

THE CALL TO TOTAL CONSECRATION

From ST. LOUIS DE MONTFORT

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ST. LOUIS DE MONTFORT

Born: January 31, 1673

Died: April 28, 1716

Canonized: 1947

Feast day: April 28

Founder of the Company of Mary
and the Daughters of Wisdom

“They will know the grandeurs of that Queen, and will consecrate themselves entirely to her service as subjects and slaves of love. They shall be the true apostles of the latter times.”

St. Louis Marie Grignon de Montfort, now that’s a strange sounding name – de Montfort – what’s it mean? Well, it’s not as strange as it sounds. St. John the Baptist said, “ He must increase while I must decrease” (Jn. 3:30). St. John meant that God must become more in him as he became less. As we empty ourselves, God fills us. And so it was that St. Louis emptied himself – even of his name. His middle name was Marie and his surname was Grignon. He dropped them both and preferred to be called simply le Pere de Montfort (the Father of Montfort) after his birthplace. “De” means “of” in French and that’s why we call him St. Louis de Montfort. His name is like “Joe from Kalamazoo.” He’s a nobody, so he preferred the name of a nobody.

St. Louis was born in Montfort-La-Canne, France on January 31, 1673. After he was ordained a priest, he became a poor vagabond missionary preacher. He preached the True Devotion to Mary, meaning the total consecration to Jesus through her. He preached that the Act of Total Consecration is a perfect means of renewing and ratifying our Baptismal promises by which we renounce Satan, all of his pomps and works and give ourselves entirely to Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Wisdom, through our Mediatrix, the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

Now this was a little bit too simple for many of the educated intellectuals in France at that time, especially for the Jansenists. They believed that God was very remote from us and that we were so unworthy that we should only receive communion once a month. God was “up there” very far away in heaven and we were “down here” on earth.

But Father Louis brought Him down to the people through Our Lady and even recommended daily communion. That caused a lot of envy, a lot of jealousy, and a lot of hatred. He became a little uncertain about his mission. He was successful with the people. They loved him. They came out. They consecrated themselves to Jesus through Mary but he was a little too

successful for the likings of many of the priests and bishops. He was even banned from preaching in his home diocese.

Father Louis felt completely and totally rejected. His first reaction was a desire to get out of town. So, he said to himself, "Well, I guess I'll just go off to Canada, I'll be a missionary and I'll convert the Indians." However, before he left for Canada, he thought that perhaps he should get some advice. And who better to get advice from than the Pope?

Whenever Father Louis did something, he did it big. But how could he go to see the Holy Father when he had no means? He had nothing but his feet and the clothes on his back. Well, that was enough for him. He was determined to walk the eleven hundred miles from France to Rome. He took as his companion an energetic, idealistic young man who said, "Father, I'll walk to heaven and back with you." Unfortunately, he only lasted for two days. He had had enough of inhospitable children throwing rocks at them, eating little and sleeping in fields with rocks for their pillows. They had no food except what was gained by banging on doors and begging for table scraps. For him it was very humiliating, very painful and not very restful. But Father Louis walked on alone. When he saw St. Peter's Basilica, he took off his sandals and continued barefoot to the tomb of St. Peter. Ultimately, he received a personal private audience with Pope Clement XI.

In June of 1706, he knelt before the Pope and told him of his desire to go on to Canada as a missionary. However, the Pope said, "No, your home is with your people. I pronounce you Apostolic Missionary for France. Go back to France and preach in season out of season the Gospel of Jesus Christ."

Seeing God's will in the words of the Holy Father and filled with renewed vigor and determination, Father Louis returned to France. Father Faber later wrote that St. Louis "comes forward like another St. Vincent Ferrer, as if on the days bordering on the Last Judgment, and proclaims that he brings an authentic message from God about the greater honor and wider knowledge and more prominent love of His Blessed Mother, and her connection with the second advent of her Son."

However, the rejections repeated themselves. He preached parish missions that were very fruitful but he was still banned from six dioceses. If he was told that he couldn't preach in a church, he'd go into the village square and he'd stand there with the cross and start preaching. Well that's making a fool of yourself for Christ. So, the kids would throw rocks at him but, when they saw that he didn't duck, they'd go home and tell their parents. Then a few parents would come and eventually he'd have a congregation in the village square. They listened to him because he was preaching the simple word of God and reaching the hearts of the people. They responded, they converted, they consecrated themselves to Jesus through Mary and on it went. This was his missionary work for the rest of his life, a short period of sixteen years, until he was ultimately poisoned and killed by his enemies and died at the young age of 43.

St. Louis was the founder of an order for priests and an order for nuns. The priests were the Company of Mary and the nuns were the Daughters of Wisdom. Both the "Company" and Father Louis' "Daughters" were few in number during his lifetime. The "Company" consisted solely of Father Louis and his two brothers. The Company never received a priestly vocation during his lifetime! This was a great cross for him but nevertheless this was the "Company" of Mary. The "Daughters" of Wisdom consisted of only one daughter, a young girl named Mary Louise Trichet. She worked in a hospital for the poor and the sick. Father Louis was often away

on missions but he prayed that she would receive help through other vocations to the order. None came.

Finally, he visited her one day and said, "You'll just have to be more patient."

"How patient, Father Louis?" she asked.

"Well," he replied, "I hope that you have someone to help you within the next ten years."

"Ten more years Father! I've been here for five already. Still no one has come to help me."

"Be patient, my dear," he counseled her.

Ten years later, the second vocation came and they truly became Daughters (in the plural) of Wisdom. These were the continuing crosses of Father Louis' lifetime but his biggest Calvary was yet to come – the Calvary Project.

Father Louis thought it would help the devotion of the faithful of Pont Château if they planted a Cross on a hill for them to venerate. As the project was carried out, its scope increased. They decided to add to it the Stations of the Cross along the way to the Cross on Calvary. Then they decided to construct a real highway to the Cross and to make the land into a true hill in imitation of the original Calvary. All the faithful caught Father Louis' vision. Thousands of them gave up weeks at a time to come with hand labor and dig this man-made mountain with an encircling roadway leading to the Cross on the top. They worked for over a year with pick axes, shovels and wheelbarrows until this project truly became the Calvary of France.

The Bishop had agreed to bless the project on Dedication Day. At last, Father Louis had a Bishop who supported him and would bless one of his projects. However, this was to be the greatest cross of Father Louis' life. Shortly before Dedication Day, a messenger from the Bishop approached.

"Father Louis, I've got some bad news for you."

"What is it?" Father Louis asked, "Will the Bishop be late?"

"Well, Father, the Bishop won't be coming."

"Oh, I'm disappointed that the Bishop won't be here. Well, we must go on, I'll give the blessing myself."

"Well Father, you can't bless the Project."

"Oh, no! I can't bless the Project?"

"Actually, Father you have to take the Project down. You have to completely dismantle the entire Calvary and the Stations, level the land and restore it to the way it was before."

"There must be a mistake! I'll rectify it. I'll go see the Bishop."

So Father Louis, worn out from all his journeys and missions, immediately left on his sore hips and feet and walked all the way to the Bishop's residence. It was a two-day walk. When he arrived, he poured out his heart to the Bishop. The Bishop said that the entire Project had to go. The highest civil leaders had convinced the Bishop that Father Louis would turn the Project over to the British. Then they would place cannons on the hill, destroy the village below and eventually take over all of France. Either the Bishop actually believed this absurd allegation or he was not able to stand up to the civil officials.

Father Louis humbly obeyed, returned to the faithful at Calvary and said simply, “We had hoped to build a Calvary here; let us build it in our hearts.” And so, with Calvary in their heavy hearts, the faithful leveled the Project. Probably more graces came from their obedience and acceptance of their disappointment than might have from all the thousands of people who might have come to that Calvary. St. Louis said that Jesus Christ gave more honor to God the Father by humbly submitting Himself in obedience to His Mother for thirty years of His life than He did for all the public miracles that He performed thereafter. Father Louis was able to bear his crosses because he too humbly submitted himself in obedience and was completely abandoned to the will of God through his Total Consecration to Jesus through Mary.

Father Louis wrote a book called True Devotion to Mary. He prophesied, “I clearly see that raging beasts will come with their teeth to gnarl and tear at this little book of mine or at least it will be buried in a coffer and forgotten.” This prophecy was fulfilled to the letter. The manuscript wasn’t found until 1842, almost 100 years after he died. It was probably hidden during the anti-Catholic French Revolution. Ultimately, it was found in an attic in a chest of old books and the book was published.

Father Louis’ second great prophecy is of the Apostles of the Latter Times. He said, “The Apostles of the Latter Times will be all of those who consecrate themselves to the Blessed Mother. They will have the two edged sword of the Word of God in their mouth, the crucifix in their right hand and the Rosary in their left. They will go forth in this consecration as the Apostles of the Latter Times.” That’s where we are right here and now – in the Latter Times. We don’t have to be prophets to see that. All we have to do is to see the news or read the newspapers.

The greatest of these Apostles of the Latter Times is Pope John Paul II who made and practices the Total Consecration of St Louis de Montfort and wears the Brown Scapular as a sign of his consecration. He wrote an Encyclical Letter, Mother of the Redeemer, and said, “I hold up to you the figure of St. Louis de Montfort.” Of all the thousands of Marian saints in the church and the thousands of Marian books in the Church, Pope John Paul II mentioned only one of each in Mother of the Redeemer. It was St. Louis de Montfort and his True Devotion to Mary.

On one occasion, the Holy Father said, “This perfect devotion is indispensable to anyone who means to give himself without reserve to Christ and to the work of redemption.” “Indispensable” means something that you can’t do without, something that is absolutely necessary. Therefore, if you want to be totally given to Christ, you must practice the Total Consecration.

How do we learn about St. Louis? From the great intellectuals? No, knowledge of him comes from the simple, the humble and the poor. That’s how Pope John Paul II learned about him.

During the Nazi occupation of Poland, he studied in secret for the priesthood. He was working in a limestone mine during the day and studying as best as he could at night. One day he went to a tailor shop and the simple tailor recommended that he read St. Louis’ True Devotion to Mary.

The Pope said that he read it, re-read it, and carried it in his back pocket as he went back and forth to labor in the salt quarry every day. He said that all of the pages were stained with limestone dust. He said, “Reading this book was to be a turning point in my life.” However, he had

two apparent obstacles with this book. Most people face the same two obstacles when they read the book.

The two apparent obstacles with the book that the Pope met were, first the fear that devotion to Our Lady would detract from the precedence of Christ and second, the baroque style of the book's language. Now, this book is not like a comic book. It's not like a novel that we read, drop and go on to the next one. This book doesn't work that way. Perhaps the Holy Spirit inspired St. Louis to write it in this manner in order to slow us down. To stop us and make us think about what we read, to reflect about what we read, to meditate on what we read, and to understand what we read before we go on. In other words, to become masters of what we have read.

The Holy Father persevered with the book and soon overcame both obstacles to the book and so can we. He made the Total Consecration of St. Louis and he recommends it to us. The model of his papacy is *Totus Tuus*, that means "Totally Yours". His heraldic shield, the emblem of his papacy, is the Cross with an M down at the right hand side. It stands for Mary standing at the foot of the Cross. When the Holy Father said that he wanted that for his heraldry, all the heraldic experts said that he couldn't do it because they were not traditional heraldic symbols. They wanted something traditional like a lion here, a flower there or a helmet at the top. But, the Holy Father was insistent, so they made it as he requested. Although it has nothing to do with heraldry, it manifests his desire to be standing as St. John with Mary at the foot of the Cross in Total Consecration to Jesus through her. (See Jn. 19:27).

The words "Totus Tuus" are from the shortest form of St. Louis' Total Consecration – "I am totally yours Jesus through the Immaculate Heart of Mary." One day several priests had lunch with the Holy Father. They told him that they made the short form of the Total Consecration every day. The Pope smiled in reply, "I make the long form everyday!" He wasn't bragging, but just giving an example that sometimes shortcuts are not the best way.

Do you remember the shortcut that St. Juan Diego took? He had a date with Our Lady of Guadalupe on December 11th to receive her sign for the Bishop to believe her request for him to build a church on Tepeyac Hill in Mexico. She told Juan, "I'll be waiting her for you. Don't forget me."

But he did forget her! On that day, Juan took care of his dying uncle, Juan Bernardino, forgot his date with Our Lady and left her waiting on Tepeyac Hill. On the next day, he went to get a priest to give his uncle the Last Rites. As he approached Tepeyac Hill, he remembered that he stood up his date with Our Lady of Guadalupe and he thought he'd take a shortcut around the hill so that he wouldn't have to face her.

But she intercepted him and said, "My little friend, what path is this that you are taking?" Juan, in all his simple, charming innocence answered, "Well good morning most noble and pure lady and how is your health today?" As if the health of the glorified body of the Mother of God could be anything but well. But his uncle was not, so he used that as a pleasantry to excuse himself for standing Our Lady up the prior day. Nevertheless, she provided Juan with the sign of miraculous roses that he brought to the Bishop in his tilma (cloak). He unfurled them, the miraculous image of Our Lady of Guadalupe appeared on his tilma, the Bishop believed and the church was built.

We all have to ask ourselves the same question that Our Lady asked Juan, "My little friend, what path is this that you are taking?" Are we taking the path of the world, the flesh and the devil

or the path to the top of Tepeyac to find the roses in our lives that Our Lady has waiting there for us? These roses are the graces of the Total Consecration. We have to make an act of faith to take that path just like Juan did.

Our Lady asked him to go to the top of the hill to pick the roses. It took faith to go up in the cold of winter when no flowers grew, to a barren dessert hilltop where no flowers grew. But he didn't argue with Our Lady. He went up there and he found roses and so will we if we act on faith and climb the unknown path of the Total Consecration. Then at the top of the hill, we will receive the roses of its graces. This is the path of Our Lady, this is the path to Jesus through Mary, this is The Act of Total Consecration.

This is not something that St. Louis made up. "Consecration" means to entrust something, to set something aside for a holy purpose. This is what we do with holy vessels such as the chalice for the Precious Blood. This is also done with persons. This is what God the Father did with His Son, Jesus. He entrusted Him to us. St. John said, "God so loved the world that he gave His only Son." (Jn. 3:16). Jesus, in turn, entrusted Himself to His mother and became a simple little embryo and fetus who grew in her womb for nine months and was born like other human beings.

This is the divine order, this is God's plan, this is God's will – to submit ourselves to Mary like Jesus did. The Total Consecration is the perfect imitation of Christ. Isn't that what we want to do in the Christian life? Well let's submit ourselves to His mother like He did in obedience to her. This is the model to follow for the Christian life. This is the way of Jesus. Although He was God, He didn't hold on to His divinity but emptied Himself and joined our humanity.

St. Paul said, "Though He was in the form of God, he did not deem equality with God something to be grasped at. Rather, He emptied Himself and took the form of a slave. (Phil. 2:7). This is what we are called to do in imitation of Christ – to humbly empty ourselves and to submit ourselves to Jesus through Mary and to become slaves. But not like human slaves that are forced to do somebody else's will, rather we become voluntary slaves of love like Mary (see Lk. 1:38) and St. Paul (see Rom 1:1). We become slaves who submit our wills to do the will of the Father as Jesus did. He is our model.

There are different ways that we can make a model. If we wanted to make a statue of Christ, we could sculpt it or we could make it from a mold. We could take a block of marble, whack away at it, and try to make a statue. But, unless we're artists, we'd probably make a mess. Or, we could accept an artist's help. We could use an artist's mold, pour a liquid substance into it, let it harden and have a beautiful statue of Christ.

It's the same in the spiritual life. We could try to imitate Christ through our own efforts and whack away at ourselves trying to perfect ourselves and to become holy people but we'd probably make a mess. Or, we could accept Our Lady's help. She is an artist and she has a mold. She is the mold that Jesus chose and he poured Himself into her for nine months and submitted Himself to her in obedience for thirty years after that.

Our Lady calls us into her mold, into her Immaculate Heart. If we pour ourselves into her, she will transform us into this beautiful statue of Christ, a perfect imitation of her Son. That's her job as our spiritual mother. That's what she did for Jesus and that's what she'll do for us. She will transform us into her son Jesus so that no longer will we live, but Christ will live in us as one.

The psalmist said, "My home is within you." (Psalm 87). He was referring to the city of Jerusalem. But we can apply that to Our Lady and say with the psalmist, "My home is within you." Our home is within her where she is the mold to form us into the perfect likeness of her Son Jesus Christ. All we have to do is accept her help. But, this is too simple for many people just like it was too simple for many of the people during the time of St. Louis. However, God wants us to accept the help of His mother in making the Total Consecration to Him. He wants us to take the path of the Immaculate Heart of His mother. He told St. John from the Cross, "Behold your mother." (Jn. 19:27). From that day he took her into his home and his heart. (Jn. 19:27).

Our Lady doesn't just sit on a throne in heaven twiddling her thumbs. She cares for us who labor on earth. In her motherly charity, she wants to help us. So, our attitude should not be, "Mother, I'd rather do it myself," but rather, "Mother, I accept your help, please help me." She wants to help us even in little ways. In a nice tender touch, she personally arranged the roses in Juan Diego's cloak with the motherly hands of her glorified body so they would make a beautiful bouquet for the Bishop.

She wants to be a mother for us right down to the last detail. One Sunday I took my children bowling after Mass. On our way, we stopped at Burger King to get some lunch and then continued to the bowling center. After a couple of games, I noticed that my young son's dental retainer was missing from his mouth. He said, "I guess I left it on the table at Burger King." So we went back to retrieve it. The manager said that the table had been cleaned and that the trash barrels had been emptied four times since we left. All of the garbage was in a big dumpster behind the restaurant.

I went to the dumpster that was full to the brim with burgers, papers, French Fries and with ketchup all over. It looked hopeless that I could find the retainer in all of that mess. But, I went to my children and asked them to pray that Our Lady would help me to find it. Then I went back to the dumpster. The sun was shining brightly on its silver wires and I saw something glistening. I ran up to it and, lo and behold, there lay the retainer in the sunlight! I cleaned off my son's filthy retainer and returned it to him.

This was a great sign for my children to show how Our Lady wants to be a mother even in the smallest details. She will also go through the garbage of our lives to find our missing retainers, to find that pearl that her Son purchased for us at the price of His life. She wants our hearts and she will have her way.

She dug through the garbage of my life to find that pearl. When I was six years old, I enrolled in first grade in three different schools all in one year. That's pretty traumatic for a little boy. My family moved and I transferred from a Catholic school to a public school in the new town, and then finally to the Catholic school a couple months later when there was room for me.

One day I acted up. I don't remember what I did but I did something wrong. It was a special picnic day for us. It was a bright day in May and there was a park on a pond right across the street from the school. Each of us had a brown bag lunch that our mothers gave us for the picnic. However, because I misbehaved, Sister said that I couldn't go on the picnic but would have to remain behind.

Sister said, "You're going to stay here and go in the corner before the statue of Our Lady of Fatima and tell her how sorry you are for being bad and you're going to ask her to be your mother." That didn't mean anything to me but I remember standing there during lunchtime

watching the other kids eating their picnic across the street while I stood in that corner with a statue. But Our Lady heard something from me that day that she never forgot. I said something, she heard something, she answered some prayer, somehow, in her way.

Then I grew up and poured all of the garbage into the dumpster of my life. I was successful in the world, eating, drinking and being merry. But when the dumpster got full, she came with her light and shined it on the pearl that was buried inside. I was lost but she found me, cleaned me off and gave me back to myself, just like I cleaned off my son's filthy retainer and returned it to him.

Within a very short time I went on a spiritual whirlwind and experienced all of the movements in the Church: the Cursillo Movement, the Charismatic Movement, the Marriage Encounter Movement, the Pro-Life Movement and the Marian Movement. It was all from Our Lady bringing the fruits of the Total Consecration that I had made in a childish manner when I was six years old. She brought these fruits to me when I was ready to receive them. She always worked as my spiritual mother behind the scenes, in the shadows, working with fine tender hands, making beautiful bouquets of roses for me. It is a beautiful and wonderful thing to look back on your life and see what she has done as a loving mother.

Our Lady wants us to accept her help – to allow her to be our mother, to allow her to form Jesus in us through her. She wants us to imitate Pope John Paul II. She wants us to make the Total Consecration of St. Louis de Montfort to Jesus through her.

St. Louis' Consecration is unique because of its totality. It's the gift of ourselves, our bodies, our souls, all of our possessions and even the value of our good works. This is what distinguishes it from any other consecration formula in the Church. And this is why it is so important. It is a formal personal consecration that may be done only for ourselves and not for others. Moreover, this is why it has been granted a plenary indulgence. It is the only consecration formula that has a plenary indulgence attached to it. This forgives us the temporal punishment due to our sins under the usual conditions of Mass, Communion and prayers for the Holy Father within a period of eight days of making the Act of Total Consecration. Confession forgives the guilt of sins but not the punishment. The temporal punishment is worked out in time either on earth or in Purgatory. A plenary indulgence forgives this. The plenary indulgence is gained each time we make or renew our Total Consecration. It also may be applied to ourselves or to others who are dead.

The Total Consecration does not mean that we must sell everything we have and join the poor. No, it means we release our attachments to everything. Everything is entrusted to Jesus through Mary. Is she going to take it away from us? Is that what a mother does? No, she uses it. She uses it as she sees fit. And she sees fit with her will that is in union with God's will, so what are we losing? Can she be outdone in generosity? Can we be more generous than her, or her Son? No. So, we give her our lives and all of our goods, all that we are and all that we have, but we don't have to sell out and go to a homeless shelter. God calls us through our vocation in our life. Whatever our vocation may be, single, religious, married, clergy and whatever our jobs may be, that's where God probably wants us. It is in the exact context of our lives that we will work out our Total Consecration on a daily basis.

Moreover, the Total Consecration does not mean that we can't pray for anybody anymore because we give up all the value of our good works. It doesn't mean that we can't pray for our families and friends or for the deceased. It simply means that we give up our claim over those intentions but it doesn't mean that these intentions are forgotten or will not be granted. We leave

that up to Our Lady and we trust her as a good mother. We trust her with everything. Everything we can possibly have that God has given us we give to Our Lady. What more can a man give than his very self? Nothing. That's the greatest, that's the best, that's the most, so why don't we do it that way? That's why I did it.

I said to myself, "This is what God wants. There's nothing more than this. Nothing more that I can give Him." And I wanted to give Him everything I could and that's how I stumbled onto the Total Consecration. Nobody ever told me about it. I had no guide. I read about it in a book but the True Devotion was out of print. I obtained an old copy and prayerfully read it. Like the Pope, I thought that it was hard but I persevered. Now the book is in print with the book Preparation for Total Consecration as well and we have other people to help us. But I was alone in 1978.

I got down on my face on the floor after making the 33 day preparation that St. Louis recommends to get away from the spirit of the world, into the spirit of Christ, to shed all of the garbage that's in us and to give our hearts totally to Jesus through Mary. I got down on my face and I recited the entire Act of Total Consecration. I told Our Lady, "I really don't know what I'm doing. But I mean it. Whatever this is." She led my heart, not my mind and she took me at my word, just like when I was six years old in front of her statue. And my life has never been the same.

I retired as a lawyer and Judge and now direct two lay apostolates, The Missionary Image of Our Lady of Guadalupe and the Jesus King of All Nations Devotion. Everyone doesn't have to make dramatic changes in their lives after making the Total Consecration but Our Lady calls all of us to make it. These are the Latter Times that St. Louis talked about. These are the Latter Times when he said the true apostles will be those who "will consecrate themselves entirely to her service as subjects and slaves of love."

Our Lady is calling everybody to consecration. Everybody! Now is the time to make it and to be ready and not be like the foolish virgins who ran out of oil waiting. The graces of the Total Consecration will be the oil that keeps our lamps burning as we await the coming of the Bridegroom. These graces will enable us to imitate the virtues of Our Lady and to live the Total Consecration on a daily basis until the Bridegroom comes.

St. Louis said that the Kingdom of Christ will not come until the Kingdom of Mary comes. And the Kingdom of Mary will not come until everyone is consecrated to her Immaculate Heart. Then she will reign as the Queen of all hearts. Maranatha, Come Lord Jesus and let us pray with Him to the Father, "Thy Kingdom come!"

This article is not for academics. It is written in a light manner for a popular audience. The dialogue is not verbatim but restructured.

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