

BLESSED LOUIS MARIE GRIGNION DE MONTFORT

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I: The Rosary and the Blessed Virgin



NE DAY while St. Vincent Ferrer was preaching beside the ruins of a church dedicated to Our Lady of Pity, in Brittany near Cheze, he expressed a wish that he himself might restore the ruined edifice. Then he said: "but that work has been reserved by heaven to a man whom God will raise up in the distant future, a man who will come here unknown, a man despised, contradicted and scoffed at, a man who, nevertheless, with the grace of God will see the end of this enterprise."

Three centuries later, a tall, strong, brawny man stood in the same plain near the same ruins, before another large crowd. "I am the unknown man," he said softly, "predicted by St. Vincent Ferrer, who was to see the rebuilding of this church to Our Lady." He erected it into a beautiful shrine, and established there the recitation of the Rosary three times a day, as it has been said even to this day. In this dramatic way Louis Marie Grignon de Montfort introduced himself to the world that was to revile him, to call him preacher of the Cross and the Rosary, ardent apostle of the Blessed Virgin, and finally, blessed of the Church of Christ.

A French Sulpician, Fr. Grandet, first called Blessed de Montfort a second Dominic.¹ He wrote: "Since St. Dominic there has not been any man more zealous than de Montfort for the establishment of the Confraternity of the Holy Rosary in any places where he found it not erected, and for re-erecting it in parishes where the negligence of the pastors and the people had caused it to be abandoned." Another historian² wrote that Blessed de Montfort is the second Dominic because "he destroyed heresy and dispersed the shadow of ignorance by means of the Holy Rosary."

The resemblance of the second Dominic to the first is fur-

¹ Cited in: Querard, *La Mission Providentielle de Bienheureux Louis Marie Grignon de Montfort*, Sherbrooke, Paris, 1898, p. 101.

² Querard, *opus cit.*, p. 40.

ther marked if we compare them in other more particular aspects. They both preached a devotion to the Blessed Virgin, one the Rosary, the other the True Devotion, both of which are parts of one devotion. They preached against similar heresies. They chose the same weapons against them, the Rosary, study, and poverty. Both spent short apostolic lives; both founded orders, for men and women. The most marked and most significant likeness, however, is in their zeal in preaching the Rosary.

The relation of St. Dominic to the Rosary is a tradition in the Church. While preaching, with little success, to the Albigensian heretics in the south of France, the Blessed Virgin appeared to him and presented him the Rosary, telling him that through it he would obtain the conversions he desired. He accepted the commission and preached this prayer through southern France. He gave this commission to those who were associated with him and bequeathed it to those who were to follow him. The Mother of God made several promises to St. Dominic which she renewed to a Dominican, Blessed Alan de Rupe, in which she promised innumerable graces and helps and her special protection to those who would be faithful to its daily recitation. She promised that it would dispel heresy, destroy vice, bring a speedy sanctification, a happy death, and a prompt delivery from Purgatory. St. Dominic's Order has to this day been the custodian of this devotion, and these promises, preaching them with the vigor of St. Dominic himself, and one of the most vigorous of its apostles, one of his sons, was the Blessed Louis Marie Grignon de Montfort, who was to be called the second Dominic, the Dominic of the West.

Blessed Louis, known and honored best as the founder of the Missionary Fathers of the Company of Mary, or the De Montfort Fathers, and the Daughters of Wisdom, was a Dominican. He was a tertiary, and shared in the spirit, benefits and mission of the Order of Preachers. He was a member of the order in its integral whole, and has been honored as a Blessed of the order with an Office and Mass since he was raised to that honor by Pope Leo XIII in 1888. His greatest personal devotion was to two Dominican saints, St. Dominic and St. Vincent Ferrer, and this devotion he recommended to the members of the two orders which he founded. In this Dominican spirit, he preached the Rosary with such vigor that he is called in the liturgy of his Office an "admirable preacher of the Cross and the Most Holy Rosary." The devotion recommended to Dominicans

in his honor is devotion to this same Rosary of Mary.

Some facts of his devotion are revealing. He himself recited the entire Rosary daily; and in all his preaching missions he said the three parts every day. He instructed the people in its mysteries, and in the virtues and the gifts which are the fruit of it. He instructed his sons and daughters in his congregations to be as eager as himself in its propagation. He made it a rule in his communities that the entire Rosary should be said every day; he specified the times and places at which his missionaries should say it publicly. One historian³ tells us that it is impossible to count the number of places in which he erected the confraternity. It is impossible, he adds, to tell how many places in Paris alone, much less in the country. Even today in parts of France the devotion is known as the Rosary of Fr. de Montfort, so that in some places he has eclipsed even St. Dominic.

In one Church he made the beads of such great length that many people were able to say the Rosary on them at one time, each holding in his hand the decade which he was saying. It was large enough to go around the chapel, and with the chapel filled he conducted the devotion. Thus he brought the people together not only in the unity of the prayer but even in the unity of the chain which bound them one to another. In another place he surrounded a shrine of the Crucifixion with one hundred fifty pine trees, marking them off in tens by cypress trees. Thus a pine stood for the Hail Mary, and the cypress for the Our Father in the Rosary which the visitor might say walking in the garden. In their appropriate places he erected three chapels, with gardens, to represent the three parts of the Rosary, the Joyful, Sorrowful and Glorious mysteries.

He wore the Rosary on his belt, sometimes around his neck. We are told that he never stopped talking about it, that he drew pictures of it on paper, on the table cloth, on walls. He carved it into trees, and in stones and boulders. He organized processions in its honor, painted banners to be carried in processions, and on many occasions had ten, and twenty thousand people walking after him, saying the Rosary, joyfully giving thanks and praise to the Mother of God.

In one verse of the marvelous hymns he wrote, he used to sing that if he were a clap of thunder he would bring into every place, and to all the sinners of the earth, this marvelous word

³ De Cloriviere, cited in Querard, *opus cit.*, p. 110.

"Ave." It was a thunder of voices that answered him when he said the Rosary, and it is this thunder which echoed, and still echoes, from hill to hill in the West of France, and from house to house, reaching all the sinners of the earth, in praise of Mary and his devotion to her.

Blessed de Montfort is best known in our time for his special devotion to the Blessed Virgin, and the book he wrote concerning it. The book is the *Treatise on the True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin*. The propagation of this devotion was the true mission of de Montfort's life and it was as a means in preaching this devotion that he used and encouraged the Rosary.

De Montfort's True Devotion, is, in brief, a total consecration to the Blessed Virgin. It consists in giving ourselves entirely to Mary in order to belong entirely to Jesus through her. We must give her (1) our body with all its senses and members, (2) our soul with all its powers, (3) our exterior goods of fortune, whether present or to come, (4) our interior and spiritual goods which are our merits and our virtues, and all our good works, past, present, and future. It follows from this that it is a perfect renewal of our Baptismal vows. It devotes us entirely to the service of God. It makes us imitate the example of Christ and makes us practice humility. It obtains for us the good offices of the Blessed Virgin. It is, Blessed Louis tells us, a short, perfect, and a secure way of obtaining God's glory. This is the True Devotion as it is known today.

Blessed de Montfort preached this devotion, and spent himself in it, and preached also the relation which the Rosary has to it. In his treatise he wrote: "I pray you urgently, by the love I bear you in Jesus and Mary not to content yourself with saying the little crown of the Blessed Virgin but five decades, or even, if you have time, fifteen decades of the Rosary every day." In another place he wrote: "Heretics will still say the Our Father but not the Hail Mary or the Rosary. They abhor it, they would rather wear a serpent than a Rosary."

The True Devotion and the Rosary are so intimately connected that in preaching one he preached the other. The Rosary is the proper and particular practice of the True Devotion, and the True Devotion is founded on the mysteries of the Rosary. It is founded on the first particularly, that of the Annunciation, and on all the others because they are an extension of the first. For the proper mystery of the True Devotion is that of the Incarnation which we celebrate eminently in the Annunciation,

because the end of this devotion, as de Montfort tells: "is to honor and imitate the ineffable dependence which God the Son has been pleased to have on Mary, for His Father's glory and our sanctification, which dependence particularly appears in this mystery." The True Devotion, too, is a means for thanking God for the incomparable graces which He has given Mary, and particularly for having chosen her to be His most holy Mother, which choice is expressed in this mystery.

It is these two practices which are the principal ends of the devotion which Blessed de Montfort preached. Here again we see a resemblance to St. Dominic, for both preached the Rosary, one however as a means of teaching submission to God, and a docility to His grace, hence he is called the Praedicator Gratiae; the other in bringing men to God and to submission to His grace now through Mary, who, as the Mother of Grace, is the universal Mediatrix.

All Dominicans love to see in each of their saints some special reflection, or participation in the life of the founder of their order, St. Dominic. He is the father of them all, the first Dominican who is the model and exemplar of the Dominican life in each member of the order, and in an eminent way in its saints. Thus St. Thomas reflects the contemplative character and the love of truth of St. Dominic, who is called "Doctor Veritatis." St. Catherine reflects his love of penance and observance, and his burning zeal for souls. These three saints are the trinity of Dominican life. Yet also Dominicans see in St. Vincent Ferrer the perfect participation in St. Dominic's apostolic activity; in St. Pius V, his love of the Church, and in St. Peter Martyr the life as defender of the Faith of him who was the first Inquisitor. And thus also with the others.

At the present time, there is appearing in the diocesan newspapers an account that the cause of the Blessed Louis Marie de Montfort has been completed, that, as far as men may say, canonization will be celebrated after the war. Are there grounds, then, for the claim that this new saint in the house of the Church, this sixteenth Dominican saint, will reflect his father in the life for which St. Dominic is best known to the faithful, that of devotion to the Rosary? And that the True Devotion of Blessed de Montfort will be understood as the perfect participation of that devotion to the Blessed Virgin which marked St. Dominic? Only time can tell.