Meditation on the Spirituality of Louis Marie de Montfort – Reflections by Sr Marie

This reflection and meditation can be done without the Youtube video (recommend the use of Youtube if you can). For those who struggle with hearing, the text below can also be used to support the video. Our Youtube presentation is an invitation to spiritually join regular meditators at Wisdom Centre (presently isolated and meditating in their own homes). The tradition we meditate in is Centering Prayer which is fully inclusive of all traditions of Christian Meditation and welcoming of World Traditions.

The text is on the screen with narration. Music and a count down timer are part of the presentation. For technical reasons, the reflection has some disruption to the sound quality. To overcome this, a transcript is below.

Begins with opening prayers and introductions (Audio Visual or follow using text below)

Welcome to Christian Meditation in the Centering Prayer Tradition

Introduction and Prayer: Good evening everyone, welcome to our weekly meditation. I am going to speak of the spiritual path proposed by St Louis Marie de Montfort, who was a French priest, a great lover of the poor who founded three religious congregations including the Daughters of Wisdom here in Romsey. His spiritual inspiration came from Divine Wisdom whom he contemplated in the Wisdom books of the Old Testament and in the Wisdom texts of the New Testament. So I will start by the prayer he used to obtain Divine Wisdom, it is based on the prayer of Solomon.

O God of my fathers, Lord of mercy, Spirit of truth, acknowledging the great need I have of your Divine Wisdom and trusting in the unfailing promise that you have made to all those who ask you in confidence. I come before you today and beg this grace of you with all possible earnestness and the deepest humility.

Send us O Lord, this Wisdom who sits with you on your throne, to strengthen our weakness, to enlighten our minds, to inflame our hearts, to speak and to act, to work and to suffer in union with you, to direct our footsteps and to fill our hearts with the virtues of Jesus Christ, and the gifts of the Holy Spirit, for Wisdom alone contains all good.

O Father of mercy, O God of all consolation, grant us, we beseech you, this infinite treasure of your Divine Wisdom, through the merciful heart of Mary, through the precious blood of your dear Son, and through your intense desire to bestow your gifts on your poor creatures, hear and grant our prayers. Amen.

Personal Introduction: Many years ago, when I first started to develop my prayer life, words like meditation, spiritual journey were already familiar to me but words like contemplation, mysticism were not something for me, they were for those people very advanced in their prayer life. At that time I was thinking me and them. It was wonderful when on the day I realized that all of us are called to be contemplatives and to follow the mystical path to unity, then my thinking became all of us on one journey.

In contrast to the Law and the Prophets in the Old Testament, the Wisdom texts begin from the perspective of humankind. They are addressed not to the people of Israel as a whole but to each person individually in order to ensure their happiness.

Wisdom, personified as a feminine figure in the Old Testament and sometimes known as Sophia, falls in love with humankind. She reveals to us humans an art of living unknown to us until now, very practical. In his book, Love of Eternal Wisdom no 64 Montfort writes “There is a bond of intimacy between humankind and Wisdom that is so deep that it is absolutely beyond human understanding. Wisdom exists for each one of us and each one of us exists for Wisdom.”

So the spiritual path proposed by Montfort, can be described as an ‘interior journey’. This implies a passage that is unique to each human being, a pilgrimage leading to an encounter with Wisdom and a profound transformation of the whole person. In the introduction to Pierre Humblet’s book *A Lover’s Letter to the Beloved*, we read:

On the one hand, spirituality is the experience of "being touched" by God, an experience that leaves its deep imprint within us and continually calls us thereafter to certain spiritual values. On the other hand, "this experience is lived by each of us in a strikingly personal way, eventually transforming the deepest structures of one's personality."

The Journey: Another way of speaking of the journey to which each of us is invited is to say that it is a 'mystical experience'. However, it is possible that the word 'mystical' may seem a bit intimidating to you as it was to me as mentioned above. Probably, most of us have a very narrow idea of the word 'mystical, or even perhaps a misinformed view. We associate it with the heroes or heroines of the Christian tradition such as Teresa of Avila, Catherine of Sienna, or John of the Cross, all of whom attained the highest possible degree of union with God, often marked by visions and other exceptional phenomena. While this is, in fact, the primary meaning of the word 'mystical', it is also its narrowest interpretation. Also, when we think about the heroes and heroines of Christian spirituality, let's not fall into the most mistaken ideas held about mystics: that they are people who live in the clouds, fanatically focused only on God, and cut off completely from the community of the faithful. These are false images that don't in any way correspond with the reality of true mystics: For, mystics don't operate this way. On the contrary, they surrender themselves totally, offering their entire lives to the process of spiritual transformation. Little by little they become more and more open to God and to others. To remain committed to this process requires great perseverance. For there is a much broader, larger meaning of the word mysticism; it concerns not only the great and famous, but also all the rest of us, so we shouldn't be afraid of it.

Genuine mystical experience is essentially a contact, an overwhelming encounter with God (in Montfort's case - Wisdom) that is personal, takes place in a significant period of real time and leads to a commitment to fully accept the gift of union with God.

Mysticism: Mystics are ordinary people who fully commit themselves to the process of relating to God, i.e., to Wisdom. In the broadest sense of the term, each and every one of us is invited to mysticism.

Actually, Fr de Montfort did achieve a high degree of union with God and even experienced many of the 'secondary' phenomena associated with mysticism. His biographer B. Papsogli writes "One of his fellow seminarians observes Louis a bit fearfully, prostrate in his seemingly endless sweet repose in God. He himself has long since abandoned his devotion and would really like to know how Louis could converse with God for so long a time and what he possibly could have to say. But having emerged from his long recollection Louis has the look of someone returning from so very far away." These phenomena shouldn't be considered as 'proofs' of his mystical experience. Nevertheless, they can help us to understand how Montfort was perceived by his contemporaries, not merely as a man of prayer, but as a man of exceptional prayer. These phenomena are mentioned by his biographers, but Montfort himself paid little attention to them and never mentioned them. And indeed, the mystics themselves say that these phenomena are not the most important aspects of mysticism!

In actual fact, the distinctive mark of authentic mysticism is the orientation of the will toward genuine love. (If you love me, keep my commandments).

True mysticism calls for a re-ordering of one's own character and entire life. All the natural qualities of the mystic need to be mobilized, focused, and reoriented by 'transforming love'.

Spiritual Journey: It is easy to see this in the lives of Montfort and Marie Louise of Jesus, the first Daughter of Wisdom. Their spiritual journeys didn't involve great breaks with the past. The changes in their lives were gradual, almost imperceptible, and incorporated into the normal framework of their unfolding existence.

Various aspects of the spiritual development of Montfort and Marie Louise can be used to illustrate this point, and all of them point to the transformative action of love. In each of our founders, transforming love is obviously at work, in ways that are similar in certain respects yet absolutely unique to each one. This is because each and every human being has a unique story, psychic makeup, spirituality and personality. Let us consider some examples, first from Montfort, then from Marie Louise:

At the end of his formation at St Sulpice, in Paris when he became more and more aware of his missionary vocation, Montfort felt within himself a strong tension between the Sulpician tradition and the desire to give himself over to the life of an itinerant preacher at the service of the poor. At this time, we sense that he is pulled

in two directions, even 'split in two' by apparently opposite desires: to live a life of solitude with God, which suggests an intense desire and attraction for prayer and union with God, or to proclaim the good news to the poor in the countryside.

Little by little, the choice was resolved in favor of his second inclination. In this sense, his desires were both 'good and persistent', and the option he chose was also a response to the needs of the church. Hymn 22 expresses his ultimate choice:

So be it! I rove through the world, choosing the life of a vagabond in order to save my poor neighbor.

His close contacts in his pastoral work convinced Montfort of the urgency of his mission. Also, his active experience and the success of his missions in and around Nantes confirmed him in his apostolic vocation. His discovery of Wisdom as the source of dynamism in his life confirmed him in this choice.

The firming up of his missionary vocation changed his spirituality in profound ways. Once at work in Poitiers, Montfort wrote with considerable surprise that his incessant work in new forms of apostolate among the marginalized, had actually helped his spiritual progress, for he had received new lights, a greater facility in preaching, and a fuller openness of heart toward everyone.

So it would seem that the central core of his life moved from contemplation toward mission. Also, Montfort discovered the apostolic purpose of his crosses and purifications, for he found that the cross is the ordinary fate of the missionary, since it is so closely linked to apostolic wisdom. In his famous dialogue with his friend, he hotly defended Wisdom as a special charism, capable of unifying and integrating spirituality and mission. This he did not only for himself but also for Wisdom's future disciples.

What was really at work in him was an interior dynamism that unified his life. The two aspects that attracted Fr. de Montfort as a young priest, the Church's calls to contemplation and to action, were no longer understood to be in competition with each other. Rather, they were integrated into an apostolic spirituality that sacrificed nothing of union with God or contemplation and that was fully oriented toward mission.

In the case of Marie Louise, we find a similar evolution toward an authentic apostolic spirituality, even though hers unfolded in a very different way.

All her biographers point out that in her youth, when she first met Fr de Montfort, Marie Louise expressed a clear desire to become a cloistered religious. This was the type of religious life that was practiced at the time with very few exceptions. This contemplative type of religious life is still with us today, it is still a valued form of life but it is different from that of an apostolic religious. In traditional cloistered life Marie Louise saw a way to live 'a hidden life' completely dedicated and united to God. Her ideal left no place for mission at the heart of the world or for the service of the poor, for its pattern was that of withdrawal from the world for the sake of contemplation.

Deep down of course, what Marie Louise desired so dearly was to do God's will. This was the primary motivation of her life. Under the guidance of Louis Marie this desire would take the form of seeking 'to acquire Wisdom', which she gradually learned from him. For this, she would commit all her strength and all her human and spiritual resources. She would achieve her end; her prayers would be heard. And in the very process of accomplishing God's will, she would end up living a paradox: she had arrived at and even chosen Montfort's direction not knowing that her obedience to him would shape her spiritual experience and lead her into specific paths that she had never dreamed of. In the course of this spiritual experience, a process of transformation was at work in her, a process that would lead her to let go of her ideal of cloistered life and embrace instead the ideal of apostolic life in which union with God was never separate from the service of the poor. Seduced by the Wisdom of God, she was led to integrate contemplation and mission. She learned to contemplate Wisdom's face in her own life experience, not in the solitude of the cloister but in the faces of poor ravaged by suffering.

During the pandemic we are now experiencing, I have often thought of Louis Marie and Marie Louise here present among us. What would have been their reaction to the Black Lives Matter movement, to the lockdown, isolation, to the new poor? They would have been in full agreement with Pope Francis who says "We have lost the contemplative dimension and we have to get it back. We see nature as a service to exploit rather that an inheritance to nourish. We see the poor as economic units to be counted rather than as noble souls whose dignity has been denied. This is a moment to see the poor, to really see them, they are hidden, we don't see them

because we don't want that part of the landscape." (Re Thinking Poverty, Radio 4 22/6/20) Mother Teresa was in the same line, "they are people, not things, garbage. They are people and we often treat them like rescued animals." We need to see them, really see them. This is contemplation practiced by Montfort and Marie Louise.

Preparation for meditation: In preparation for your prayer today, I invite you to take the position you usually have for prayer. Gently call the focus of your attention to what you can feel in your body and see or hear around you. Maybe your mind is burdened with thoughts, regrets and loss from the past as well as worries about what your future may hold. Bring these thoughts and feelings before the Beloved, holding them gently in mind and allow yourself slowly to be still. Call to mind awareness of the present moment. This is where your Beloved waits for you now in the present. You may focus on the candle, the images on the screen, your special word… The meditation will last 25 minutes and end on the sound of the gong

Bell sounds … 25 minute meditation begins…count down starts…

Bell sounds… slowly the mediation ends

Close the meditation: I would like to end with some verses of a Hymn written by Louis Marie entitled *The Cry of the Poor*

Rich people everywhere see our despair Lighten our misery, show us you care Christians are we like you! Brothers and sisters too Become aware of us; learn how to share. You wear the finest dress, your beds are gold; We walk in nakedness, starving and cold. Those who most honour you, praising your wealth and name, See as the poor man's due scorn and disdain.	God full of power and might, save us, your poor, Pity our dreadful plight which the rich ignore. Look down from heav'n above, with eyes of tender love; Please, Father contemplate our humble state. I, Lord of heaven above, moved by your sighs, Hear with a Father's love, your anguished cries. I will transform your pain, justice once more will reign. Happy will be my poor, for ever more. Hymn 10 verses 1, 3, 6, 7

Thank you for meditating with us, please join us again soon.

References:

- Transforming Wisdom compiled by a group of Daughters of Wisdom
- A Lover's Letter to the Beloved by P Humblet
- Love of Eternal Wisdom by St Louis Marie de Montfort
- God Alone II by St Louis Marie de Montfort
- Montfort, a Prophet for our Times by B. Papasogli
- Re-Thinking Poverty, Radio 4 22/6/20 Pope Francis

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