



A Word from the Postulator

If you look up the word « Mercy » in the topical indices of Fr. d'Alzon's works, you won't find one reference to it there. Does that mean that he never addressed the topic? Might it not be rather that the authors of these indices didn't sufficiently take into account this central theme of the Christian life?

In my opinion, Fr. d'Alzon considers mercy mainly in two ways, that dovetail perfectly with two of Jesus' parables: the Prodigal Son and the Good Samaritan. First of all, mercy is the expression of the gratuitous love of God. But, for Fr. d'Alzon, it is necessary that the first step be that of the return of an authentically penitent sinner who requests, like the prodigal son, the forgiveness of a father more disposed toward mercy than to punishment. That is the aspect we will underline in this issue of « Signs of God. »

Yet mercy is also a virtue that every Christian must cultivate. It flows from charity and is an essential dimension of all apostolic activity. And Fr. d'Alzon speaks of « social works, » of the « issue of the working-class, » of « organizations » to come to the aid of the poorest, of the mission of laypeople to get involved in « good works. » We will address this aspect in the next issue of our newsletter.

Fr. Julio Navarro Román, A.A.

A noble and generous heart

A former pupil of Fr. d'Alzon became a missionary in a foreign, but not pagan, land. He once acted in a way that greatly displeased and saddened Fr. d'Alzon. It was not the first time he had acted thus.

A short while later, the missionary had to go to Nîmes. He wrote to Fr. de Cabrières, his comrade and friend, announcing the date and time of his arrival. He didn't know how angry Fr. d'Alzon was with him. He didn't even suspect it.

Coming out of the railroad station he met de Cabrières who told him, «Listen, I've come to warn you. Fr. d'Alzon is angry at you. This time you have seriously offended him. He said he'd speak severely to you the first time he saw you. He knows you're coming, so be ready for a cool reception. Accept the humiliation and everything will turn out all right.»

It was very unpleasant to hear this after a long trip, especially when he had been so glad to return to Assumption. There was

no way to escape the gathering storm, except by avoiding the college altogether, and that would only have made things worse. He had to summon all his courage, as he approached the judge whom he loved yet feared. They crossed Feuchères Avenue, Pradier and La Servie streets, and arrived at the entrance to the College. The door was opened as soon as they had rung the bell. Fr. d'Alzon was standing in the main courtyard, with Frs. Bailly and Pernet nearby.

Although the parallel was not exact, the poor traveler thought of the parable of the Prodigal Son as he advanced, trying to seem at ease. As soon as he saw the traveler, Fr. d'Alzon ran toward him, arms opened wide. «My son, here you are. How pleased I am to see you again.» Fr. d'Alzon embraced him tenderly, Fr. de Cabrières was stupefied, disappointed, and speechless at this warm reception. Then, deeply moved himself, he smiled and said to Fr. d'Alzon, «Father...shame on you! After all

In Fr. d'Alzon's words

*It is impossible to consider what God is like,
his perfections, his merciful kindness toward human
beings, without being drawn to love him more and more
every day.*

(Spiritual Writings, p. 850)

The Prodigal Son

... God is less interested in how far one has fallen than he is in the depth of one's repentance, "Much has been forgiven her because she has loved much" (Lk 7:47). This is what Jesus says of the woman caught sinning in public. So let us not try to present excuses like "It wasn't that bad." Rather let us say to God, "Father, I have sinned against Heaven and against you."

So let us not waste time looking for excuses. Let us just confess – confess that we really are sinners – that is the best way to receive forgiveness. How little value vain excuses are in the sight of God! How much better it is to turn everything over to him! "Pater, peccavi in coelum et coram te! Father, I have sinned against Heaven and against you." What is there to add that would touch a sinner more and make him forget his past misdeeds more? ...

So the prodigal son throws himself at his father's feet and declares himself unworthy to be treated like a son. But all the father thinks about is clothing his nakedness and putting on a banquet to make up for what the young man has had to suffer. Let's stop here for a moment and draw a lesson that you might find extraordinarily strange, but which, I think, will provide us with a powerful assurance of our ultimate salvation.

Go, go up to your Father, fall at His feet and say to Him as well, "Peccavi in coelum et coram te; I have sinned against Heaven and against you." But if he in his own turn brings out the best



The Return of the Prodigal Son, painting by Rembrandt

robe for you, tell him: "No, Father, not yet. I am too unworthy to be called your son. Give me the time to prove that I can become so through my own efforts at re-

penting."

(E. d'ALZON, excerpts from the *Fourth Meditation: The Prodigal Son*, E.S., p. 342-344)

you've said, you greet him in this way. After all you've reproached him with!"

"What can I say?" said Fr. d'Alzon. "I had carefully prepared myself...but as soon as I saw him, everything crumbled. I couldn't resist. My heart won. Are you going to hold that against me?" Fr.

de Cabrières never held it against him. Nor did he who tells you about this fine scene. The Assumptionists, for whom this is written, will not hold it against their Father. They will admire and approve. Of this I'm sure.

(H.-D. Galeran, *Sketches of Fr. d'Alzon*, p. 98-100)

What Fr. d'Alzon teaches us

What is God's mercy?

... God gives to each what is proper to his nature. God owes us nothing; his gifts are pure grace, and marvel of marvels He prefers to be in debt to us. He grants us rewards for the good deeds we have performed.” He deals with us mercifully, showers free gifts on us and exercises his justice according to our use of the gifts, “they might recognize that one is punished by the very things through which one sins.” (Wisdom 11:16).

In what does God's mercy consist? Strictly speaking, he cannot experience what we call compassion, but he acts as if he did. The word “compassion” implies equality or at least similitude. God's compassion transcends ours. Being infinitely kind, he loves whatever exists – and he never responds to revolt by exacting complete retribution. “It is thanks to God's mercy that we have not been destroyed” (Lament 3:22). To Christ alone, the voluntary victim of our sins, did he apply justice without mercy “God spared not his own Son” (Rm 8:32). His mercy extends even to the fires of hell by not punishing the damned as much as they deserve. Let us therefore redoubt God's justice, yet trust in his mercy. (E.S., p. 865-866).

Prayer of a sinner

Not only am I poor, helpless, abandoned and distressed. Besides all this I am a sinner, and I have to pray for forgiveness. This is what I must pray for during my retreat. I will see my sins stare me in the face - all the time and with ever greater clarity. “Et peccatum meum contra me est semper; my sin is always before me (Ps. L, 5 Vulgate, Ps 51:5). I will soon see that God's creatures and the harm I may have done them pale in comparison to my horrible offenses against God himself. “Tibi soli peccavi et malum coram te feci; against you alone have I sinned (Ps 51:6).” This is the prayer of the guilty who, facing up to the penalty he deserves, has no other choice than to throw himself into the arms of Infinite Mercy, and to cry out with tears: “Miserere mei, Deus, secundum magnam misericordiam tuam; have mercy on me, God, in your goodness” (Ps 51:3). (E.S., p. 314-315).

The attribute of God we need the most

That human tribunals judge according to their

laws, so they must do; but the fact that the Son of Man remembers that above judgment there is mercy, this, of all God's attributes, is the one for which we should love him the most because that's the one we need the most for our sins to be forgiven. Happy the apostle who, in imitation of Jesus, while never forgetting the law, replaces it, when he can, with this merciful indulgence that reveals to the soul the utter depth of the abyss into which he has fallen and always holds before him the hope and the means of getting out. (Meditation on the Good Samaritan, in *Les Cahiers d'Alzon*, IX, p. 88).

Prodigal Son, design of Claudio Pastro



Favors et graces received

Healing through the intercession of Venerable Emmanuel d'Alzon

My name is Anastasie BENDERA, of the Holy Spirit Quadrant (Goma, Congo Kinshasa). I am grateful to my God who healed me and proved how much he loves me. Since becoming a member of the lay Assumptionists in Goma, I have learned how to pray. I have received any number of graces through the intercession of the Virgin Mary and Venerable Emmanuel d'Alzon. For several years I suffered from a belly-button infection. It oozed pus whenever I was hungry or full, whenever it was hot or cold, and it was very painful.



When it would swell, I could neither eat nor drink. From morning to night I would cry my eyes out because I could not stand the pain. After eight years of tears and suffering, I went to the « Heal Africa » Hospital, a famous hospital in the Congo. After consultation the doctor advised us that I would have to undergo an operation if there would be any hope of healing. He gave me an appointment in a month's time for the operation.

During that time, neighbors in my Quadrant, having learned what I was preparing for, told me that I should spend extra time in prayer. So I spent all my time praying to God through the intercession of Venerable Emmanuel d'Alzon; I also added the chaplet of Divine Mercy.

When the month was over, I had to go to see the doctor. The morning of the appointment I said my chaplet of Divine Mercy and the prayer for healing through the intercession of Fr. Emmanuel d'Alzon. I also invoked the compassion of the Virgin Mary. It was clear what I was praying for: healing. I had faith and I hoped in God. Once at the hospital the doctor examined me

again before the scheduled operation and his decision was a total surprise. He told me to go back home because I no longer needed the operation. Wow! No, no operation, since for a while I was no longer suffering. So, the decision of the doctor confirmed what I had already begun to sense. I was healed and for several months now I have rediscovered the joy of living. I thank God for all these wonders.

I recommend that everyone also spend time in prayer and use the prayer for healing through the intercession of Fr. Emmanuel d'Alzon who proved to me that he already counts among the ranks of the saints. Anastasie BENDERA. (see the newsletter of lay Assumptionists of Goma, *Le Gouvernail* #4, October 2015)

News from the Secretariats

Diocesan Secretariat of Nîmes (France): Meetings were held on February 20 and November 20, 2015. Among the results: plans to put up a portrait of Fr. d'Alzon in every parish, church, and chapel of the diocese, together with a book in which the faithful could express their prayers or their thanksgiving to Fr. d'Alzon, with the Bayard pamphlet about his life to make him better known, and a card with his image and the bishop's prayer requesting his beatification on the back. It was also decided both to add seven laypeople to the Secretariat, one for each of the seven pastoral districts of the diocese and to encourage the diocesan Pastoral Ministry of the Sick Office to collaborate in promoting the Cause of Fr. Alzon.

Secretariat of Mexico: Here we are continuing to work for the cause of Fr. d'Alzon's beatification. We pray for persons, we visit hospitals, and we promote the life and work of Fr. Alzon. (Br. Germán González Álvarez)



Mercy: the ultimate and supreme act by which God comes to meet us.

Mercy: the fundamental law that dwells in the heart of every person who looks sincerely into the eyes of his brothers and sisters on the path of life. (Pope Francis, *Misericordiae Vultus*, 2)

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