



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO THE MONTFORT MISSIONARIES PARTICIPATING IN THEIR 38th GENERAL CHAPTER**

Clementine Hall

Saturday, 20 May 2023

[Multimedia]

*Dear Brothers and Sisters,
Welcome!*

I am pleased to meet you on the occasion of your 38th General Chapter, on the anniversaries of the birth and canonisation of your Founder. Celebrating more than three centuries of life and service, you have chosen the motto: “Dare to take risks for God and humanity. Our creative fidelity” as the theme of your work. It is true that it is not a mummified fidelity; it is creative! They are words that well recall the values that inspired Saint Louis-Marie Grignon de Montfort at the beginning of your story.

He lived in a time marked by demanding challenges for the Church and society: it was called the “era of rationalists and libertines” and at the same time, the “crib of Jansenism”. Faced with these provocations, Saint Louis-Marie asked himself first of all what might be their common root, and he identified it as people’s excessive trust in the wisdom of the world at the expense of the primacy of the Wisdom of God. For this reason, he threw himself into the intense activity of preaching, with creativity and without fear, also finding misunderstandings within and outside the Church. This is what always happens. And he never gave up, continuing to preach and foster love for true Wisdom, through devotion to Mary, until his death, which came when he was only 43 years old, during a mission in Vandea. You bear witness to the fruits of his courage: present in 33 countries, with more than 700 religious, together with the *Brothers of St Gabriel*, the *Daughters of Wisdom* and the *Lay Associates*. This is beautiful!

Even today there is no shortage of pastoral challenges: for example, the individualism that keeps each person closed up in his or her own small world; the relativism and hedonism that make pleasure and self-interest the measure of every decision; the consumerist selfishness which makes the heart of the rich wither and which creates unjust inequalities to the detriment of the poor.

Faced with all of this, Saint Louis-Marie left you a plan of life and action that is always up-to-date: “to seek, to contemplate, to reveal Wisdom in the heart of the world and to denounce false wisdom” (cf. *Regola di vita*, Introduction), and this by following Mary’s example and with her help. I would like to highlight three values of yours that I hold to be important and timely: welcoming, internationality and tenderness.

The Gospel shows us Mary as she who, in order to welcome Jesus, Wisdom of the Father, within herself, courageously accepted completely changing her life, her routines, her dreams and her decisions. Thus she cared for and gave to her brothers and sisters the love she received, in Nazareth, on Calvary and in the Upper Room, where, in the light of Easter, she humbly shared in the life of the first community. Welcoming — which is the first thing I would like to talk about — was a fundamental dimension in Mary’s existence and in her mission. Following her example, I urge all of you, too, to practice it in your homes and towards the people God entrusts to you. Our world is in great need of welcoming and in welcoming it needs creativity, which can make us close to everyone, even in new situations that require urgent responses. To welcome with an open heart in order to receive.

For you this value is enriched, as your presence here shows, with the colours of internationality, multiculturalism and intergenerational dialogue. In a recent document, you wrote that the living face of Saint Luigi-Marie today has, in you, “strong hints of Europe, with lovely accents from the Caribbean, from Latin America, from Africa and Asia” (Letter of the Capitulants to the Confreres, Rome, 20 May 2017). It is true, this is quite musical. That is what it’s like, and it is rich with the smiles, tears, ears and mouth of all the sisters and brothers scattered throughout the world (cf. *ibid*). And perhaps a canonist might say to you: “But this is unnecessary, this is not a canonical definition of what an institute is”. It is a lively definition, and I like this. It is a beautiful image of an evangelical community, a true gift for all! Treasure it, nurture it and disseminate it with your witness.

Lastly, I would like to remind you that the virtues we discussed flourish on every level when people feel loved and respected. Montfort taught this to us by showing us the tender arms of Mary, who welcomes everyone as her children (cf. *Treatise on True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin*, no. 48). Let yourselves be enveloped by her maternal embrace, and with the same tenderness, embrace one another. Tenderness. This will help you and the people you encounter to bring out and share the best of yourselves, and in the light of said sharing, to discern what the Lord asks of you for your future. Therefore, if you want to be brave and creative, make Mary’s tenderness yours and

give it to everyone, always! But tenderness is not a sweet to be bought; tenderness is sweet, but it is strong. Having a tender heart indicates strength in the heart to become tender. Do not forget that tenderness is one of God's three traits. God is close, tender and compassionate. Tenderness, compassion and closeness. Do the examination of conscience with this: "Today, was I close or did I defend myself a little? Was I compassionate or did I condemn half the world? Was I tender?". Uphold these three traits of God: closeness, compassion and tenderness.

Father Olivier Maire, a Montfort Missionary, bore witness to this. He died for having welcomed into the community a man who had erred, a very problematic person, to whom however, he wanted to give a roof and hope for the future. His generosity and courage cost him his life, because of a crazy and inexplicable gesture, and while I embrace his parents and relatives, here present, I invite all of you to cherish his example: He welcomed a brother, forgiving his past and embracing him without calculating, wanting only to give him love, with tenderness. We have so much need to learn to love like this, to grow in this love, to be close, compassionate and tender.

This is why last year I chose to consecrate the Church and the entire world, especially Ukraine and Russia, to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. And I ask you, who are the Company of Mary, to renew this act of entrusting and this supplication. May the Heavenly Mother help us all to search, with courage and creativity, for paths of forgiveness, dialogue, welcoming and peace for all humanity. I bless you from my heart and I ask you, please, to pray for me.

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