

Homily of Most Rev. Robert J. McManus, Bishop of Worcester
Assumption International Education Congress
Opening Mass / July 17, 2016

1. Saint John Paul II often states that for the person of faith, there is no such thing as pure coincidence or sheer good luck. Rather for the person of faith, every good gift comes from the Providence of God who only wills that you and I are healed, flourish and ultimately be saved. So it is providential that today as we gather to celebrate this Holy Mass on the campus of Assumption College whose motto is "…until Christ be formed in you" that the Church gives as our second liturgical reading St Paul's Letter to the Colossians in which he insistently reminds that early Christians that in baptism, they have died with Christ and their very existence is rooted in the mystery of God in Christ alone is their hope for future glory. Yes, my dear Assumptionist friends, it is good for us to be here so as to enter more deeply into the mystery of the crucified and risen Christ who is our only hope of future glory.

2. During my 12 years as Bishop of Worcester, I have visited this campus many times and have come to learn something about the extraordinary life and ministry of Father Emmanuel d'Alzon. D'Alzon was a missionary priest who was on fire with the zealous conviction of faith that the Church, society and the academy could be transformed and significantly enriched "by extending the reign of Christ in our souls," especially through education in all its various forms (First Constitutions, 1855).

3. I believe that our own time, both socially and ecclesially, is not unlike the social and religious situation that Fr. d'Alzon faced in France in the middle of the 19th century. Today like then, we

live in a society and world that are imbued with a pervasive secularism and a disturbing indifference to God and religion. And at the core of this secular horizontalism is the strange notion that God is somehow in competition with our human freedom and intelligence to such a degree that if a person is a genuine believer, if one believes with St. Paul that our life is rooted in Christ who has set us free to live in the freedom of the children of God, then such a believer is destined for a life that is intellectually impoverished and culturally outdated.

4. But the very purpose of this college and the other Assumptionist educational institutions and apostolates is to preserve and promote the Catholic intellectual tradition at the heart of which is "the glory of God is the human person fully alive." Those of you who have dedicated your life's work to the promotion of this authentic Christian humanism must not become discouraged by the sometimes hostile or perhaps even worse, the indifferent reaction to your intellectual and apostolic endeavors. Your work is holy work; your apostolic task of bringing to fruition in various ways Fr. d'Alzon's dream of "Christ being formed in the hearts and minds of the people of our time" is an essential participation in the entire Church's vocation to the work of evangelization. Because at the center of evangelization is the person of Christ who gives us a share in his own divine life so that you and I can be fully human and authentically free. As we move through this 21st century, the vitality and relevance of our Church will greatly depend on the transformation of the minds and consciences of men and women through your vocation of inviting them to embrace the Catholic intellectual tradition. In the name of the Church, I ask you to bring to the people of our age the Church's perennial conviction that faith and reason, truth and freedom are not only compatible but open up for us the way that leads to our Father's house in heaven. And that way is Christ himself. Amen.

Assumption College
Chapel of the Holy Spirit
July 17, 2016