



On Christmas Eve 1850, the Congregation of the Augustinians of the Assumption was born. That night Emmanuel d'Alzon, together with a small group of generous men (the first Assumptionists), pronounced their first religious vows, thus launching this new congregation.

The following imaginary "interview" with Fr. d'Alzon appeared in the Chilean Assumptionist monthly review, *Eco de Lourdes*, in 1999 in preparation of the 150th anniversary of the founding in 2000. As we celebrate the feast of Fr. d'Alzon this year, we are reprinting it because we received so many positive comments about it (editorial staff, *Eco de Lourdes*)

- Fr. d'Alzon, what would you say is the foundation of your work, of the congregation which you founded?

- The foundation of my work is Jesus Christ. Everything can be found in him. One should look to him alone and dedicate all to him, announce and preach him alone. We must teach what he taught and live as he did; we must always imitate him who is the Christ, the Son of the living God.

- What would you say today to young people who are afraid of making long-term commitments, whether in marriage, in the religious life, or in public service?

- Let them not fear to soar upon the heights like an eagle. Let them have no fear to expand their horizons to see far and wide. Let them not be like ostriches that bury their heads in the sand at

the first sign of danger. This is nothing but an evasion of commitment, a copout, even if some might call it prudence.

- Fr. d'Alzon, isn't your reply rather hard?

- Absolutely! Only the one who has a spirit opened wide, who sees far and wide, is able to give himself completely to great ideals. Those who settle for a narrow vision are capable of committing themselves to nothing and to no one and embrace whatever they fancy as their ideal.

- Many Christians find it hard to pray? What do you think?

- Praying is not easy for anyone. Prayer is a real struggle with ourselves. But the problem is not whether prayer in and of itself is easy or not. The real problem for a Christian is whether he prays or not. One must be steadfast in facing everything that may turn us off, every hardship, and every distraction that occurs when it is time to pray. To do so, one must place oneself under the action of the Holy Spirit who dwells in our hearts. Do not worry about where you are praying well or not. Otherwise, our prayer will decrease since we will (and can) never be satisfied with the quality of our prayer life. Prayer is the only way that we can be filled, impregnated, with the spirit of God.

- Father, your words are filled with passion, clear and strong. How did you get to this point?

- To be a Christian one must follow Jesus Christ, truly love him. That means that all the feelings of my heart and everything that I am and can become must focus on Jesus Christ; or better yet, we are called to put on the very sentiments, the very mind, of Jesus Christ, to quote St. Paul.

- Father, what you have just said is something to be learned and takes time; it is a way to be followed. How does one go about it?

- The way is Jesus Christ. We must believe in God and in Jesus Christ. Faith is a process, a way in which we allow him to be formed in us (as St. Paul says elsewhere, "Until Christ be formed in you"). To do so, we must know him and we are called to make him known by our own example. Insofar as catechists and preachers do not take their responsibility to heart, Jesus Christ will remain unknown.

- Fr. d'Alzon, many Catholics today do attend Sunday Mass and only come to Church for funerals, weddings, or other big events. What do you think?

- I am not scandalized by this. Even in my day, this was happening. In the end, it's a question of love. The Eucharist is the food that empowers us to love because it is there that we encounter Jesus Christ, the object of our love, who gives himself to us completely and teaching us how to give ourselves likewise, to him, to others, in the service of the Church. In the Eucharist there takes place a tremendously mysterious union between man and Jesus Christ. How can love Jesus Christ if I do not seek him the sacrament of his love? Whenever we celebrate Mass, we re-enact the work of our redemption.

- Since we are speaking about redemption, does the Blessed Virgin have any relation with the Eucharist?

- (Quite surprised at our ignorance, he responded): When we go to Mass we place ourselves side by side with the Blessed Virgin who shows us how to give ourselves completely to her Son who came not to be served but to serve and give himself as a ransom for the world, the most profound and unrepeatable act of redeeming love the world has ever known.

- Father, we don't want to keep you too long since we know your time is valuable. Perhaps we can come back another time. But, please, one final question. Given the serious financial crisis that exists in the world, what should we be doing for the poor?

- (Getting comfortable in his chair, he thought for a moment and then, with a strong and clear voice, said:) The real way to reach the least of my brothers and sisters, the poor and the marginalized in general is love. Almsgiving isn't enough. When an employer, for example, reaches out to an employee not with monetary gifts but in a way that is truly inspired by love, not only do production and morale rise but a real reconciliation occurs between them.

Almsgiving will never satisfy the just anger of the poor. The evangelization of the world must begin with the poor and the marginalized.

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