In the

Footsteps

of St. Louis Marie de Montfort

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160 Years since the Publication of "True Devotion"

Pope John Paul II has recently written a letter to the Religious of the Montfortian Congregations to commemorate the 160th anniversary of the first publication of "True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin".

St. Louis Marie Grignion de Montfort, all his life, practised and preached in his missions and retreats a form of devotion to Our Blessed Lady which he called "the most perfect devotion" to her, and which is often referred to as "the Holy Slavery". About Autumn 1712, he set down his teaching on this devotion in a book which has become, as Pope John Paul says in this letter, a classic of Marian spirituality: *"True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin"*. After St Louis Marie's death in 1716, his followers in the Company of Mary continued to make this devotion a major part of their teaching and preaching, but, for some reason, they never thought to publish his book, although they possessed the manuscript. They did, however, value the manuscript sufficiently that, when the French Revolution brought chaos to the Vendée region where the Mother-house of the Company of Mary was, they hid it, along with other precious papers, in a field nearby. After the revolutionary fury had abated, they retrieved these papers and put them back in the library of the Mother-house, but then, it seems, forgot about them. It was only in 1842 that one of the members of the Company of Mary, doing some research in the library, came across the old manuscript and recognised the handwriting of St. Louis Marie. The manuscript was quickly authenticated, and in 1843 was published for the first time as *"Traité de la Vraie Dévotion à la Sainte Vierge"* (Treatise on True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin).

Some 20 years later, in 1862, Fr. Frederick William Faber, of the London Oratory, made the first English translation of the book and had it published in London. There have been a number of English editions published since that time, in the United States as well as in Gt. Britain. In 1883, Bishop Herbert Vaughan, at that time the Bishop of Salford in England, and the founder of the Mill Hill Missionaries, wrote a letter recommending St. Louis Marie's book to all the clergy of the diocese. When he was transferred to Westminster Archdiocese in 1892, he did the same for his clergy of that diocese.

St. Louis Marie's book has been an inspiration to many thousands of people throughout the 160 years since its first publication. Our present Holy Father has several times acknowledged its influence on him, as he does again in this letter. It is well known that Frank Duff, the founder of the Legion of Mary in the 1920s, made the "Holy Slavery" the basis of the Legion's spirituality. Others in the English-speaking world who have been deeply influenced by it include Matt Talbot, Eddie Doherty and Catherine de Hueck Doherty (these two the founders of the Madonna House apostolate based in Combermere, Ontario).

On page 3, we offer, in its entirety, the Pope's letter, addressed to the Religious of the Montfortian Congregations, to a wider audience, in the hope that "True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin" will continue to bear fruit among the men and women of our own day. ◘

From the Provincial's Desk

The Company of Mary has its own regular newsletter called the *Montfortian Echo*. It points to important events, which serve as an update on the worldwide mission of the confreres. And it contains a word from our Superior General, Fr. Bill Considine. These 'words' have always served to inspire, to console and to deepen the link between himself and all his brothers.

In the latest edition, Fr. Bill noted the fact that our province in Colombia is celebrating one hundred years of the mission of the Company of Mary in that country. He used this occasion to give some thoughts on what the celebration of a centenary means. "How do you celebrate 100 years of Montfortian presence in a country, 100 years of mission in the style of St. Louis-Marie de Montfort? To celebrate a Centenary is to remember the first Montfort Missionaries. To celebrate a Centenary is to remember the Colombian vocations. Hand in hand with fortifying the Church and civil society, went the work of building up the Company of Mary in Colombia. To celebrate 100 years of missionary presence in the spirit of Montfort is not to fall into nostalgia or to mourn a golden age, rather to maintain a concrete desire and a choice to undertake new works in this new age, with the same spirit of risk and boldness that inspired the confreres and sisters who went before them." He ends by saying "One can feel quite old at 100 years, … or one can be filled with the life and hope of the Holy Spirit. *'O Lord, we offer you our youth'"!*

There was another 'celebration' in Haiti that affected our Montfort religious. The country was marking the fact that it was two hundred years since it became self-governing. Events since January, in the upheaval and chaos that followed the revolt against president Aristide, have certainly overshadowed any euphoria that this celebration brought. Colombia and Haiti, both of these countries have benefited for such a long time from dedication and apostolic witness, which the religious of our congregations, and those associated with them, have brought to the building of Christ's kingdom. And both of these countries have proved difficult and dangerous places. Neither has ever enjoyed any really prolonged period of peace and stability. The Colombia of today struggles against violence, corruption and injustice; the Haiti of today is still searching for some respite from what seems a never-ending cycle of fear and disturbance. Yet the Company of Mary has never ceased to offer help and selfless dedication to the poor and often frightened people, whom it seeks to serve in our provinces of Colombia and Haiti. As Fr. Considine says they do what the Montfort missionaries have always tried to do "with the same spirit of risk and boldness that inspired the confreres and sisters who went before them." This wonderful example of the mission of our congregation is nothing more than St Louis Marie foresaw in his prayer for the Company of Mary. "These followers of the apostles will preach with great power and effect. So powerful will their impact be that they will stir the minds and hearts of all who hear them …in all their missions their sole aim will be to give glory to you."

It is a great consolation to us, as members of the Montfortian family, that our pope John Paul has written to us and given us a particular apostolic blessing. I am sure that this is nowhere more deeply appreciated than in Colombia and Haiti – yet followers of St Louis Marie everywhere can take heart from the pope's words; "In this letter, I would like to share with you, Religious of the Montfortian Congregations, a meditation on some passages from the writings of St. Louis Marie, so that they may help us in these difficult times to nourish our confidence in the maternal mediation of the Mother of the Lord".

In what he calls a **'pilgrimage of Faith'**, the Holy Father makes a point that is particularly striking. St Louis Marie sees in Mary a faith in which she is the model and figure of the Church. And it is when we attempt to make ourselves friends of Mary that her faith will inspire us in our daily life. St Louis Marie has much to say about this faith; however, I think that perhaps the greatest consequence of this faith, to the mission of the Company of Mary, is that "It inflames those who are lukewarm and need the gold of fervent love. It restores life to those who are dead through sin. It moves and transforms hearts of marble and cedars of Lebanon by gentle and convincing argument. Finally, this faith will strengthen you to resist the devil and the other enemies of salvation". May the religious and the associates of the Company of Mary find their own strength as they seek to model their faith on that of Mary.

On 17th April I will be in Malawi once again. Fr Thomas Msusa will be ordained as the bishop of the Zomba Diocese. Fr Thomas is a Montfort Missionary who was the superior of the African Delegation of the Company of Mary. He was also a student when I was rector of the Child Jesus Seminary in Zomba. He told me "I am still coming to terms with the new appointment. I continue to ask myself 'why me!'" I told him what I really believe, that he is the best man and the best priest for the task. Please remember him in your prayers. May he receive all the blessings he will need to serve the people of the diocese entrusted to him.

F. W. Scragg smm, Provincial ◘.

News from Here and There

A New Montfortian Bishop

As Fr. Provincial mentions above, Montfort Father Thomas Msusa has been appointed Bishop of Zomba in

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Letter of John Paul II

To the Religious of
the Montfortian Congregations

A classical text of Marian Spirituality

1. One hundred and sixty years ago a work was published which was destined to become a classic of Marian spirituality. Saint Louis Marie Grignion de Montfort had written *True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin* at the beginning of the eighteenth century, but the manuscript had remained practically unknown for more than a century. When at length, almost by chance, it was discovered in 1842 and then published in 1843, it had an immediate success, proving to be a work of extraordinary efficaciousness in spreading "true devotion" to the Blessed Virgin. As far as I am concerned, the reading of this book was a great help to me in my youth: "I found the answer to my doubts," which were due to a fear that worship given to Mary "if developed too much, might end by compromising the primacy of the worship of Christ" (*My Vocation, Gift and Mystery*, pg. 42). Under the wise guidance of St. Louis Marie de Montfort, I understood that, if we live the mystery of Mary in Christ, there is no such risk. This saint's Mariological thought, in fact, "is rooted in the Mystery of the Trinity and in the truth of the Incarnation of the Word of God" (*ibid.*).

The Church from the outset, and especially in the most difficult times, has contemplated with particular intensity one of the events of the Passion of Jesus Christ, recalled by St. John: "Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary of Magdala. Seeing his mother and the disciple he loved standing near her, Jesus said to his mother, 'Woman, this is your son.' Then to the disciple he said, 'This is your mother.' And from that moment the disciple made a place for her in his home" (Jn 19.25-27).

Throughout its history, the People of God has had experience of this gift made by Jesus on the Cross: the gift of his Mother. The Blessed Virgin Mary is truly our Mother, who accompanies us on our pilgrimage of faith, hope and charity, towards an ever more intense union with Christ, the unique Saviour and Mediator of salvation (cf. Const. *Lumen Gentium*, 60 and 62).

As is well-known, in my episcopal arms, which are a symbolic illustration of the gospel text we have just quoted, the motto *Totus tuus* takes its inspiration from the teaching of St. Louis Marie Grignion de Montfort (cf. *My Vocation, Gift and Mystery*, pg 42; *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, 15). These two words express total belonging to Jesus through Mary: *"Tuus totus ego sum, et omnia mea tua sunt,"* writes St. Louis Marie, and he translates: "I am all yours and all I have is yours, O dear Jesus, through Mary, your holy Mother" (*True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin*, 233). The teaching of this saint has had a profound influence on the Marian devotion of many of the faithful, and on my own life. What we are dealing with is a *lived teaching*, of remarkable ascetical and mystical depth, expressed in a lively and ardent style, which often appeals to images and symbols. Since the days of St. Louis Marie, Marian theology has nevertheless developed a great deal, thanks above all to the decisive approach taken by the second Vatican Council. Montfort's teaching, therefore, must be re-read and interpreted today in the light of the Council, while retaining substantially the same value.

In this letter, I would like to share with you, Religious of the Montfortian Congregations, a meditation on some passages from the writings of St. Louis Marie, so that they may help us in these difficult times to nourish our confidence in the maternal mediation of the Mother of the Lord.

Ad Jesum per Mariam

2. St. Louis Marie recommends with particular force the loving contemplation of the mystery of the Incarnation. True devotion to Mary is Christocentric. In fact, as the Second Vatican Council reminded us, "Devoutly meditating on her (Mary) and contemplating her in the light of the Word made man, the Church reverently penetrates more deeply into the great mystery of the Incarnation" (Const. *Lumen Gentium*, 65).

Love for God, through union with Jesus Christ, is the aim of all authentic devotion, because – as St. Louis Marie writes – Christ "is the only teacher from whom we must learn; the only Lord on whom we should depend; the only Head to whom we should be united and the only model that we should imitate. He is the only Physician that can heal us; the only Shepherd that can feed us; the only Way that can lead us; the only Truth that we can believe; the only Life that can animate us. He alone is everything to us and he alone can satisfy all our desires" (*True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin*, 61).

3. Devotion to the Blessed Virgin is a privileged means "of reaching Jesus perfectly, loving him tenderly, and serving him faithfully" (*True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin*, 62). This fundamental desire to "love tenderly" issues forth immediately in an ardent prayer to Jesus, begging the grace to share in the ineffable communion of love which exists between Him and his Mother. The total relativity of Mary to Christ, and in Him to the Holy Trinity, is first seen in this observation: "Lastly, you never think of Mary without Mary thinking of God for you. You never praise or honour Mary without Mary

joining you in praising and honouring God. Mary is entirely relative to God. Indeed I would say that *she was relative only to God*, because she exists uniquely in reference to him. She is *an echo of God*, speaking and repeating only God. If you say 'Mary' she says 'God'. When St. Elizabeth praised Mary calling her blessed because she had believed, Mary, the faithful echo of God, responded with her canticle, 'My soul glorifies the Lord.' What Mary did on that day, she does every day. When we praise her, when we love and honour her, when we present anything to her, then God is praised, honoured and loved and receives our gift through Mary and in Mary" (*True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin*, 225).

Again it is in his prayer to the Mother of the Saviour that St. Louis Marie expresses the Trinitarian dimension of her relationship with God: "Hail, Mary, most beloved daughter of the eternal Father; hail, Mary, most admirable mother of the Son; hail, Mary, most faithful spouse of the Holy Spirit!" (*Secret of Mary*, 68). This traditional expression, already employed by St. Francis of Assisi (cf. *Fonti Francescane*, 281), even if it contains various levels of analogy, is certainly a powerful way of expressing in some sense the particular sharing by the Virgin Mary in the life of the Most Holy Trinity.

4. St. Louis Marie contemplates all the mysteries from the starting point of the *Incarnation*, which comes about at the moment of the Annunciation. So, in *True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin*, Mary appears as "the true earthly paradise of the new Adam", the "virgin and immaculate soil" from which he was formed (no. 261). She is also the *new Eve*, associated with the *new Adam* in that obedience which repairs the original disobedience of man and woman (cf. *ibid.*, 53; St. Irenaeus, *Adversus hæreses*, III, 21, 10-22, 4). It is through this obedience that the Son of God enters into the world. The Cross itself is already mysteriously present in the moment of the Incarnation, at that instant of the conception of Jesus in the womb of Mary. In fact, the *'behold I come'* of the *Letter to the Hebrews* (cf. 10.5-9) is the first act of obedience of the Son towards the Father, and is already an acceptance of his redemptive Sacrifice "on coming into the world".

"*As all perfection*," writes St. Louis Marie Grignion de Montfort, "*consists in our being conformed, united and consecrated to Jesus* it naturally follows that the most perfect of all devotions is that which conforms, unites, and consecrates us most completely to Jesus. Now of all God's creatures Mary is the most conformed to Jesus. It therefore follows that, of all devotions, devotion to her makes for the most effective consecration and

conformity to him. The more one is consecrated to Mary, the more one is consecrated to Jesus" (*True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin*, 120). Speaking to Jesus, St. Louis Marie marvels at the union between the Son and the Mother: "She is so completely transformed into you by grace that she no longer lives, she no longer exists, because you alone, dear Jesus, live and reign in her… If we only knew the glory and the love given to you by this wonderful creature… So intimately is she united to you… she loves you ardently, and glorifies you more perfectly than all your other creatures put together" (*ibid.*, 63).

Mary, eminent member of the Mystical Body, and Mother of the Church

5. According to the words of the Second Vatican Council, Mary "is hailed as pre-eminent and as a wholly unique member of the Church, and as its type and outstanding model in faith and charity" (Const. *Lumen Gentium*, 53). The Mother of the Redeemer is also herself redeemed by Him, in a unique manner in her immaculate conception, and she has gone before us in this faith-filled and loving listening to the Word of God which brings blessedness (cf. *ibid.*, 58). For this reason also, Mary "is… intimately united to the Church. As St. Ambrose taught, the Mother of God is a type of the Church in the order of faith, charity and perfect union with Christ. For in the mystery of the Church, which is itself rightly called mother and virgin, the Blessed Virgin stands out in eminent and singular fashion as exemplar both of virgin and mother" (*ibid.*, 63). The same Council contemplates Mary as *Mother of the members of Christ* (cf. *ibid.*, 53; 62) and so it was that Paul VI proclaimed her *Mother of the Church*. The doctrine of the Mystical Body, which expresses in the strongest way the union of Christ with the Church, is also the biblical foundation for this claim: "the head and the members are born of the same mother" (*True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin*, 32), as St. Louis Marie reminds us. In this sense we can say that, through the action of the Holy Spirit, the members are united and conformed to the Head who is Christ, the Son of the Father and of Mary, in such a way that "a true child of the Church must have God for his Father and Mary for his mother" (*Secret of Mary*, 11).

In Christ, the only Son, we are truly children of the Father and, at the same time, children of Mary and of the Church. In the virginal birth of Jesus, it is, in some sense, the whole of humanity which is re-born. To the Mother of the Saviour, "We can attribute more truly… what Saint Paul said of himself, 'I am in labour again with all the children of God until Jesus Christ, my Son, is formed in them to the fullness of his age' (cf. Gal 4.19)" (*True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin*, 33). This teaching is most beautifully

expressed in this prayer: "*Holy Spirit*, give me a great love and longing for Mary, your exalted spouse. Give me a great trust in her maternal heart and a continuous access to her compassion, so that *with her you may truly form Jesus, great and powerful, in me*" (*Secret of Mary*, 67).

One of the finest expressions of the spirituality of St. Louis Marie Grignion de Montfort refers to the identification of the faithful with Mary in her love for Jesus, and in the service she offers Him. Meditating on the well-known text of St. Ambrose: *May the soul of Mary be in each one to glorify the Lord; may the spirit of Mary be in each of us to rejoice in God* (*Expos. in Luc.*, 12, 26 : PL 15, 1561), he writes: "Happy is the man who… will be completely possessed and governed *by the spirit of Mary, a spirit which is gentle yet strong, zealous yet prudent, humble yet courageous, pure yet fruitful*" (*True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin*, 258). This mystical identification with Mary is wholly directed towards Jesus, as is shown in this prayer: "Finally, most dearly beloved Mother, grant, if it be possible, that I may have no other spirit but yours to know Jesus and his divine will. May I have no soul but yours to praise and glorify the Lord. May I have no heart but yours to love God purely and ardently as you love him" (*Secret of Mary*, 68).

Holiness, the perfection of Charity

6. The Constitution *Lumen Gentium* also has this to say: "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" (no. 65). Holiness is the *perfection of charity*, of that love for God and one's neighbour which is the object of the greatest commandment of Jesus (cf. Mt 22.38) and also the greatest gift of the Holy Spirit (cf. 1 Cor 13.13). So, in his Hymns, St. Louis Marie presents successively to the faithful the excellence of charity (Hymn 5), the lights of faith (Hymn 6) and the firmness of hope (Hymn 7).

In Montfortian spirituality, the dynamism of charity is expressed particularly through the symbol of the *slavery of love for Jesus*, after the example and with the maternal help of Mary. It is a matter of a total communion in the *kenosis* of Christ: a communion lived out with Mary, who is intimately present in the mysteries of the life of her Son. "No other human state involves belonging more completely to another than slavery. Among Christian peoples, nothing makes a person belong more completely to Jesus and his holy Mother than voluntary slavery. Our Lord himself gave us the example of this when out of

love for us he '*took the form of a slave*'. Our Lady gave us the same example when she called herself the handmaid or slave of the Lord. The Apostle considered it an honour to be called '*slave of Christ*'. Several times in Holy Scripture, Christians are referred to as '*slaves of Christ*'" (*True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin*, 72). In fact, the Son of God, come into the world through obedience to his Father in the Incarnation (cf. Heb 10.7), then makes himself humbler yet in accepting to be obedient unto death, death on a cross (cf. Phil 2.7-8). Mary responded to the will of God by the total gift of herself, body and soul, for ever, from the Annunciation up to the Cross, and from the Cross up to her Assumption. Between the obedience of Christ and that of Mary, there is, to be sure, an asymmetry engendered by the *ontological difference* which exists between the divine Person of the Son and the human person of Mary, from which flows the exclusive nature and the salvific efficaciousness of the obedience of Christ. It was from this primary obedience of Christ that his Mother herself received the grace to be able to obey God in a total way and thus to collaborate in the mission of her Son.

The *slavery of love*, therefore, must be understood in the light of the marvellous exchange between God and humanity in the mystery of the Incarnate Word. This is a true exchange of love between God and his creature in the reciprocity of the total gift of oneself. The "spirit (of this devotion)… requires an interior dependence on Mary, and effectively becoming her slave and the slave of Jesus through her" (*Secret of Mary*, 44). Paradoxically, this "bond of charity", this "slavery of love", makes a person fully free, with the true liberty of the children of God (cf. *True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin*, 169). It is a matter of dedicating oneself totally to Jesus, in response to the Love with which he first loved us. The one who lives out such a love can say with St. Paul: "I live now not with my own life but with the life of Christ who lives in me" (Gal 2.20).

The 'pilgrimage of faith'

7. I wrote in *Novo millennio ineunte*: "One can never really reach Jesus except by the path of faith" (no. 19). It was precisely this path that Mary followed throughout her earthly life, and it is the path of the Church on pilgrimage until the end of time. The Second Vatican Council laid great emphasis on the faith of Mary, shared in a mysterious way by the Church, shining the spotlight on the journey of Mary from the moment of the Annunciation up to the moment of the redemptive Passion (cf. Const. *Lumen Gentium*, 57 and 67; Encyclical *Redemptoris Mater*, 25-27).

In the writings of St. Louis Marie, we find the same stress on the

faith lived out by the Mother of Jesus on a path which leads from the Incarnation to the Cross, a faith in which Mary is the model and figure of the Church. St. Louis Marie expresses this with a great wealth of nuances when he presents to his readers the "marvellous effects" of the perfect devotion to Mary: "Therefore the more you gain the friendship of this noble Queen and faithful Virgin the more you will be inspired by faith in your daily life. It will cause you to depend less upon sensible and extraordinary feelings. For it is a lively faith animated by love enabling you to do everything from no other motive than that of pure love. It is a firm faith, unshakable as a rock, prompting you to remain firm and steadfast in the midst of storms and tempests. It is an active and probing faith which like some mysterious pass-key admits you into the mysteries of Jesus Christ and of man's final destiny and into the very heart of God himself. It is a courageous faith which inspires you to undertake and carry out without hesitation great things for God and the salvation of souls. Lastly, this faith will be your flaming torch, your very life with God, your secret fund of divine Wisdom, and an all-powerful weapon for you to enlighten those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death. It inflames those who are lukewarm and need the gold of fervent love. It restores life to those who are dead through sin. It moves and transforms hearts of marble and cedars of Lebanon by gentle and convincing argument. Finally, this faith will strengthen you to resist the devil and the other enemies of salvation" (*True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin*, 214).

Like St. John of the Cross, St. Louis Marie insists above all on the purity of faith and on its essential (and often painful) darkness (cf. *Secret of Mary*, 51-52). It is a contemplative faith which, renouncing sensible and extraordinary things, penetrates the mysterious depths of Christ. So, in his prayer, St. Louis Marie addresses the Mother of the Lord, saying: "I do not ask for visions or revelations, for sensible devotion or even spiritual pleasures… As for my portion here on earth, I wish only to have a share in yours, that is, to have simple faith without seeing or tasting" (*ibid.*, 69). The Cross is the culminating point of Mary's faith, as I wrote in the Encyclical *Redemptoris Mater*: "Through this faith Mary is perfectly united with Christ in his self-emptying… This is perhaps the deepest kenosis of faith in human history" (no. 18).

Sign of Sure Hope

8. The Holy Spirit invites Mary to "reproduce herself" in his elect, putting down in them the roots of her "invincible faith", but also of her "firm hope" (cf. *True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin*, 34). The Second Vatican Council recalled this: "The Mother of Jesus in the glory which she possesses in body and soul in heaven is the image and beginning of the Church as it is to be perfected in the world to come. Likewise she shines forth on earth, until the day of the Lord shall come, a sign of certain hope and comfort to the pilgrim People of God" (Const. *Lumen Gentium*, 68). St. Louis Marie evokes this eschatological dimension particularly when he speaks of the "saints of the latter times", formed by the Blessed Virgin to bring about in the Church the victory of Christ over the forces of evil (cf. *True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin*, 49-59). There is no question here of any form of "millenarism", but rather of a profound sense of the eschatological character of the Church, linked with the uniqueness and salvific 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, to extend to the ends of the earth and to the end of time the work of Christ, our unique Saviour.

In the antiphon *Salve Regina* the Church calls the Mother of God "our Hope". The same expression is used by St. Louis Marie, commenting on a text from St. John Damascene which applies to Mary the biblical symbol of the anchor (cf. *Hom. 1a Dorm. B.V.M.*, 14 ; *PG* 96, 719): "'We fasten souls,' he said, 'to Mary, our hope, as to a firm anchor.' It was to Mary that the saints who attained salvation most firmly anchored themselves as did others who wanted to ensure their perseverance in holiness. Blessed, indeed, are those Christians who bind themselves faithfully and completely to her as to a secure anchor!" (*True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin*, 175). Through devotion to Mary, Jesus himself "opens our hearts and fills them with holy confidence in God, helping us to regard God as our Father; he inspires us with a generous and filial love" (*ibid.*, 169).

With the Blessed Virgin Mary, with the same mother's heart that was hers, the Church prays, hopes and intercedes for the salvation of all human beings. These are the last lines of the Constitution *Lumen Gentium*: "The entire body of the faithful pours forth urgent supplications to the Mother of God and of men that she, who aided the beginnings of the Church by her prayers, may now, exalted as she is above all the angels and saints, intercede before her Son in the fellowship of all the saints, until all families of people, whether they are honoured with the title of Christian or whether they still do not know the Saviour, may be happily gathered together in peace and harmony into one people of God, for the glory of the Most Holy and Undivided Trinity" (no. 69).

In expressing once again this wish which, along with the other Council Fathers, I expressed nearly forty years ago, I send the whole Montfortian Family a special Apostolic Blessing.

From the Vatican, 8 December 2003, the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

John Paul II ◘

The Woman at the Cross

Fr. Ronnie Mitchell, S.M.M. was inspired by the Pope's letter to write this reflection, which is also appropriate to this season of Lent.

A little boy was lost in the great city of London. He had strayed away from his parents. All he knew was that he lived near Charing Cross. A policeman found him and asked him, "Where is your home"? The lad thought for a few moments and then with wisdom beyond his years, replied, "Take me to the Cross and I'll find my way home"!

The Cross is the magnet, the compass, and the direction finder that brings us home to God's eternal embrace. It is not the Cross in itself that is the object of worship but rather it is the way or means by which we come to know God's redemptive love for suffering humanity. This is the Secret of Mary as taught by the great Marian teacher and preacher, St. Louis Marie Grignion de Montfort (1673 1716). Mary teaches us how to relate to suffering and to turn blows into blessings. She shows us how to walk the path of divine wisdom.

If you are standing at the foot of some cross just now then Mary's Secret is for you. Perhaps you are reading "Footsteps" from a hospital bed or prison cell. You may be at home coping with the fact that your sales job has just packed up or you may have just listened to a distraught daughter who has tearfully informed you that her marriage is "on the rocks". You could have just finished a Rosary for your soldier son who is at this moment peacekeeping on the streets of Basra or Baghdad.

No life is exempt from the shadow of the Cross in some shape or form and to a greater or lesser degree. So Mary is God's chosen one to bring us home to the loving embrace of Jesus who alone is "the Way, the Truth and the Life" for humankind's entire journey to the Heavenly Kingdom. God choose Mary to stand at the foot of the Cross to show us the meaning of patience, perseverance and above all, LOVING OBEDIENCE TO THE FATHER'S WILL.

If Mary can choose to do this then so can you or I. The graces available to Mary are also available to us through her intercession. We may not be called to the same level of commitment as she was, but whatever God is asking of us we can do it by grace freely won for us by Christ's death on the Cross. To turn away, to run away, is to lose unfathomable joy.

In his recent letter to the Religious of the Montfortian Congregations, Pope John Paul II says that through history, and especially in the most difficult times, the Church has contemplated with particular intensity this significant event of the Passion: Mary's stance at the foot of the Cross.

Mary's presence there highlights for us the truth that His "hour has come." At Cana the Hour had not fully come (John 2:4). The transformation of the water into wine and the subsequent pouring out of the wine for the celebration was a shadow or type of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on that Good Friday. The Holy Father teaches how Mary is again intimately involved in the work of our redemption.

"It is finished," cries out Jesus as he pours out His spirit (John 19:30). Here at Calvary it is not water that is changed into wine. Rather through the blood shed in loving sacrifice and the Spirit poured out, is it made possible for our humanity to be changed into His divinity.

Now Mary is present on the Hill of Redemption to "Mother" the "New Birth" experience spoken about by Jesus in Jn 3:7 to us. No one is born without a mother on the natural plane. And as grace builds on nature so in the realm of the spiritual are we born again by grace and through the active participation of Mary.

The Blessed Virgin is truly Our Mother. She accompanies us on our pilgrimage of faith, hope and love towards an ever more intense union with Christ. No mother leaves a baby at birth but from infancy assists that child to grow to the fullness of his or her potential. So too Our Blessed Mother does not leave us to ourselves but watches over us, guides and directs our gaze towards JESUS over the course of our earthly lifetime.

It is through obedience that the Son of God is born into the world. The dying on the Cross to redeem humanity from the power of sin is an extension of this obedience to the Father. Jesus takes the very nature of a servant... "He humbled Himself and became obedient to death - even death on a Cross". (Philippians 2:8).

At the foot of the Cross Mary unites herself with this obedience of Jesus. Montfort writes that of all creatures Mary is most totally devoted to the will of Jesus. It follows therefore that "the more one is consecrated to Mary, the more one is consecrated to Jesus". This great Marian Saint believes that in fact Jesus lives and reigns in Mary. It was necessary for the humanity of Jesus to be born in the natural order of Mary.

Jesus then "living in Mary" sanctifies our humanity and makes it possible for us "to be born again" through our acceptance of Mary as our Mother. As the Holy Father writes in this edifying Letter to the Montfortian Family, "In the virginal birth of Jesus, it is, in some sense, the whole of humanity which is reborn". ◘

News From Here and There

Continued from page 2

Malawi. Mgr Msusa is the fruit of the Montfort Missionaries' presence in Malawi and the economic efforts and prayers of the Associates. To all our Associates, thank you – the African church is now that much stronger.

Parish Missions

Prayers would be appreciated for the forthcoming Missions in Armagh and Kerry. Believe it or not, there is also a Mission being planned in Finland. As always we rely on the Associates and appreciate their interest and support in our Montfortian ministry.

Mission Appeals 2004

The appeals in the Dioceses of Hexham & Newcastle and Salford are going well to date. Please continue to pray for the success of the Appeals.

The Ugandan School Appeal

Last year this Appeal generated £1,880.00. This year 2004, £250.00 has been donated by the Associates for this worthwhile project run by Fr. Charlie Beirne, s.m.m. He continues to be highly delighted with the response from the Associates. Please keep up the donations (Details via Fr. Bob Ellwood – see address on the front page). On Fr. Beirne's and the children' behalf, I personally add my thanks once again to all the donors.

Forthcoming Jubilees

On the 8 September 2004 Fr. Louis Catterall will be celebrating his Diamond Jubilee of Profession. Fr. Louis is the parish priest at St. Joseph's, Romsey Hampshire. Many of our Associates will know Father especially those who have been on the Montfortian Pilgrimages to St. Laurent sur Sèvre and Lourdes. Romsey is the last pick-up point before crossing the Channel to France.

The same day, 8 September 2004, is the Golden Jubilee of Profession of Brother Shaun Hassan. Brother has worked in England, Ireland and Scotland. He spent a long time in Malawi in the days of the late Bishop Laurence Pullen Hardman s.m.m. As a carpenter, his talents were always sought after in the building of Churches, schools and all things connected with the building trade.

We are sure our Associates and readers will remember these two religious in their prayers as they prepare to celebrate 50 and 60 years respectively in the Company of Mary, the Montfort Missionaries.

Our Dead Associates:

We remember the following Associates and others who have died since the last issue: -

Philomena Kelly (13 Sept.'01), Adrian Balmforth (12 Sept.'03), Eileen Tattersall, (24 Oct.'03), Kathleen Kendal (30 Oct.'03) John McVerry (12 Nov. 03), Marie Simpson, the Aunt of Fr. Paul Allerton (15 Nov.'03), Jean Hughes, Peter Garland (2 Dec.'03) Ethel Dalton (4 Dec. '03) Dympna McCabe (27 Dec.'03), Mary Griffiths – "Mary of the Mountains" – (the cousin of Fr. Bob Douglas Dec.'03), Albert Hounsome (Jan.'04), Edmund Smith, (6 Feb.'04) Sarah Ball (16 Feb.'04) Sallie Roberts (the Aunt of Fr. Bob Douglas, 9 Mar.'04). Pauline McKenna, the mother of Jim Jude McKenna, our Montfortian student in Rome (16 Mar.'04)

May they rest in peace.

Your Prayers are requested for:

Marie Brooks, Kathleen Cooper, Agnes Fisher, Mary & Norman Lawley, Vincent Davies, Irene Cadley, Sister Kevin, O.S.A., (the Augustinian Superior at Park House, Liverpool), Fr. Trevor Cotter, Sister Marion Rooney D.W., Eddie Green, Rachel Perkins, Lily Giannasi (the sister of Fr. Joseph Kelly s.m.m.), Jennifer Zehetgruber's Intentions, Jean Burns, Margaret Dawson, Christine Copping, Patricia Pearson, Mary Doherty, Patricia Hughes, Dominic Godlington, Peggy McHugh, Doreen Cording, Bob Lucas, Philomena Kelly, John Clifford, Frederick & Gertrude Benham, Bro. Julien Rabiller, S.G., Peggy Addison, Jakit Gollogly, Joan Green, John Tasker, Mary Leonard, Agnes Keelan, Monica Hall, Mai Garrod, Joan Fox, Sister Shirley Martin, D.W., Marion Lydon and Stephen Lydon, John Monaghan, Vincent Dunning, Fr. Kieran Flynn, s.m.m., Rita Verbeke, Patricia Pearson, Edmond Catterall, Mary Hanson, Jean Maguire, Rachel Ellis and her new born baby Eve Dominique, Sister Elaine Sheridan, Andrew Ford, Mr & Mrs Gourgley, Sister Mary Ghent O.S.M., Karl Spedding, John Boyle, Eileen McGrath (The mother of Sister Mary McGrath D.W.), Pat & Len Postol, Sister Mary Dorothy, D.W., Sister Mary Agnes D.W. Patrick McDermott, Elizabeth Mary Hickey, Margaret Singleton, Margaret Crowley, Jerry Cullen, Vincent O'Donnell, Keith Roberts, Annie Gosnold, Angela McKenna, Sister Gráinne M.S.H.C. and her Community in S.Africa, David McKean, Maria Carlisle, Michael McCabe, Mary Hanson, Joseph Kelly (Canada), Mr. McAvoy, (the father of Fr. Danny McAvoy, s.m.m.), John Yates and his son, Ian, Cathy Walls, Mary Smith, Catherine Doyle, Terry McMullen, Louis Warburton, Dennis Deakin, Joseph Hilleard. Margaret Dawson, Samuel Slattery, Jim Miley, Mary Harkin, Anne Fitzgerald, Sylvia Chinque, Teresa Beirne (The mother of Fr. Charlie Beirne, s.m.m.), Jean Maguire (The sister of Fr. Andrew Maguire s.m.m. R.I.P.), Agnes O'Boy, Mary Washington, a Special Intention, (the Regan Family), Imelda Doran, Joan Sinclair, Kate, Tom Bryan, Sister Jeanette Connell LCM and for any Associates, who may be sick or troubled at this time.

Thank You:

We thank those who have donated monies towards the publication of this Newsletter. We are truly grateful. Please continue to support this magazine. If you wish to make a donation by cheque, please make it payable to the Montfort Missionaries and send it to the address on the front page: c/o Rev. Fr. R. B. Ellwood, s.m.m.

Fr. Robert Ellwood, smm ◘