

Meanwhile, with the Church in France now functioning in a spirit of political ambition instead of filial submission, many bishops demanded to be recognized as having an authority equal to that of the