



By Fr. Oliver Blanchette, A.A.

Fr. Julio Navarro, Postulator for the Cause of Beatification of Fr. d'Alzon is, to say the least, a good salesman! In the 5th issue of "Signs of God", he links the Church's recognition of the holiness of our Founder with our own call to holiness. Thus for Assumptionists and all those belonging to the larger family of the Assumption - friends, volunteers and Lay Assumptionists - Fr Julio is, in a sense, telling us that it's in our own deepest interest to work for the canonization of Fr d'Alzon! How does he do that ?

First, by reminding us that we are all called to holiness. To do this he cites the teaching of the Council of Vatican II whose 50th anniversary we are presently celebrating. (Full disclosure-I have been blessed with the totally unmerited privilege of having been a relatively young Assumptionist at the time of the Council that was for me an exciting, hopeful time.) The Universal Call to Holiness is the title of Chapter V of the Council's Document, "Christ Light of the Nations", on the nature of the Church. Chapter V tells us, "that the followers of Christ are justified in the Lord Jesus because in the baptism of faith they truly become sons (and daughters) of God and sharers in the Divine Nature. In this way they are really made holy.

Then too, by God's gift, they must hold on to and complete in their lives the holiness they have received... Thus it is evident to everyone that all the faithful of Christ, of whatever rank or status, are called to the fullness of the Christian Life, and to the perfection of charity; by this holiness a more human manner of living is promoted in this earthly society". The Council is telling us here that the holiness given to Christians at baptism and therefore to all Lay Christians, one that makes them more fully human, is to be held on to and completed as they live out their lives as single or married people, as they work for a living in the midst of our so secular society or in Church Ministries. Thus they are able to make a precious contribution to the building up of a more just and peaceful Society and ever holier Church.

It just so happens that today, as I write this, is February 6, feast day of St. Paul Miki and Companions, Martyrs, who on this day in 1597 were, as they died for the Faith, suspended on crosses and killed by spears thrust through their hearts. The group of 26 included clergy, religious and lay persons. From that date until 1865, Japan remained closed to the rest of the world. Despite this isolation the faith survived without any priest and only the sacrament of baptism!

Need any more be said about the call to holiness of the laity and their generous and at times, heroic response ?

Secondly, Fr. Julio reminds us of Emmanuel d'Alzon's passion for holiness. " We know how much" he writes, "Fr. d'Alzon loved to recall the date of his baptism. For him it was the real day of his birth because on that day, his journey toward holiness began. We also know how much he insisted that his own disciples and directees become saints." Then in the same issue of "Signs of God" we read in an article by Fr. Pierre Touvenerau, A.A., words like these. " Throughout his life Fr. d'Alzon had an obsession with Christian perfection, expressed in terms of conversion, holiness and ministry, for himself and for all those to whom he was sent. " Oh, if only we were saints!"... The love of Christ, then, would be for him" the perpetual spur pushing him toward the holiness of the state to which he was called ", Christian, priest, religious, apostle, founder... under grace there would take place the building of his entire personality, called to reproduce the very life of Jesus Christ".

Perhaps the most remarkable example of Emmanuel d'Alzon's passion for holiness can be found in his friendship with Marie Eugenie de Milleret, foundress of the Religious of the Assumption who, canonized in 2007, is now St. Marie Eugenie. In his book, "Christ is My Life - The Spiritual Legacy of Emmanuel d'Alzon" (pp.53-54), Fr. Andre Seve writes: "In 1838 Father d'Alzon wrote to Marie Eugenie who was to become Mother Marie Eugenie of Jesus. He was 28, and she 21. He would be her spiritual director and she his. Together they would found the Sisters of the Assumption and the Assumptionists. She would be in Paris and he in Nimes. For 40 years, by correspondence, they carried on a dialogue, sometimes on a daily basis, which is an amazing mixture of business, canon law, tenderness and entreaties to holiness.

Theirs was the story of true friendship which never ceased examining itself on the place it could have in two lives totally given to God....They kept on throwing each other the ball of their desire for God and perfection: "Become a holy woman! Become a saint."

But where does this leave you and me? Isn't it simply that Fr. Julio is trying to kill two birds with one stone? Isn't he assuring us that since Vatican II the Church is once again telling us that all the baptized are called to holiness ? And then he tells us that Fr.d'Alzon had a passion for holiness, for himself, for others and because of this can help us in our journey toward holiness. Finally, he hopes all this will stimulate our interest in Fr. d'Alzon and our desire to help promote the Cause of his Beatification. Still many of us may find it hard to believe that we are called to holiness. " Set the Soul on its Way" an article by Fr. Daniel O' Leary in "The Tablet", a fine magazine published by Lay Catholics in England, might be helpful in this regard. Here are a few excerpts from the article.

"I went alone to see the Palme d'OR winning film "Amour". I knew I would cry. Watching the diminishing effects of old age on a loving Parisian couple was full of pathos and deeply moving. It raised the most sensitive issues about how we perceive loss, love and death in raw detail in the most extreme circumstances. The cinema was utterly still when the credits ended. Why was this I wondered ? Because, I suspect, we had been taken to the place of the soul, to the land where our deepest spirit lives - a land we are slow to enter. The urgent daily context of our lives mitigates against such profound awareness.

Too much work, anxiety and a relentless stress are filling our days and nights... It is only in the loving vision and awareness we bring to whatever we do, the compassionate mindfulness that we infuse into the most mundane realities of our days, that the secret of the searching soul is revealed. And our work could be described as love made visible. When we sense the gold in the rubble of our lives, when we divine " the dearest freshness of deep down things", then we are living in the way of the Incarnation... It is also in the context of incarnate love that Fr. Pedro Arrupe, former father general of the Jesuits, outlines his agenda for soulwork. His words would be a fitting summary of Michael Haneke's AMOUR. "Nothing is more practical in finding God than falling in love in a quite absolute, final way.

What you are in love with, what seizes your imagination, will affect everything. It will decide what will get you out of bed in the morning, what you do with your evenings, how you spend your weekends, what you read, what you know, what breaks your heart, and what amazes you with joy and gratitude. Fall in love, stay in love, and it will decide everything."

So holiness is self-realization, it is becoming fully human!

Holiness is falling in love with God and staying there! No small wonder then that Fr. Seve writes, in the closing lines of his book "Christ is My Life"; "I have watched Father d'Alzon so long that I can no longer separate him from the words of St. Irenaeus: "The glory of God is man magnificently alive" !

Might it not then just be, that pursuing the Cause of Emmanuel d'Alzon's Beatification, getting to know him better, praying for the needed miracle, could awaken our own desire to become our best selves, fully human, in love with God, that is holy? Why not?