

On All Saints Day 2014, our brother Hervé Stéphan returned to the Father's house. Hervé, the seventh superior general of the Assumptionists, left us after 89 years, of which 70 were spent as a religious.

He was a genuinely free man who lived his Assumptionist vocation in all its depth and who knew how to share it with his fellow travelers in the Congregation, but also with the lay-people he met. Superior general from 1975 to 1987, he led our « little religious family » along the ways of brotherhood. Hervé had a passion for Jesus Christ, true man and true God. He inherited his faith from his Breton family and strengthened it at our minor seminary of St. Maur. He had a fierce love for and attachment to his homeland of Brittany. He relished walking along its coast, windswept and drizzly. During his walks he would often gather pebbles of varied shapes that he would convert into little works of religious art: Virgin and Child, a Last Supper, etc. Yes, Hervé was an artist by temperament.

As superior general, Hervé was a driving force behind the Congregation's re-discovery of the figure of Fr. Emmanuel d'Alzon. It was not that he had been totally forgotten, but he had lost his rightful place in the hearts of many of his sons. Hervé recognized that this man, Emmanuel d'Alzon, had the stature of a saint and that we should take him as a model. Emmanuel d'Alzon was restored to the Assumptionist memory.

But Hervé was also the superior general who insisted once again on the urgency of the mission. He encouraged recruiting native vocations in the then-Zaïre. He heard the call of what he named "the Macedonians", young people in countries where we had not yet founded, like Korea and Kenya, and invited us to reach out to them.

On this day when we celebrate the *dies natalis* of Fr. Emmanuel d'Alzon, we can give thanks for all those brothers who, in the image of Hervé Stéphan, have served the Assumption in giving of themselves without counting the cost. Let us not forget either that Hervé, after a long life of active service, accepted, at the age of 68, to leave France in order to participate in the Congregation's refoundation in Romania. He learned a new language and had to adapt to a situation that was marked by the perils and uncertainties of new beginnings. He never refused an opportunity to serve. Let us pray for religious who give their lives in service. I am thinking especially of our three brothers in the Congo: Jean-Pierre, Anselme and Edmond. We are still without any reliable news about them. Lord, hear our prayers!

I thank the Lord for Hervé who was a man shaped by the Word of God and especially by the psalms. I can still hear him reflecting at great length on Psalm 63 when I was a novice: « O God, you are my God. It is you that I seek », or Psalm 139: « It is you who knit me together in mother's womb ». Hervé was a man of the Scriptures. A man who was free because the God of Jesus Christ had freed him.

Let us pray that the Lord may continue to send us men of this human and spiritual depth.

Fr. Benoît GRIÈRE, AA.
Superior General
Rome, November 21, 2014