



Let us have passion for the Kingdom!

Dear Brothers,

The Chapter, before all else, has been a moment of grace and of peace. I want to thank each of you for the quality of your participation.· We were able to obtain a large consensus on most of the questions and themes which we treated: that is a sign in itself of our communion. We also prayed with conviction and with warmth and our beautiful liturgies remind us how we are men of faith.· We have thought also of our brothers and friends, the most disfavored and the weakest. We are solidaire of the world in which we live.

The Chapter is over but the work ahead of us is immense. We have just lived an important moment with the modification of certain number of the articles in our constitutions.· In fact, that is not the most important, but the modification illustrates the state of mind or the spirit with which we want to construct our Assumption in the future. We have not revolutionized the Assumption. We have especially revised the Acts of the last chapter and we were realistic and pragmatic.· These former Acts contain good points and we have not reinvented the wheel. We had to take one more step in the areas which are dear to our hearts and I believe that these further steps permit us to better: “be faithful to Emmanuel d’Alzon for the coming of the Kingdom.”

We want to be **men of faith**. Fr. d’Alzon was fond of saying that we had to cultivate the “supernatural” virtues.· D’Alzon was attentive to recruit men who had already dealt seriously with the natural virtues of frankness, truth, daring, courage and disinterestedness. But he

trusted in God that these would be enriched by others of a more divine origin. We want forever to become more and more men of faith, who in their religious consecration are ready and willing to follow Christ day after day without any particular worry, without regret and with a simple joy and simplicity. We know that Jesus is at the heart of our lives and that he is the way, the truth, and the life. It is he who shows the way to the Kingdom, and he wants us with numerous other brothers and sisters to go forward. We have not forgotten the centrality of Jesus-Christ in our lives.

The Chapter was a time of fraternity. It permitted us to lay out concretely what we understand by the phrase: **Men of Communion**. Yes, communion is not always easy; there is the question of language, the differences of culture, the different religious sensibilities that we have. The long debate we had about languages shows us that communion is not the suppression of diversity. In this sense, I am happy that we no longer have "official languages" but instead have "habitual ones." We might have the impression that we pitter patted but in fact we progressed. We showed each other that communion is a concrete word. Like Augustine and d'Alzon, we have placed unity at the center of our works. Msgr. Joao said it very well when he invited us to live communion ever better. With Jesus we know that «every kingdom divided against itself falls.» I invite each Assumptionist to work more and more for unity in his community and in his Province. I believe that is the one condition for us to have others join us. In so far as we promote the unity of hearts they will come to join us.

We are **solidaire with the smallest among us**, the poor and the disfranchised. We have taken in consideration that we live in a fragile world marked by poverty and misery. Our vow of poverty must make us more sensitive to the material conditions of humanity, our companions on the way. We have said that we want to be more prophetic than we are at the present moment, and I believe that there is a deficit of the prophetic stance today. A prophet is a courageous man, who knows that in his words and in his actions that he reveals the reality of the Kingdom. The prophet is a man of the Beatitudes, who softly but not without conviction, tells the exigencies of the Gospel. Blessed are the poor for the Kingdom of God is theirs. Concretely that means that we have to engage ourselves in a more simple and modest life style. We must not spoil the goods that are put at our disposition. We have to help those who lack the necessary by taking from our necessary. We must be more respectful of God's creation entrusted to us. To be prophetic, is probably to be more in touch with the equilibrium of nature.

I will pass in review the points which we have worked to see how we have advanced a little more.

The Structures

We will try a new way of doing things at Assumption. There have been many twists and turns in the history of our religious family. The most important among them have been the *New Organization* in 1923, then later on the *New Capitulary Rules* in 1964 and especially the new *Rule of Life* in 1983. I think that we had a new important moment with the new status of the congregation. To be sure the evolution is modest. But it can carry us forward and renew our dynamism and our missionary zeal if we take seriously the new modifications which we have brought forward. I invite you to be patient for the reform will not be a revolution. We must break in the new vehicle and see how we are going to use it together. I invite each Provincial not to abandon his duties. I mean that you must not expect everything to be dictated by the general level (the CC [the *Counsel of the Congregation*, i.e. the General, His Assistants, the treasurer, Secretary and Postulator] and the PGC [*Plenary General Counsel*]) to solve the daily problems, We have said very clearly that the principle of “subsidiarity” remains the base of operation in our organization. We must not decide at the top level what can be decided at the local level. The General Counsel will function while the territorial reorganization has not yet taken place. It is without a doubt that this work of reorganization is a long one. The demographic evolution of our old provinces, which are on the wane; and the growing of the new ones, which I hope will be regular and sustained, will bring about the territorial organization in the light of their evolution. A new Province of Europe will be born and most probably in a few years many provinces in Africa and some others in Asia. Our patience will not be immobile for as much.

The plenary General Counsel will start by reflecting on its functions, without discussing ad nauseam. I want it to be a real organization of government that will promote communion. It will proceed first by listening to all the provincials involved. This will permit us to discern how to make dynamic and to develop our religious family. It will give us also the occasion to decide together how we can next put into motion our apostolic dreams and to measure them to the reality at hand. I hope that we will live a true co-responsibility in the animation of the PGC. May every one express himself freely and once a decision has been taken let us apply it forthrightly and with a flawless loyalty.

The general restricted council will meet in June. It will have many dossiers of ordinations and perpetual professions to oversee. It will have to decide on two Provincials, one for France and

one for North America.

I am happy to have a team composed of Emmanuel, Marcelo, John and Didier. Together we are going to reflect on our organization in September where we have set aside a whole month to launch our activities. I want to establish community with the brothers you have given me. We did not select each other and it is important to live communion already at this level. French, American, Chilean, Congolese – this is the image of an internationality which we wish for all in the Congregation. We will have to follow each Province and each Region. Be reassured that we will not let you alone to face the challenges ahead.

If the reform of the structures is important let us not forget that **the local community** remains the cornerstone of Assumptionist life, its locus of predilection. I want to underline today its role for all of Assumptionist life.

Without a local community and without religious who are truly inserted in it, there is no authentic Assumptionist life. The local community remains the point of reference for everyone. It is there that we are called to witness and it is from here that we are missionaries. The local community is not the whole of Assumption, but it is the place where we test out our vocation and our consecration. The local community works for us as a leaven for the extension of the Kingdom. The local community is our asceticism; the place of our progress in the spiritual life. We have said that we believe in the holiness of Fr. d'Alzon and that we have to believe that holiness is possible in our lives also. Our Father will be declared a saint when we ourselves accept to walk the way of holiness he has walked before. I have said it: we are full of limp but we advance on the way. The local community remains for us the companion which we need to progress in holiness.

At Assumption, action and contemplation come together for one sole purpose: the coming of the Kingdom. It is important that we become saints. We must be men of prayer. It is my hope that each Assumptionist will become more and more a man of God: a religious who seeks God as wanted it our Father St. Augustine.

To live this we are helped by our lay friends.

Lay people have been present during the first week of the chapter. Their participation

reminded us that we are a diversified family and that there is much room for varied vocations at Assumption. There are various hopes according to each country, but little by little a common spirit is built up. The diversity of the other invites me to accept my own diversity.

I think that we will go through many more struggles in order to integrate more fully the laity among us. A work of conversion - very demanding - is asked of us. Our missionary dynamism rests in great part on our capacity to work with them. I want to make more precise that it is not a question – we already know that – to find helpers where we do not have enough religious. Even the young Provinces, in the countries where the vocations are flourishing have to live their vocation with the laity. We must go beyond the clericalism which sours the life of the Church and prevents it often from being faithful to the Gospels. The lay people are associated with our charism; they are with us actors in the mission. The lay person, as we have already written, is “called to live his baptismal vocation and the mission which he receives, in Assumption, in the Church and in society.” If we respect this, I am sure that we ourselves will live our religious vocation more profoundly. Let us not fear the presence of the lay people. They help us to make more profound our own mission.

The **Mission in the Orient** remains one of the strong apostolic axes of our Congregation. We are very fragile in a number of places. It is a question often of two or three religious when it is not the case of a single one! We must not be nostalgic of a past gone by, but we must be zealous and disinterested missionaries. I wish that a new generation of Assumptionists and laity rise to face the challenge of dialogue and ecumenism. It might be that in the near future, we will be prompted to send lay people in this or that foundation while waiting for the possibility of sending brothers and sisters – we must not discard this possibility too quickly. This would permit us to live this transition without losing certain historical sites, such as Istanbul, where Assumption has a role to play in ecumenism and in interreligious dialogue. The community of Saints Peter and Andrew will have an important role to play in the whole body. I want the brothers there to be ardent promoters of the passion for the Orient in our religious family. I want this house to be a center of formation for the whole of Assumption.

Asia remains for us all a challenge. This continent was chosen, six years ago, as a priority. Today we still continue to have to invest new blood and means into this adventure. For sure, we will not do this to the detriment of other continents, but thanks to them. I am convinced that the presence of the Assumptionists in the Asian world will bring new life to the entire apostolic body. This new influx does not exist at the present time, but already Bayard is in Vietnam, in the Philippines and in China. This is a good beginning. We also have an orphanage in Saigon and other works in Manila. Korea still needs our help and confrontation. Korea deserves that we send new brothers. Asia is a place of interreligious dialogue and the mix of cultures. Assumption must not stay with its hands in its pockets as to Asia.

Africa will not be forgotten. You know this. I love this continent where I lived for many years in the Togo and in the Senegal. I also love Madagascar, which I do not forget. We will work towards reconciliation. In Assumption we will have to move towards a greater knowledge of each other: we do not know enough about this continent. Unity will not mean uniformity or the domination of one part by the other. It will be an opening to fraternity. I believe that nowhere else as in the Church of Africa can we be taught to discover the reality of what is called "the Church, family of God." I count on the Assumptionist brothers of this continent to make us learn about this family spirit. And may this family spirit contribute to improve the fraternity on this continent. I hope that we will continue to develop in the English speaking zone as well as in the French one and why not in a Portuguese speaking zone with the help and support of our brothers from Brazil? There also we will need an opening to the exterior. Africa is generous in its missionaries ad extra, but it would be good if it welcomed brothers from other continents. This is the perspective of my program.

Europe and North America will not be forgotten either. We will have to pay attention to the elderly but also to vocations. We will have to be attentive to the expectations of the world and also be apostles in a world with expectations that are uncertain and confused. We will have to develop the theme of the "square of the Gentiles in front of the church or public building" and be in sync with the efforts of the local Church.

Latin America will have our attention so that Assumption can regain its strengths and find a new missionary dynamism. Young people are knocking on our doors. We will have to help them to find in our midst a family ready to act for the Kingdom throughout the world.

This renewal of our presence on the various continents will take shape in concrete actions and in tandem with the Sisters and the Laity. I bring up these concerns without elaborating on the immense building site which awaits us.

The mobilizing works have been made precise in their definition. We know well that every Assumptionist is fully present where he is sent whether it be in a parish, in a school, in social works, or in the university. But we wanted to make aware the whole body of new apostolic endeavors which we must take up if we are to meet the challenges of the societies in which we live. It is not a question of having a double tier Assumption, of a double speed Assumption, one of the mobilizing works and the others, but to live solidarity in both. We have to be very concerned - not to say be passionate - about what our brothers are living in their apostolate, whatever it is. The mobilizing works want to destabilize our habitual concerns, to have us see

broad and wide.

The media and education: we had a good exchange on Bayard, and during the debate we discovered the complexity of announcing Jesus-Christ in a world indifferent and secularized

• We saw that education and Christian teaching have the same problems. We are convinced that it is our role to be in the media and to educate in this way. Assumptionists must invest even more in these apostolic missions. • We must form brothers, sisters, and lay people to increase our action. I invite each Provincial to reflect on the possibility of implementing such a work of communication/ education in their Provinces if it does not yet exist.

The Assumptionist family is made up of brothers, the Laity and the Sisters. • I wish that we pursue **our work inter-congregationally**. • The Sisters of the family are open to this. They too are hit by fragility. But they are very dynamic nevertheless and we can benefit from the contagion. • I believe that the testimony of a family united and diversified, composed of men and women, of lay and religious are a good example for our world today.

Formation is well defined thanks to the Ratio institutionis. We have insisted on the necessity of learning new languages and of permanent formation. • We insisted on the primacy of the Word of God and of the spiritual life. • We want to form apostles, men of prayer and zealous missionaries. The General Council will support all efforts which go in this direction. • The General Council in close cooperation with the Provincials will see to it that the future generation will be well formed. • I hope that we will go rapidly with the establishing places of international formation.

I want to conclude by inviting us to keep the flame burning of the **bicentenary of the birth of Fr. d'Alzon**. With Fr. d'Alzon we have rediscovered our Passion for Christ, the Church and the Virgin. We don't have to blush in shame: Assumption has not yet run its course. • Modestly but surely, we must continue his work I am his 9th successor and I know how unworthy I am to succeed him but I would like to share his zeal, his ardor, his passion so that we can live of his values a little more. • I pray that we might all have a passion for the Kingdom and that we be seekers of God. Without faith, love and charity we are nothing.

Fr. Benoît Grière,
Superior General.

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