



Annual Retreat 2024

KISANGANI, DRC - In order to recharge spiritually after a long time of apostolic work, the Montfort Missionaries of the General Delegation of Francophone Africa (GDFA) withdrew for three days, from 26th to 28th August 2024, at Kisangani (DRC) to make an annual retreat, also with the aim of entering the General Assembly of the Entity. Indeed, this moment of retreat was very nourishing for each retreatant. The very rich teachings of Mgr. Léonard, auxiliary bishop of the Archdiocese of Kisangani, enabled each participant to emerge from this retreat with a new lease of life for the Montfort – ecclesial mission. During these three days, Mgr. Léonard developed five themes:

1. “Find your inner calm”. Based on biblical texts (*Lk 5:1-3; Mk 6:30-31...*) and on Cardinal Sarah's book, *The Force of Silence*, the preacher insisted on knowing how to withdraw, of finding a moment of calm, of silence. In the midst of the noise and turmoil of this world, of pastoral care, we must know how to put ourselves aside, to remain in silence. Because silence is the language of God. Often, God speaks to us best in silence. For this, we must have moments of prayer which gives us inner peace. Praying in silence allows us to overcome different kinds of noise.

2. “The call to holiness”. Echoing the words of Pope Francis, found in his apostolic exhortation *“Gaudete et exsultate”*, the retreat preacher highlighted the fact that the call to holiness is addressed to all the baptized. To be holy is to be able to reflect the goodness of God in the world. Holiness is the most beautiful face of the Catholic Church. For being holy, we just need to live our identity with

love because holiness is the meeting of human weakness with the grace of God. The saint is not a perfect one, but one who is capable of loving the Lord despite his weakness. The preacher also highlighted the presence of the “saints of the next door” who are witnesses, who encourage and accompany us. What these saints have in common is the fact that they loved the Lord and allowed themselves to be loved by Him. There is the call to holiness because we carry a treasure in our perpetually fragile human condition.

3. “*Mercy – Reconciliation*”. Inner peace comes through a path of reconciliation and mercy towards our loved ones. In the gospel according to Saint Luke (*Lk 15, 1-2*), Jesus welcomes sinners to allow them to begin a process of conversion. In the parable of the “prodigal son,” the father respects his son’s choice and freedom. Thus, God respects the freedom of each of us, he does not force us to stay with Him. Today, many religious people demand the freedom to act as they want, they no longer give enough time for the mission to which they have been called. We take a lot of time for personal things. And the eldest son who refuses to enter the celebration, refuses for this purpose to enter into communion with the father and his returned brother. There is nothing that exceeds communion with our brothers. Communion with God is the reason for our existence.

4. “*The Transfiguration*”. Jesus takes Peter, James and John with Him to have a profound experience of God, an experience that transforms them and allows them to support the faith of others. It is necessary for us to experience this transformation, so that we become pillars, columns on which others can support themselves. A consecrated person must allow himself to be transformed by the divine presence. And transfiguration comes through prayer. This transforms the person praying. The encounter with Christ in prayer must transform us. For our main work as consecrated persons is “prayer”. Jesus called his first disciples first to be with Him. The apostolate comes second. At the end of the transformation, we must realize that true glory comes through the path of passion, through the cross. Difficulties are necessary for our transformation, for our maturation.

5. “*Religious consecration, gift, responsibility and path*”. In this last theme, Mgr. Léonard began by saying that our vocation to religious life (Montfortian) is a gift from God. It is not a coincidence, nor a human right, nor even a personal merit. My presence in the congregation is willed by God. Our vocation has an ecclesial, congregational, family dimension. The gift of vocation requires the responsibility of those who are its beneficiaries. Personal responsibility involves living out the vows. The vow of poverty evangelizes the instinct of possession. The vow of chastity evangelizes the instinct of procreation and sets the heart free to love and let itself be loved by the Lord. The vow of obedience evangelizes the instinct of power. This final wish asks for three things; maturity, dialogue and humility. To close his teachings, the auxiliary bishop of Kisangani addressed the Montfortian retreatants, saying that to flourish in religious life, it is necessary to: know one another, be able to meet in community to build fraternal communion, to be able to ask for forgiveness and to forgive, to accept difference as an asset and not as a threat, to rediscover the other as a gift.

At the end of this retreat, each participant expressed their satisfaction with the teachings received through the words of thanks given by Father Henri ALOTEREMBI, SMM on behalf of all the participants. It should be noted that this retreat was attended by 21 confreres from the General Delegation of Francophone Africa and the Superior General, Father Yoseph Putra Dwi Darna WATUN, SMM, accompanied by his Advisor in charge of Africa, Father Lonely Paul MASHONGA, SMM.

Long live Jesus through Mary! God alone!

Deacon Emmanuel KWASIA, SMM