

Praying with the Assumptionists

*Tap into a spiritual tradition
that can enrich your prayer life*

■ BY FATHER RICHARD E. LAMOUREUX, AA

When I was teaching at Assumption College in Worcester, Massachusetts, I decided it would be good to tell my students what the Assumptionists were all about. To organize the gathering, I enlisted the help of a senior with whom I had worked on a number of projects, but after a week or two of serious effort, he came to tell me that he was having a hard time stirring up interest. We did the best we could (even luring participants with the offer of pizza) and succeeded in bringing together 20 or so young men and women. I launched into my presentation with a good deal of enthusiasm, but I sensed I wasn't connecting. Finally, one student courageously spoke up.

"Father Richard, this is all important stuff, but, you know, here you are talking about Assumptionist spirituality, and most of us don't even know if Moses was born before Christ or after. A lot of people our age don't even go to church on Sunday. My guess is it'd be hard for them to identify with what you're saying."

That froze me in my tracks, but, call it grace or adrenaline, I immediately understood what he was saying: When



The bronze statue of Assumptionist founder Emmanuel d'Alzon with a student, created by Sister of Charity Margaret Beaudette, was dedicated at Assumption College in Worcester, Massachusetts, in October 2010

PHOTO COURTESY ASSUMPTION COLLEGE

the Titanic is sinking, you don't worry about how the chairs are arranged on deck. When the Gospel is unknown, what meaning could an Order's spirituality have? That thought led me to set my notes aside and say more or less what follows.

The founder of the Assumptionists, Emmanuel d'Alzon, was born in southern France in 1810, just 20 years after the beginning of the French Revolution. D'Alzon had one obsession in life: to bring God back into play in a society that had pretty much set God aside, and in a Church in almost total chaos, searching for ways to respond to the challenges of revolutionary forces. "The most intimate thought of my soul is that the world needs

to be penetrated through and through by a Christian idea; otherwise it will fall apart." That was how the 25-year-old d'Alzon put it.

He founded a Religious Order in 1845, the Augustinians of the Assumption, because he could find no other Order that shared his particular vision. But when one of his early disciples asked him what distinguished his Order, he gave this surprising response: "The first characteristic of our Religious family is a certain simplicity of means. It's claimed that the rarest thing in the world is common sense. Would it be paradoxical to maintain that in the Catholic world the rarest thing is 'Catholic common sense'? It's for this reason that I think this characteristic of the Assumption is, in fact, original. Our desire is to be simply Catholic — Catholic as much as it is possible to be." In today's terms, d'Alzon would have probably said that the Assumption is neither liberal nor conservative, it's not for this devotion or that devotion, it's not a movement or a special way of being Catholic. The Assumption is simply Catholic.

D'Alzon defined this simplicity by saying we should focus

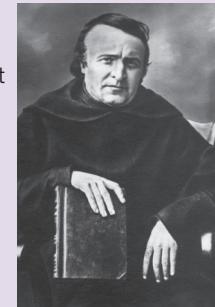
on the essentials. That meant that Jesus Christ should be at the center of our lives. D'Alzon would have liked the WWJD ("What would Jesus do?") motto. He said we should study Jesus (especially in the Bible and in what the early Church said so clearly about his nature and his mission), we should imitate his actions and his attitudes, we should try to be Jesus for our own day. Then, we should love what Jesus loved most: his mother and the Church.

Regardless of what its name suggests, Assumptionist spirituality is centered on Christ and not on Mary, but she is important because Jesus gave her to us as a model, as someone who brought God into the world in the person of Jesus. We should do that like her, i.e., by giving birth to Christ in our own lives and around us.

PRAYER ADVICE FROM EMMANUEL D'ALZON



I have learned to pray mostly as a result of my experience with prayer, and I do not have much in the way of advice beyond what I have tried to do myself. Remain before God; tell Him you are nothing and how much you need Him. Ask Our Lord to give you his spirit; ask the Holy Spirit to give you his love. It's as simple as that. And by so doing I have found all the strength and hope I need. I do not know of any greater goal than to search for God with all one's strength. In a word, I have to simplify things as much as possible and can only urge you to become as simple as possible in your prayer."



The Assumptionists at a glance

NUMBER OF ASSUMPTIONISTS WORLDWIDE: **1,000**

WORLD HEADQUARTERS:
Rome

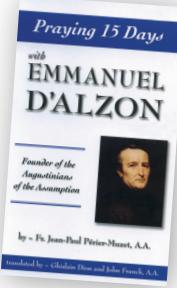
SUPERIOR GENERAL:
Father Richard E. Lamoureux, AA

U.S. WEBSITE: assumption.us

DISCOVER THE ASSUMPTIONISTS

HERE ARE **SOME RESOURCES** YOU CAN USE TO FURTHER EXPLORE THE ASSUMPTIONIST TRADITION. FOR MORE INFORMATION VISIT ASSUMPTION.US AND CLICK ON "BOOKS" UNDER "ABOUT US."

- Jean-Paul Périer-Muzet, *Praying 15 Days With Emmanuel d'Alzon*, Rome: Assumption Publications, 2009
- André Sèvè, *Christ Is My Life: The Spiritual Legacy of Emmanuel d'Alzon*, New York: New City Press, 1988
- New Assumptionist online library, assumption.us/media/virtual-library



With his unfailing ability to insist on the essentials, Emmanuel d'Alzon used to tell his followers that the Assumptionists had no special method of prayer. "Just pray," he would tell them. Of course, he did have a particular preference for praying with the Bible and for the kind of prayer that St. Augustine, whose works he began reading (in Latin!) when he was still a teenager, would have practiced: a slow, meditative reading of God's Word, allowing the power of that Word to fill and transform our spirits. St. Augustine, like Father d'Alzon, refused to say "how" we should pray. Instead, he said how we should "be," i.e. men and women of desire, people who turn to God with the desires in their heart, asking God

to purify those desires and grant those which will truly bring them peace and joy.

In the same spirit, Emmanuel d'Alzon refused to focus his energies on one project that could later to be called "characteristic" of the Assumptionists. His real passion was to bring about God's reign in his own heart and in the world, and that led him to be attentive to the needs of his people and obedient to the Church's calls to ministry. He considered education to be particularly effective in renewing society at the deepest levels, and dedicated much of his energy to that cause. As a young priest, his love for the Church and his desire to see it united once again led him to reach out to the dominant Protestant popula-

tion of his native region and later to the Orthodox Christians of Eastern Europe; ecumenism became one of his great missions. Journalism and the publication of good books was an effective way to have a broad influence on the society of his day; that led d'Alzon and his followers to found a daily Catholic newspaper and then a host of other publications in the service of the Gospel. More than anyone, he would

want the Assumptionists of today to be responsive to the real needs of God's people in view of bringing about change at the deepest level, of realizing God's dream for humanity. **CD**

Father Richard E. Lamoureux, AA, is the superior general of the Assumptionists. He is a native of Worcester, Massachusetts. *Catholic Digest* is sponsored by and is a ministry of the Assumptionists.

NEXT MONTH PRAYING WITH THE DOMINICANS

THE WHOLE TRUTH AND NOTHING BUT THE TRUTH

A small town prosecuting attorney calls his first witness, an elderly woman, to the stand and begins questioning by asking, "Mrs. Jones, do you know me?" She responds, "Why, yes, I've known you since you were a boy, and frankly, you've been a big disappointment. You lie, cheat at cards, and talk about people behind their backs!" The lawyer is stunned, but continues. "Mrs. Jones, do you know the defense attorney?" Again she replies, "Why, yes I do. I used to babysit Mr. Bradley when he was a youngster. And he, too, has been a real disappointment. He's rude, lazy, and selfish. He only cares about money and wouldn't spare a cent to a charity." The defense attorney sits at his desk in shock. At this point, the judge brings the courtroom to silence and calls both attorneys to the bench. In a very quiet voice, he says, "If either of you asks her if she knows me, you'll be jailed for contempt!"