

ALLOCUTIO, LEGION OF MARY MELBOURNE SENATUS, 1 MAY 2016

Last Wednesday we celebrated the feast of St Louis de Montfort. St Louis gets moved to 27th April in Australia because of the Feast of St Peter Chanel on 28th April, but in the Universal Church, St Louis is also celebrated on 28th, the anniversary of his death. This year was the 300th anniversary of his death on 28th April 1716, so it's a suitable moment to recall the life of this saint, whose teachings are such an important inspiration for Legionaries in particular, and indeed for the universal Church.

I recently read an article about why rosary beads have a bead for the 'Our Father' but no bead for the 'Glory Be' (so we pray the 'Glory Be' maybe on the section of the chain between the tenth 'Hail Mary' and the next 'Our Father'). The reason is that in the centuries when rosary beads in their current form were being promoted by the Dominican Order, having the 'Glory Be' at the end of each decade wasn't the normal practice. It was especially St Louis De Montfort who promoted this addition, which of course is now our normal way of praying the Rosary. This means that every single day, at a rough guess tens of millions of 'Glory Be's are being prayed that otherwise would not have been – all because of St Louis. If that was someone's only legacy in life, what a wonderful gift to God and to the whole world!

St Louis Marie Grignion de Montfort was born in the town of Montfort in Brittany, the westernmost province of France, on 31st January 1673, the eldest of eighteen children of Jean-Baptiste and Jeanne Robert Grignion. This was during the long reign of the grand King Louis XIV, and during the very years when St Margaret Mary was receiving the revelations of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. St Vincent de Paul had died only a few years earlier. It was a time when France was at a peak of influence in the Church and in the world. The strict theology of Jansenism had been condemned by the Church a few years earlier, but would remain influential for a long time, especially in France. So this is some of the context of St Louis' life.

Different priests St Louis knew as he was growing up influenced his faith and devotion, and especially his devotion to Our Lady. He studied theology at the Sorbonne in Paris, then entered the seminary of St Sulpice in 1695. In 1700 he was ordained priest and assigned to Nantes in Brittany. Like quite a few saints, he had a great desire to go to the foreign missions, in particular the French colony in Canada, but that wasn't God's plan. But he did make a pilgrimage to Rome where Pope Clement XI gave him the title of Apostolic Missionary.

Back in France, he spent the following years devoted to preaching missions, travelling on foot from one town to the next in the west of the country, and having a great influence. He obviously ruffled some feathers, because one time he was poisoned (though he survived). In the midst of all this, he was writing his books, 'True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin', 'The Secret of Mary' and 'The Secret of the Rosary'. And at the same time he was establishing schools and laying the foundations for two orders: the Company of Mary (priests and brothers who preach missions and retreats) and the Daughters of Wisdom, that he founded with Blessed Marie Louise Trichet.

St Louis was only 43 when he died in 1716 at St Laurent-Sur-Sevre in western France, where he is buried in the basilica named for him – but what an amazing amount he had achieved in his 16 years of priesthood! He was beatified in 1888 by Pope Leo XIII and canonised in 1947 by Pope Pius XII.

A number of recent popes were much influenced by St Louis, and St John Paul II's motto, 'Totus Tuus' – 'Totally yours', meaning, totally belonging to Mary – is from the writings of St Louis, which greatly influenced Pope John Paul as a young man. And in so many ways, his teachings influenced Frank Duff in his development of the Legion of Mary. In the index to the Handbook, he's referenced much more than any other person (apart from Jesus and Mary, naturally). In recent months we've especially been considering his great work, 'True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin', and in particular the total consecration to Jesus through Mary.

We read in the handbook, explaining the decision to include him in the Legion invocations: "No saint has played a greater part in the development of the Legion than he. The handbook is full of his spirit. The prayers re-echo his very words. He is really the tutor of the Legion: thus invocation is due to him by the Legion almost as a matter of moral obligation."

And then Handbook goes on to quote Cardinal Tedeschini: "Not only a founder, but missionary as well! And more than missionary; for we see yet another aspect: He is doctor and theologian, who has given us a mariology such as no one before him had conceived. So deeply has he explored the roots of marian devotion, so widely has he extended its horizons, that he has become without question the announcer of all the modern manifestations of Mary – from Lourdes to Fatima, from the definition of the Immaculate Conception to the Legion of Mary. He has constituted himself the herald of the coming of the reign of God through Mary, and the precursor of that longed-for salvation which in the fullness of time the Virgin Mother of God will bring to the world by her Immaculate Heart."