



A Word from the Postulator

Saints are not born saints. Holiness is, first and foremost, a grace that comes from God; nevertheless, at the same time, it requires a generous response on the part of the Christian who pursues the ideal of becoming a saint. For Fr. d'Alzon, the ultimate goal of his own life was certainly, and always, holiness. And to get there, he had to overcome a lot of obstacles in his way.

One of these, he admits again and again, was pride. It was part of his temperament, which, in his own words, he described as “mocking, irritable, proud, and scornful.” And he suffered from it. That is why humility would be one of the virtues he worked hardest to acquire. He recommended it as something essential to his religious and to those who came to him for spiritual direction: “Of all the virtues, humility is surely the most indispensable.”

True humility is born of faith, because it places us face to face with God: “God is everything; I am nothing” in relation to him. Humility “arises when we compare who God is to who we are”. Humility leads us to enter into the deepest recesses of our being and to see ourselves as we are with all our weaknesses and problems. Finally, humility facilitates relations with others marked by respect, service, obedience, and love.

Fr. Julio Navarro Román, A.A.

Humility, a virtue painfully acquired

As a young man, Emmanuel d'Alzon was wont to say that pride formed the basis of his character and that he was trying to curb it. He wrote in 1831: Pride is waging a cruel war against me. I am sadly experiencing the influence exerted upon me by the opinion I have of myself. I contemplate myself endlessly and I always admire myself; I almost adore myself, and yet pride makes me sink to the level of dirt; it is shattering me, it is crushing me.... I know all too well that I have been worth something, have adhered exactly to my plan of conduct, been firm in my work, strong against my passions only when I attacked the first of these, only when I was convinced of my uselessness, only when I told myself: “You are nothing. You are worth nothing.” I know all this, and yet the opinion I have of myself is always the very best.

He can be believed because he was clear-eyed about his flaws, and his absolute truthfulness was not only applied to others, but to himself as well. It should be added, however, that the uncompromising judgment he was directing against his own person in his correspondence

gives the impression not of humbleness, which is the result of a virtuous constraint, but of the most natural and spontaneous humility. (...) (He writes) again, in 1854 : “The shame that the sight of my past life causes me, the futility of my life, the blemishes which human feelings have cast on the little bit of good that I am capable of doing, all this upsets me greatly. I hope that God will have pity on me.” Finally, (...) in 1855: “The Blessed Virgin has obtained for me...very great graces. I have understood that I preach myself too much and not Jesus Christ enough; that I must attract souls by being less mocking, irritable, proud, and scornful. I must draw them through patience, humility, gentleness that I do not have and that I must acquire..” (...) The uprightness of Father d'Alzon is confirmed first of all in his humility.

(Gaétan Bernoville, *Emmanuel d'Alzon, 1810-1880, A Champion of the XIXth Century Catholic Renaissance in France*, trans. Claire Quintal, Bayard, Inc., 2003, p. 226-227
<http://www.assumption.us/media/virtual-library/47-virtual-library/516-emmanuel-dalzon>).

Fr d'Alzon says to us

Humility is a form of love. There are a lot of links between humility and love.

You cannot truly love without forgetting yourself.

(Cahiers d'Alzon, #8, p. 118)

Example of humility

It is true that the Servant of God practiced to a heroic degree the virtue of humility that serves as the foundation on which all other virtues are built. By nature he had a spirit that was open to noble and generous thoughts. By instinct he loathed petty and vulgar self-centeredness. In his regard, high-mindedness and a solid character went hand in hand with humility, the virtue of great souls. During his meditations, he would often place himself before God or before the most perfect of God's works. Thus an ideal of perfection shone before his eyes; and from there, coming down to himself, he would find himself quite small. "Who am I," he said, quoting the Scriptures, "if not dust and ashes?" Yet it was only because he looked on high that he found himself so small. He felt this nothingness in which he now lost himself: it was *humility, the fruit of his soul's greatness*. The small-minded have no experience of this. Having no idea of anything in the world that might be greater than they are, they are thoroughly satisfied with themselves. Fr. d'Alzon, accustomed to considering the perfections of God, was also well aware, by contrast, of the creature's defects. (*Articles gathered at the Nîmes inquiry for the cause of the beatification and canonization of Fr. d'Alzon*, Bar-Le-Duc, 1958, p. 86).



Stained glass window from the chapel of the Oblates of the Assumption in Paris

An anecdote

The following incident took place in France. Two Franciscans arrived and requested hospitality at a religious house. Since mud from the journey had covered their naked feet, they asked for a little water to wash them. The superior of the house who received them was alone at the time, but he didn't make the guests aware of this. He simply asked them to excuse him

while he took care of everything. He went into the kitchen, put on an apron, grabbed a jug filled with warm water and found two small basins, came back and placed them in front of the two religious. They objected, embarrassed that they would be served by the superior of the house. Yet, he, smiling at the chance to serve them, paid them no heed and, like Abraham who received the three Angels, knelt down before them, poured water over their feet, and handed them a white towel that he himself had gone to find in the laundry room.

The house in France where this took place was the Collège de l'Assomption in Nîmes; the religious superior, so humble and welcoming --- you guessed it--- was none other than our Father, Fr. d'Alzon. The two pilgrim visitors were Fr. Bruno, procurator general of the Capuchins, and Fr. Pius, his secretary. When they recounted this story later,

they would have tears in their eyes, for they considered it something truly worthy of a saint.

We were no less touched when we learned of this further proof of our Father's holiness. We hope that it will be added to everything we already know about him. May it help to win favor for his cause in Rome, so that we may soon be able to invoke his name publicly. (Extract from *Souvenirs*, #53).

What Fr. d'Alzon teaches us

Knowledge of my smallness

What am I, indeed, but a sinner so absorbed in the things of this world that I am incapable of thinking of anything higher, of thinking about the things of God? When it comes to matters of business, politics, or my leisure, my attention is fully engaged. But when it comes to my eternal destiny, I immediately become lazy, powerless, inclined to drop off to sleep – and those things that are the most important spark the least interest in me. Surely this gives me cause to feel thoroughly ashamed of myself. I have, indeed, nothing to boast about.

But what makes it worse yet is that it is a question of my relationship with God! Who is he, and who do I think I am? He is infinite Perfection, Greatness, Power and Wisdom. So what ought my feelings to be when I draw near to his throne? Now let me take a good look at myself. What wretchedness and what degradation! Not one ounce of gratitude! Forever inflating my “ego” on account of qualities I do not possess – and if I do possess them to a minimal degree, I spoil it all by becoming fatheaded. That’s me – that’s where my conceit has brought me. ... (“Fourteenth Meditation,” *Spiritual Writings*, II).

Humility at the Assumption

Of all the virtues, humility is surely the most indispensable to an Assumptionist religious: because if it is true, as Saint Paul says, that knowledge puffs up, then we are bound to be exposed to very grave



Fr. d'Alzon surrounded by high school students, taken around 1852-1853

temptations arising from the type of work we will be doing. The danger will lurk in the very good expected of us; therefore, we must strive, by being humble, to perform all our actions with the purest of intentions, lest we substitute self-satisfaction for the glory of God which should be our sole objective. We will continue to lift our thoughts toward Him who should be the source and goal of all our actions, for fear of finding our reward in the personal satisfaction of our achievements, praiseworthy in themselves, but insufficiently directed toward God (*Directory*, II, 2).

<http://www.assumption.us/media/virtual-library/47-virtual-library/374-directory-of-the-augustinians-of-the-assumption>)

Humility and Obedience

Humility will rid us of our self-seeking. Good works done for personal gratification, and not simply to please God, expose us to the danger of hearing these terrifying words: “Behold, in the day of your

fast your own will is found” (Is. 58:3, Confraternity translation). If we are humble, we will obey, no matter how difficult the sacrifices demanded of us, for self-distrust will make us understand our need to be led; and being conscious of our own weakness, we shall place all the more confidence in God (*ibid.*).

Humility and Truth

Saint Augustine says that the pagan philosophers have vainly sought the truth in pleasure, in ambition, in pride. To attain the Truth which is Jesus Christ, there is only one way, humility – and we can say of this virtue...that it is the one and indispensable condition of success. The man who prays humbly prays truthfully since he stand before God *tanquam nihilum* (as one that which is nothing). But how rare this conviction is! (“Second Circular Letter on Prayer,” 1876, *Spiritual Writings*, in *Écrits Spirituels*, p. 293).

News from the Secretariats

Audience With Pope Francis



A group of lay Assumptionists and others who help out at our shrine of Our Lady of Lourdes in Buenos Aires made a pilgrimage to Lourdes in France, then to Nîmes to walk in the footsteps of Fr. d'Alzon, and finally to Rome, where they attended an audience with Pope Francis. Here is the account that Cristina Berardi sent us.

On Wednesday, August 12, we had an audience with Pope Francis. I had never dreamed that such a gift from God would be possible... The meeting with the Pope was wonderful. We brought him a nice gift. I had written him a letter in which I told him of my personal life, the pastoral work that I do at Lourdes (Santos Lugares, Buenos Aires), the commitment I have made as a lay Assumptionist and the work and prayer ministry in which I am involved for the beatification of Fr. d'Alzon. I recounted to him the testimonies and medical dossiers that we had brought with us and asked him to study this material (with possible miracles). I told him that we are convinced of the holiness of our Founder, first because of his life and also because of the testimonies that we witness every day of favors received and 'little miracles' that people have received through his intercession.

I placed this letter, with an image of Fr. d'Alzon, into the hands of the secretary who was next to him. And to my surprise, yes, what great news ---- the Pope definitely read it and I have the proof: he an-

A publication of the Secretariat for
the Cause of the beatification
of Fr. Emmanuel d'Alzon.

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swered my letter with one of his own, very simple, but which is extremely touching. It gives me the assurance that he read all of it attentively. Now let's see what the follow-up is. I have the deepest hope that we will soon see the beatification of our Founder!



Lay Assumptionists of Buenos Aires with Pope Francis,
August 12, 2015

Vatican, September 1, 2015

In a letter, which expressed your sentiments of filial affection and attachment, you addressed yourself to the Holy Father and shared with him some of your concerns.

His Holiness thanks you for this sign of warmth, to which he responds by assuring you that in prayer he remembers you, those you recommended, and the concerns you hold in your heart. Also Pope Francis asks you to pray for him and for his service to the People of God, that it might bear abundant fruit. Wholeheartedly he grants you the Apostolic Blessing as a pledge of abundant divine favors.

I take advantage of this opportunity to send you warm wishes,

Msgr. Peter B. Wells,
Advisor of the Secretary of State

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Since humility is a sentiment so contrary to any human instinct, it is impossible that man

invented humility.

On the other hand, it is impossible to give a true definition of man without humility.

(Cahiers d'Alzon, #8, p. 110)