

## A Word from the Postulator

Pope Francis is in the midst of inviting the entire Church at once to respond to three urgent calls, if it wishes to be credible and wishes to bring the gospel to today's world: the option for the poor, bringing the gospel to the *margins* of society, and the mission to all. In his own time Fr. d'Alzon knew how to respond, with boldness, creativity, and, especially, great faith, to these same urgent calls. In recent issues of *Signs of God* we tried to show d'Alzon's appreciation for the first two challenges and what he did concretely to respond to them. In the present issue we would like to draw attention to his missionary zeal. He tells us that the vocation, the very *raison d'être* of the Assumption, his religious family, is the extension of the Kingdom of Jesus Christ; this is the greatest of all causes. Our mission is that of the Church: to gather all men and women into the People of God. Every Assumptionist, whether religious or lay, must possess a missionary spirit, like that of the apostles, d'Alzon would say, where every inkling of laziness or false prudence is ruled out: *Have a faith that is bold; don't worry if it is characterized by a certain careless concern. Happy are those who embrace the whole world in their ambition, because what they're really ambitious about is the extension of the Kingdom of Jesus Christ everywhere!* This is the challenge, ever current, to which he calls us.

*Fr. Julio Navarro Román, A.A.*

## Bringing Christ to the margins of society

Assumptionist religious life, like a tripod, rests on three legs and aims at striking a balance among the three, prayer, community, and mission. Prayer is the breath, community the heart, and mission the spearhead. In his own words, Fr. d'Alzon elaborated at length in his writings on these three constitutive components of apostolic religious life...

What are the areas or goals set by Fr. d'Alzon for his disciples? There are no limits other than those set by Rome, the heart of the Church and center of unity from which missions extend to the farthest reaches of the world, whence this concept of a mission with universal, catholic dimensions. Tongue in cheek, Fr. d'Alzon set the Great Wall of China as the limit for the mission of the Oblates in Nîmes, and it is a known fact that, towards

the end of his life, he made Russia an apostolic obsession for Assumptionist religious. As early as 1860, he sent his first missionaries to the other side of the world, to Australia, and he rejoiced when Saint Marie-Eugenie de Jesus, the Superior of the R.A.s, seized an opportunity to create a foundation in Capetown in 1852.

If Fr. d'Alzon tried to escape the tyrannical rule of so many bishops, it is because he wanted to put his congregations under the universal supervision of Rome, which rarely rejects the gratuitous missionary initiatives of religious orders. Concretely, we know that when it comes to a particular assignment, things can be a little uncertain. Frequently, religious themselves must define on the ground what shape their commitments will take based on the needs, one's

### In the words of Fr. d'Alzon

*What an immense field of endeavor is opened before us!  
What Jesus said to his rude disciples I say to you:  
"The harvest is rich" (Mt 9:37). The disciples became  
apostles and conquered the world.*

*(Foundational Documents, p. 133)*

## «A missionary aspiration of reaching everyone»

I dream of a “missionary option”, that is, a missionary impulse capable of transforming everything, so that the Church’s customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures can be suitably channeled for the evangelization of today’s world rather than for her self-preservation. The renewal of structures demanded by pastoral conversion can only be understood in this light: as part of an effort to make them more mission-oriented, to make ordinary pastoral activity on every level more inclusive and open, to inspire in pastoral workers a constant desire to go forth and in this way to elicit a positive response from all those whom Jesus summons to friendship with himself. As John Paul II once said to the Bishops of Oceania: “All renewal in the Church must have mission as its goal if it is not to fall prey to a kind of ecclesial introversion”.

(...) the principal aim of these participatory processes should not be ecclesiastical organization but rather the missionary aspiration of reaching everyone.

Pastoral ministry in a missionary key seeks to abandon the complacent attitude that says: “We have always done it this way”. I invite everyone to be bold and creative in this task of rethinking the goals, structures, style and methods of evangelization in their



Pope Francis in Korea

respective communities. A proposal of goals without an adequate communal search for the means of achieving them will inevitably prove illusory. I encourage everyone to apply the guidelines found in this document generously and courageously, without inhibitions or fear. The important thing is to not walk alone, but to rely on each other as brothers and sisters, and especially under the leadership of the bishops, in a wise and realistic pastoral discernment.

We see then that the task of evangelization operates within the limits of language and of circumstances. It constantly seeks to communicate more effectively the truth of the Gospel in a specific context,

without renouncing the truth, the goodness and the light which it can bring whenever perfection is not possible. A missionary heart is aware of these limits and makes itself “weak with the weak... everything for everyone” (*1 Cor 9:22*). It never closes itself off, never retreats into its own security, never opts for rigidity and defensiveness. It realizes that it has to grow in its own understanding of the Gospel and in discerning the paths of the Spirit, and so it always does what good it can, even if in the process, its shoes get soiled by the mud of the street. (Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium* of Pope Francis, # 27, 31, 33, 45).

interests, and one’s abilities. As for the apostolic activity of the Assumptionists, one might describe it as a sort of exercise in on-the-spot inventiveness. This term seems to describe well the work of missionaries who set out with nothing but their faith and zeal as their first resources; only later do they begin to develop more concrete means of

action, something for which Fr. Galabert, one of the first Assumptionist missionaries, pleaded with great insistence..

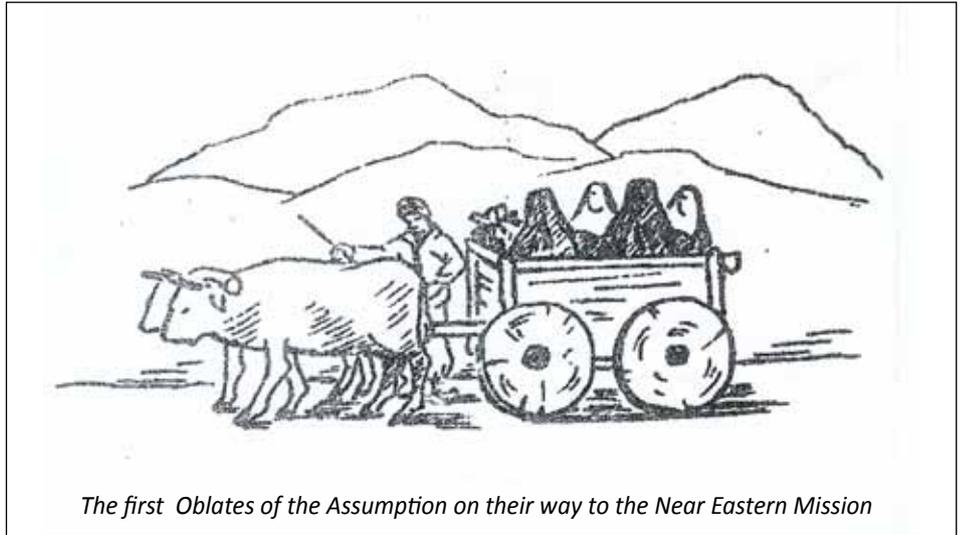
(Jean-Paul Périer-Muzet,  
*Praying 15 Days with Emmanuel d’Alzon*,  
New City Press 2009, *Tenth Day*)

## « You will go beyond the seas »

### « You are soldiers »

You are, my daughters, soldiers, ready to leave sooner or later for battle. I can see you carrying the flag of Our Lord to the farthest corners of the Orient. The only limit I am putting on your labors beyond Constantinople, the Black Sea, and the Caspian Sea is the Great Wall of China. How many miles you'll have to travel in doing so. And if we take you along to Australia with us, that would be just one more challenge for you! Well, you know what, none of this worries me much at all. You know what does concern me? That you be saints. [...] You have Sisters in heaven who are praying for you, and their prayers are effective because their sacrifice was accepted. It is not my wish to send you all to your graves at once, my children, but what I do want is that you resolve to become real victims of love for the salvation of souls. Gain a little more courage every day. Ask Our Lord to make of you lamps burning intensely and brightly. Like John the Baptist, nourish an ambition to be his forerunner everywhere, yes, everywhere where he may be better known.

Just two weeks ago the Pope said to missionary bishops, « *I bless your blood, your sweat and your tears* », and this evening I heard the bishop of Tulle say, preaching to the papal zouaves, that the superiority that a soldier has over an angel is that he can shed his blood as Jesus Christ did. Who knows if you will have to shed your blood? I am unworthy to be a martyr, but who knows if, before I die, I won't have the good fortune to see some of my daughters soaring to the heavens bearing the martyr's palm branch in their



*The first Oblates of the Assumption on their way to the Near Eastern Mission*

hands? And why not?

(Letter of Fr. d'Alzon to the Novices of the Oblates of the Assumption, Rome, December 22, 1869).

### « The foreign missions are our ambition »

Love of the Church stirs up another love in our hearts. The Apostles were commissioned to preach Christ's message not only in Jerusalem but to the ends of the earth. Yes, our ambition extends also to foreign missions. What providential grace has already given us so many missionaries when we are still in fact not very numerous? But besides ourselves,

notice that we have called upon others to assist us. In the past, virgin women consecrated to the Lord were hidden behind the most severe cloisters. Today they are asked to travel even beyond the seas.

This has been a tremendous change, thanks to the mercy of God and the great devotion of these, his spouses, who want to sanctify themselves, as we do, in a great apostolic love for the Church. From that point of view, their spirit in a way deepens our own.

(Closing Address of Fr. d'Alzon to the General Chapter of 1868, *Foundational Documents*, p. 91)

### News from the Secretariats

On the occasion of November 21 this year, the anniversary of Fr. d'Alzon's « passover », we are hoping to be able to distribute a small pamphlet « Believe » on the founder. The goal is to make his personality better known as well as his apostolic zeal and above all his holiness. This pamphlet has undergone a long process of composition with many people involved, especially Br. Jean-Michel Brochec and Fr. André Antoni, and, of course, with the competence of professionals at Bayard Press, Paris. Initially it will appear in three languages: French, English, and Spanish, totaling 25,000 copies, 5,000 of which are to be sent to the diocese of Nîmes.

## Favors and graces received

### Aix-en-Provence (July 17, 2014)

*I have been praying to Fr. d'Alzon for at least 45 years, asking for his intercession in my life and that of my family! A few months ago I think I saw an article in your newsletter requesting that people who had received a grace from Fr. d'Alzon make it known for his glorification. Here is my account:*

*Our daughter Catherine, currently 56 years old, has had a really tough life... Last year, after not having visited us for several years, she came by to see us telling us that she had moved to a new city, that she was no longer smoking, and that she had just passed a test allowing her to begin training as a nurse's aide --- even though this wasn't at all in her field of work! (...)*

*From the very beginning we had entrusted her to Fr. d'Alzon that he might sustain her and encourage her in the moments of despair and uncertainty that she would know... She told us: «if I help others, at least in this work I will not have wasted my life!» Last week she made it through the final week of her training, passed the exam, and received her diploma as a nurse's aide.*

*Our immediate circle of friends, a priest friend, and others who have known us forever are stunned and have even said that this is a miracle! As for us we don't know if this can be called a miracle, but what is sure, beyond a doubt, is that the proof for Fr. d'Alzon's intervention has been compelling throughout her training period but also throughout all the difficult evaluations she has had to undergo subsequently in the hospital context.*

*We really want to render homage and thanks for these graces in view of Fr. d'Alzon's glorification and we will pray more than ever for this to happen...*

*We hope that this witness of ours will help things along in Rome! Mrs. Soalhat.*

### Bogotá (August 30, 2014)

*The birth of my grandson is a miracle of God, with Fr. Emmanuel d'Alzon's intercession, given the following facts. During her pregnancy, Mary showed up at the hospital.... She was treated by a gynecologist and on January 15, 2014 she was given an obstetrical ultrasound. The result: the baby's heart was no longer beating. The doctors recommended a therapeutic abortion... The parents asked if there wasn't something else that could be done to save the infant and the doctors answered that medically speaking there was nothing else that could be done to save the child...*

*Mary, accompanied by her husband, left the hospital in tears. She called me, her father. I am a surgeon... I evaluated the case and I saw that the only thing that remained was to pray and ask God for a miracle. I agreed with the doctors at the hospital that medically there was nothing that could be done. But, yes, there was still something that could be done --- to ask God for a miracle and to hope with faith. Therefore, my wife and I began to pray to God through the intercession of Fr. d'Alzon that he would grant us the grace of life for our grandson, or, if it was his will to welcome him into heaven, that his will be done... I advised Mary and her husband to remain calm and to pray; I also told Mary not to take any medical prescriptions and not to go to the hospital for a therapeutic abortion. We would leave in God's hands and those of Fr. Emmanuel d'Alzon the life of our grandson.*

*I myself took the decision to oversee the prenatal care and I looked for a doctor who was a believer, a specialist in gynecology. He recommended rest and prayer. Two days later, on January 17, 2014, a new obstetrical ultrasound was taken that indicated that there was cardiac activity in the child in the womb. Each month thereafter the couple went in for a gynecological check-up and finally on August 30, 2014, Andrés Orlando was born, totally healthy, to the joy of all and to the glory of God.*

*I, as a doctor, as well as the gynecologist who treated the child, consider the birth of this baby to be a miracle of God. My wife and I believe that this miracle was granted through the intercession of Fr. Emmanuel d'Alzon. Cordially, Orlando.*

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