

## A Word from the Postulator

Pope Francis has declared the year 2015 « the Year of the Consecrated Life ». So I thought it would be a good opportunity to reflect on the personal testimony and teaching that Fr. d'Alzon gives us with regard to religious life. The way in which he lived the vows and the virtues of poverty, chastity, and obedience is also a sign of his holiness. His teaching on these virtues speaks to all the baptized, because it is the teaching of Jesus Christ himself. Let's begin with poverty. It makes no sense in Fr. d'Alzon's mind unless it is the imitation of Jesus' poverty, an identification with this radical option of the Son of God, born poor in a manger, working years in Nazareth by the sweat of his brow, having nowhere to lay his head during the years of his ministry, embracing the poor of his people, and dying on a cross in an act that represented the absolute pouring out of himself. Gospel poverty is linked to the virtue of hope, the act of placing all one's heart in God alone. The fruits of such virtue are interior freedom and joy. Poverty, chosen as an option for the Kingdom, can become a remarkably effective means of evangelization in our world. The poor will have a place of privilege in the heart of the one who makes himself poor out of love for Jesus Christ.

*Fr. Julio Navarro Román, A.A.*

## He lived like the poor

His aristocratic background, his education, his relations with the nobility of his day --- all of this could have made Emmanuel d'Alzon indifferent to social inequalities. But his parents, profoundly Christian, taught him that the Gospel calls us to reach out to the poor and the least among us. As a little child, his mother would bring him to visit the sick in the local hospital. As a young school-boy he would gather the personnel at the château of Lavagnac to give them lessons and teach them catechism. As a young priest, he would distribute all that he owned to the poor. His house-keeper nicknamed him, « Fr. Give-it-away ». Even his mother, good as she was, complained of his generosity: « My son costs me more than two beggars ». Appointed diocesan Vicar general, Fr. d'Alzon led a life that was sober, even aus-

tere. He chose to live in simple quarters in a poor neighborhood of the city. He refused to accept the trunkfuls of clothes and furnishings that his family would send him. He would walk through blue-collar neighborhoods in thread-bare shoes. He encountered plenty of misery and suffering which he set out to address. From the day he arrived in Nîmes, the poor found in him an advocate.

(...) In his end-of-the-year addresses at his high school, the Collège de l'Assomption, addressing parents as well as students, he would denounce in scathing terms « corruption that takes advantage of poverty and hunger ». The poor are « the suffering members of Jesus Christ ». We must learn to « respect the poor ».

*(Fiches d'Alzon 80, # 6, pp. 1-2)*

### In Fr. d'Alzon's own words

I implore you then, my dear Brothers, to flee from the love of wealth and thus protect against the tendency to material well-being which is one of the greatest degradations of our time and the destruction of all aspirations to Christian perfection and the supernatural order.

*(Spiritual Writings, 157)*

## He chose evangelical poverty

The young d'Alzon was well aware of his privileged status from a material point of view. He thanked God for allowing him to be able to work without worrying about tomorrow. He made the decision himself to strive to become poor in spirit. When he was 21, he wrote the following as he planned his life's goals: « *I am determined to become poor in spirit. I thank God for making me a man of independent means – like this I can work without worrying about tomorrow. I can make use of the goods he has given me to acquire far more easily the intellectual tools I need to fulfil my task* » (E.S., 743).

When he professed private vows of religion in 1845 at Notre Dame des Victoires Church in Paris, here is how he formulated his commitment to poverty: « *I renounce the use of all that property which may come to me except insofar as it is used for the glory of God and I reserve the right to leave it or not to leave it to my family, depending on what will be most prudent in the eyes of those I shall consult. I commit myself to living poorly with regard to clothes, food, and other living expenses..... I pledge to make every effort to waste as little of my time as possible* » (Compendium of his life and virtues, vol. II, p. 342).

In September 1845, before beginning the novitiate, Fr. d'Alzon took up residence at the Collège de l'Assomption, first in the infirmary and then in a small, windowless room which he wanted to make into a monk's cell. From the day the novitiate began (Christmas 1845) he insisted on the spirit of poverty and its practice. He would make an example of himself: « *Would you like to know how I am knuckling down to a life of poverty as a future re-*



1871 – Les Châteaux: Fr. d'Alzon and the first seminarians

*ligious ought? I have been making my own bed for some time – but the day before yesterday I moved into a new cell, and actually swept it! – not at all well, but I did my best. Today I had pitchers and buckets placed in the passage. The novices who live with me, or soon will, must get used to following the example you have been giving us for so long*

*– their only servants must be their own fingers! Need I tell you, these poor fingers provoke infinite compassion! I have a talent for flaying mine each time I tuck the blankets under my straw mattress! Please teach me how to do my chores without making too much of a mess of myself* » (E.S., 790-791).

### An anecdote

One day Father returned from Lavagnac with a suitcase full of fine clothes, all marked with his name. His mother had herself packed everything for her dear “beggar,” and had included among other things a half-dozen pairs of black silk socks. As Fr. d'Alzon arrived, the beggars stretched out their hands. Father was penniless, but he did have something. He opened his suitcase and gave away everything in it. All the socks went; only the empty suitcase remained. Some friends, notified soon enough, managed to retrieve some of the clothes and return them to Fr. d'Alzon who needed them more than did many of the paupers.

It is said that near the Maison Carrée one could see a beggar in rags who had on his feet fine silk socks of which he was very proud and wouldn't give up for any price. He showed them off and told everyone where they came from.

Thus the poor wore new clothes while Fr. d'Alzon was content to wear old mended garments. He was called extravagant and foolish, but such fools are wonderfully wise! Is that not exactly what we think of our Father? (H.-D. Galeran, *Sketches of Fr. d'Alzon*, “The Silk Socks”).

## What he teaches us

For Fr. d'Alzon evangelical poverty is a virtue which every Christian must practice; it is not the exclusive reserve of men and women religious. Here is a summary of his teaching:

### 1.-Poverty is linked to the virtue of hope.

In fact, God is our only wealth and we must learn to depend on Him for everything. « No man can serve two masters. As long as I remain attached (as my nature inclines me) to the joys, to the pleasures, to the comforts of this world, how can my heart dwell in Heaven? So the love of heavenly things, the longing for God as my supreme happiness, cannot go hand in hand with attachment to earthly things..... This detachment from whatever is not God or doesn't lead to God attains its very summit in the profession of religious poverty. By poverty we detach ourselves, not only affectively but effectively, from all creatures, in order to attach ourselves to the Creator, to that Father from whom every perfect gift descends » (*E.S.*, p. 1254).

### 2.- Poverty implies work.

It does not consist in seeking « acts of excessive austerity » (look at the example Our Lord gave during the years of his ministry). But, « like the poor, we must work to earn a living » (*Directory*, II, 6, ii). Moreover, work « is a sacrifice of his body or of his intellect or of his will. And this, I repeat, is worship rendered to God the whole day long. It's a question of wanting to get started and setting about it with vigour and determination » (*E.S.*, 512). The obligation to study would also be for Fr. d'Alzon « an essential element of work » which the vow of poverty imposes on religious (*E.S.*, 200).

### 3.- Voluntary poverty has a social dimension.

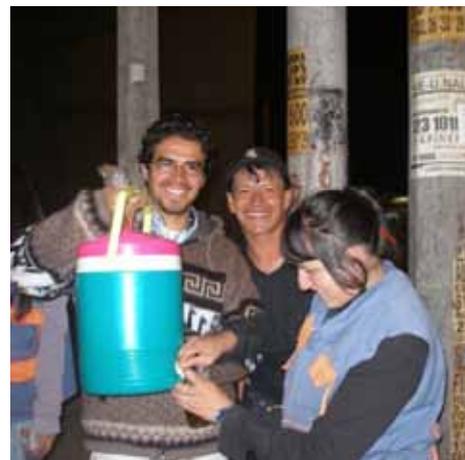
« Above all we consider the practice of poverty to be central. We believe that it is critical in our day, especially as a means to protest the way people are behaving » (Letter to Fr. Picard, January 7, 1857). « When dealing with the working classes, the proletariat and pauperism, the religious has no more powerful tool than the imitation of Our Lord who had no place to lay his head, that is to say, than the practice of poverty » (*Circular Letter* #8, IV, 2).

### 4.- By our poverty we seek to imitate Jesus Christ.

He chose to be poor. « As God, Jesus was rich. Let us not forget, he made himself poor for our sake (...) Let us ponder in our hearts over and over again every detail of this poor life, from the very beginning in Nazareth where Mary, poor working woman, laboured to earn a living in the workshop of Joseph. And it was there that the mystery of the Incarnation took place. In fact, God sent His angel to greet her not in some palace but in a humble hovel» (*E.S.*, 504-5). « Is my poverty that of Christ, whether in the manger at Bethlehem, at work in Nazareth, or without a stone to rest his head during His public life?

... Does the holy poverty of my Master so attract and charm me that I long only to live as He did? ... Does my spirit of poverty lead me to be particularly careful of books, clothes and the other things that have been entrusted to me? » (*Directory*, II, vi, ii).

Young lay Assumptionists with some street people in Bogotá ▶



## Favors and graces received

Testimony concerning the illness and cure of Máximo Agustín Fernández (11 years old).

*In November 2012, he began suffering from a persistent fever. After all the necessary testing, the diagnosis came back: Philadelphia-chromosome positive (Ph+) chronic myeloid leukemia. The treatment was long, annoying, and painful. We accompanied him in prayer, especially addressed to Our Lady of Lourdes. The first phase of chemotherapy was very strong; it put our faith to the test (...)*

*On February 11, 2013, Marisa, his mother, in much anguish, went to the shrine of Lourdes to pray to the Virgin for Máximo. She was comforted by a priest who told her that he was going to pray for him and he gave her a pamphlet that directed her to get in touch with Cristina [a lay Assumptionist responsible for promoting the cause of beatification for Fr. d'Alzon]. The latter called us several times while Máximo was in the hospital to tell us that they were praying a novena to Fr. Emmanuel d'Alzon for the healing of our son. After a few months, and given that the chemotherapy wasn't working, the doctors decided to do a bone marrow transplant. The donor was to be his brother Pablo. Whenever his fever rose or there were other complications, we began to pray all the harder...*

*First reports indicated that the expected collateral effects hadn't occurred, namely, loss of hair and nails, infections... The doctors were taken aback at this favorable response. According to the doctor, it looked like it wouldn't take a month for the new bone marrow to begin working. To everyone's surprise, it began working on the seventh day. After seventeen days Máximo left the hospital. To this day he has shown no complications.*

*We give thanks to Venerable Fr. Emmanuel d'Alzon; ever since they began, people at the church of Our Lady of Lourdes continue praying for Máximo Agustín.*

*Carlos and Marisa (Santos Lugares, Buenos Aires, December 2014).*

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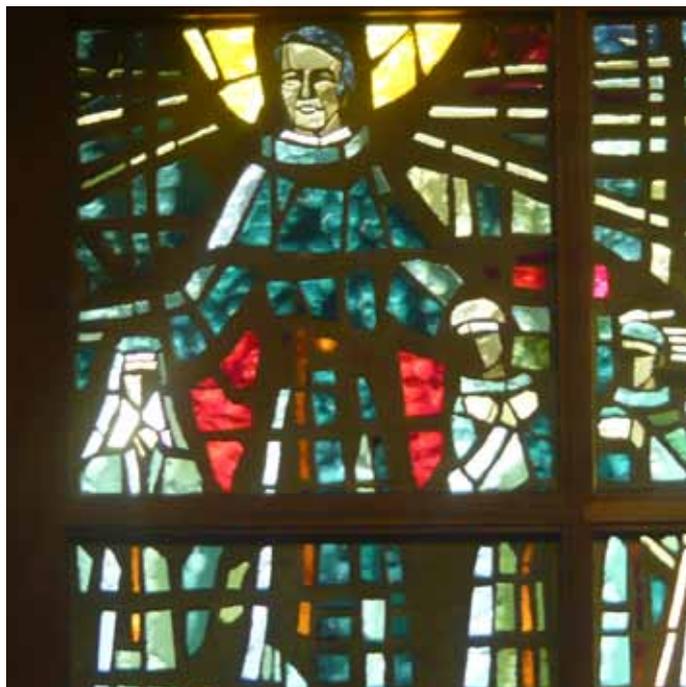
## News from the Secretariats

Here are a few events that took place in USA for the cause of Fr. d'Alzon.

**\*Assumption College:** A poster with Fr. d'Alzon's image was placed at the entrance of the chapel with a brief presentation of the highlights of his life. The Campus Ministry peer ministers were given a talk about Fr. d'Alzon's life. The annual d'Alzon Lecture took place on November 20, 2014 and was preceded by a word from the provincial about Fr. d'Alzon. Fr. Richard Lamoureux was the speaker. On the weekend of November 23 Fr. d'Alzon was incorporated into all the homilies given at the chapel.

**\*St Anne-St Patrick Parish:** A page on Fr. d'Alzon and the Assumptionists was placed in the parish bulletin. During pastoral visits to the sick and the elderly of the parish a card bearing the image of Fr. d'Alzon with the prayer for his beatification was distributed. Books, medals, and cards with his image were made available at the shrine store. All the homilies the weekend of November 23 focused on the figure of Fr. d'Alzon.

**\*Brighton:** On November 21 there was a Mass with all the residents present and a homily given on Fr. d'Alzon. Every evening at Vespers the prayer for the beatification of Fr. d'Alzon is recited. (Fr. Claude Grenache, A.A.).



Stained glass window from the chapel of Assumption College in Worcester (MA), USA