

Fr. d'Alzon

Day by Day

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Quotations from his writings

Compiled and edited by
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Cum permissu Superiorum

*In memory of the Assumptionists and
Oblates of the Assumption who have
worked on the dissemination of their
Founder's writings, who have studied and
explained the riches of his thought, and
who have made his name and his work
known over time and across continents.*

PREFACE

This book is intended neither for scholars, nor for bed-time reading. It is more like a travelling companion, the kind of book that would have pleased Emmanuel d'Alzon, the founder of the Assumptionists, as well as of the Oblate missionaries of the Assumption, to whom the book is dedicated.

Emmanuel d'Alzon was not a systematic theologian. He was before all else a founder of religious Congregations, a pastor, a master of the spiritual life. What he wrote (sermons, conferences, thousands of letters, spiritual essays, popular articles and serious essays) was always intended to address events in the life of the Church and 19th century society, as well as the needs of his brothers and sisters in religious life. The purpose of *Emmanuel d'Alzon Day by Day* is to accompany the reader along the path of his or her own spiritual journey.

The book is organized according to the calendar and the cycle of the liturgy. Father d'Alzon had many interests: he was taken up with a wide varied of human experiences. Consequently, in this book you will find excerpts from his writings that touch upon spiritual and theological themes, as well as reflections on simple but important human realities, like rest and relaxation, vacation, play, friendship, reading, work, education, family and social life, art and sports. The one who selected the texts wants to help the reader enter more profoundly into the celebrations of the liturgical year and to live more fully the events that a person lives through during the year.

The book leaves us with a certain image of Father d'Alzon, the image of a wise friend, of a man of faith yet a person that is profoundly human, a person one would like to have as a travelling companion. Even if it is not a systematic study of the thought of the man, the book also provides a number of references that help the reader go further if time allows additional reading. Even when these texts deal with religious life and the specifically religious concerns that were Emmanuel d'Alzon's preoccupation, they were chosen particularly in

view of the lay reader who will appreciate his faith perspective.

We are once again grateful to Father Jean-Paul Périer-Muzet, the archivist and historian of the Assumptionists, who chose these texts very carefully and has provided enlightening introductions. His competence as a historian is well known, but we appreciate his pedagogical competence at least as much as his scholarly abilities. In the end, what will enable this book to make Emmanuel d'Alzon better known to more people is the love that Father Jean-Paul has for this spiritual master and for the spirit that he bequeathed to the Church and his religious families.

Fr. Richard E. Lamoureux, a.a.
Superior General

FOREWORD

The idea of offering our lay friends and those close to the Assumption a selection of d'Alzonian texts is not new, even though it has received renewed expression here and there in recent times. Assumptionists and Oblates in the provinces of Chile, Brazil-Argentina, Europe, North America, Africa-Madagascar and the region of Mexico, among others, have been concerned for a long time with finding ways to nourish those with whom we have the privilege of frequent contact in the Assumption and who have collaborated apostolically with our different religious families in services as varied as vocations, parochial and social pastoral work, teaching, different kinds of chaplaincies, pilgrimages and the media. It is anchored in the conviction that was both original and dear to Fr. d'Alzon, that the laity, far from forming a body of auxiliaries, whether volunteers or full-time helpers, constitute a fully-fledged face of the

Church, the People of God, and a communion in which each member, according to his or her own character and life choice, is called to testify with others to the living strength of the Gospel because it is the same Spirit who gathers them together.

To promote a more effective, more efficient and better defined collaboration between the religious world of the Assumption and our lay friends, to encourage each of them to share the spirit, spirituality or charism of the Assumption more and to bring to the mission field a mutual support that will endure....here is some of wealth of ideas, oral and written, which have emerged and which cannot simply remain at the level of “good intentions.” Our predecessors knew this well, as they organised the Fraternities and Hospitalities, who in their turn developed magazines of spirituality on the Augustinian movement for them and for members of different Third Orders. These same religious, from their communities and local works, strove to organise strong battalions of benefactors, of zealous followers and partners, to use the terminology of the time.

*To nourish a person’s reflection, to fortify the faith and to energise the apostolate, it is essential to return to the sources constantly. Fr. Athanase Sage had received a mandate while publishing the *Essential d’Alzon (Ecrits spirituels)* in 1956, but this seminal Assumptionist classic hardly left the*

shelves of many religious. Fr. Rafael le Gleuher mobilised the young novices of his day to prepare a selection of spiritual reflections of the Founder; these consisted of short quotes on theological and religious themes that expressed the spirituality of Fr. d'Alzon. This work did not have a great deal of success and it was largely produced for religious. Since then the Essential d'Alzon and the whole correspondence of Fr. d'Alzon (between 1923 and 2003) were gradually entered into a computer data bank that now contains all known d'Alzonian texts; this allows much greater access to and selection of the thoughts and quotes that Fr. d'Alzon produced for the world of the laity. We not only entrust this new edition to the wisdom of the laity but especially to their prayer, persuaded as we are, that they will know how to draw from this common fund of the Assumption what is useful for them, neither feeling that they are being assimilated into religious life nor that their choice of life excludes them from a written source or commentary that, without fail, leads them to the living Gospel, the original seedbed and horizon where we encounter all our brothers and sisters.

MONTH OF JANUARY

Our meetings with Fr. d'Alzon this month are based, on the one hand, on the liturgical calendar (1,6, 18, 21, 24, 25, 28, 31), and, on the other, on fundamental themes of the Assumptionist charism, bringing to light the thought of the founder and the tradition to which it eventually gave life. For each quotation, an effort is made to provide the source of the text, the various Biblical passages cited by d'Alzon, whether implicit or explicit, and, at times, a word of explanation or interpretation to contextualize the quotation or to clarify d'Alzon's thought by giving some of the background or ramifications.

January 1

Mary, Mother of God

In the beginning God said: *Let us make man in our image and likeness* (Gen I: 26). Without doubt, this did not just mean the first Adam, but also the second. Yet, after Jesus Christ, to which creature can these words be applied more perfectly than to Mary? Yes, she is the most perfect image of God, after his adorable Son... There is something about God that is inexpressible, and the eternal difference between the Creator and the creature is that the creator is Being in himself and at the same time the fullness of being, while the creature draws all his being from God alone. This illustrates the vastness of the abyss that exists between God and us. However, it is possible to say that in his love God does all that he can to bridge the gap. Indeed, God is the first among beings and has made Mary the mother and the principle of the humanity of his Son. How incredible and wonderful!

Ah! Without doubt, everything comes from God; but what treasures of life, what abundance of

being must not have been communicated to Mary to enable her to become the Mother of God! As image of God, she has the strength, the perfection, the brilliance, and the beauty of being. The truth took possession of her....

*Meditations on Religious Perfection,
Paris, 1925, I, p.350.*

The Feast of Mary, the Mother of God, in the Roman calendar.

January 2

The Identity and Charism of the Assumption

Our spiritual life, our religious substance, our *raison d'être* as Augustinians of the Assumption is to be found in our motto: *Adveniat Regnum Tuum*. The coming of reign of God in our souls, by the practice of the Christian virtues and the evangelical counsels, in keeping with our vocation; the coming of the reign of God in the world in the struggle against Satan and the conquest of souls, ransomed by Our Lord and yet still buried in the depths of error and sin; what could be more simple! What could be more

ordinary, dare I say, than this form of the love of God! If, to this basic love, you add the love of Our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of the Blessed Virgin his Mother and the love of the Church his bride, you have before you in its briefest expression the spirit of the Assumption.

*Instruction of 1868,
from The Essential d'Alzon (ES 130-131)*

Adveniat Regnum Tuum: the second petition taken from the Lord's Prayer, according to Mt 6:10 & Lk 11:2b, that Fr. d'Alzon chose as the motto for the Assumption. Throughout their lives all the baptized are called to practice the Christian virtues; the evangelical counsels are, according to theological tradition, but not exclusively, bound more especially to the choice of religious life.

January 3

God's light

As I study religion, I discover, in the depths of Catholic dogma, such a great wealth, such a rich vein, a life so powerful... that it seems to me that the only way to strengthen flagging spirits or heal the moral fatigue that everyone laments today is to expose society to the brilliant light that guides all

people coming into this world¹, to warm them all with the rays of the Eternal Word.... The most intimate thought of my soul is that the world needs to be penetrated through and through with a Christian idea; otherwise it will fall apart.

*Letter to Alphonse of Vignamont,
March 18, 1835
(Letters, vol. XIV, p. 64)*

¹ An implicit reference to the Prologue of John 1:9. The divine illumination of the human intelligence, heart and will forms one of the recurring leitmotifs of Augustinian thought: God, the light source of spirits, hearts and impulses. The first work of the Christian is, therefore, the care of the heart through the understanding and the goal of Christian life as union with God.

January 4

Go to Christ in total love

Yes, we go to Jesus Christ. We affirm Jesus Christ before those who deny him, or hate him, or abandon him. The denial of the unbeliever, the hatred of the impious, the neglect of the indifferent or the traitor are for us so many reasons for embracing Jesus Christ with a love

that is more ardent, more active, more tender and demonstrated more solemnly. In Him we love God. And, although unworthy, we proclaim his divinity. We love the man, who is the most perfect of models and the most tender of friends. We love the God-Man, who brings peace to heaven and earth, the doctor of true law, *finis legis Christus*¹. He initiates us into the supernatural world; by washing us in his blood, he transports us by his power and his mercy to those higher spheres which no one any longer wants today, because they are the true domain of the Sovereign whom no one wants today either, precisely because of his gifts. Yes, we love him because he leads us to true light and true goodness; we love him with a first-time love... with the love that made the apostle say: «*If anyone does not love Jesus Christ, let him be cursed*»...²

*Instruction of 1868,
from The Essential d'Alzon (ES, p. 133)*

¹ Quotation from Rom 10:4 “*Christ is the end of the law.*”

² An approximate quotation of I Cor. 16:22. The mystical life is guided by the power of the call of love; it is a union of a person and his God. God comes to the soul and the soul in its turn is transported to God. The two dwell one in the other. In this way, the experience of God also becomes one of a love of human beings.

January 5

To pray with perseverance in the Spirit of Love, which is none other than God

You must continue knocking at the door and it will be opened to you¹. When God loves a soul as much as yours, the soul must expect to give something in return for so precious a gift. Everything that you necessarily endure purifies you, if you bear it with humility, in love. It is not necessary for you to understand what is happening to you; it is probably better that you don't understand any of the reasons and that you give yourself completely to Our Lord who loves you and wants you to have faith in his love. Always remind yourselves of the words of the Holy Spirit: *In charitate perpetua dilexi te*². Since God loves you, it is necessary for you to love him even if you do not feel it. With regard to this article of faith, I can only urge to you to persevere continually. Read the Gospel for Rogation Monday; you will see there that God loves the one who pesters him. The Gospel last Sunday is equally beautiful: *Petite et accipietis, ut gaudium vestrum sit plenum*. Abandon yourselves to this petition in the name of Jesus Christ. He adds: *Usque modo non petistis quid quam in nomine*

*meo*³. This is all admirable in my eyes and touches the bottom of my heart.

*Letter to Mother Marie-Eugénie de Jésus,
May 30, 1848
(Letters, vol. XIV, p. 424)*

¹ A Biblical reference to Mt 7:7c.

² Jer 31:3: *'I have loved you with an everlasting love'*.

³ Jn 16:24b: *'Ask and you will receive, so that your joy will be complete'* and Jn 16:24a: *'until now you have never asked for anything in my name'*.

January 6

The star of Epiphany

It seems to me that you are right when, finding it impossible to receive the support you need, you turn to Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament. For this is where you will find your true support. Go to him; cry out to him so that it is to Him that you have recourse in the abandonment in which you find yourself. The mystery of the Epiphany provides you with an important lesson. See: the Magi are alone in their Orient and a star appears to them and guides them. They arrive in Jerusalem where they discover the necessary directions. The

star hides and then reappears to show them the dwelling-place of the God Child.

May it be the same for you. When a guide seems wanting, invoke the light of Our Lord. If he Himself sends you help, take advantage of it.

*Letter to Mrs. de Chaponay,
January 7, 1875
(Letters, vol. XV, p. 269)*

The feast of the Epiphany in the Roman calendar. The Gospel according to Matthew, ch. 2.

January 7

The Tradition of lay-religious collaboration at the Assumption

There will be two classes of Associates: those who live here in the college, and those who live outside the premises, including those of you who are married. Both categories must live up to the ideals of Religious Life, as far as their circumstances permit. They must regard themselves as Religious living outside the cloister – wearing no distinctive uniform, yet distinctive by their man-

ner of living – not being ordinary “good citizens”, but maintaining a high standard of virtue.

Those of our Associates who live in the world must realise to what dangers their piety is exposed by continual contact with worldly attitudes. In his prayer after the Last Supper, Our Lord prayed, not for the world, but for those he was going to leave in the world (Jn 17:9). Thence their need to be very humble and mistrust their own strength. The snares into which they are liable to fall must teach them to beware of themselves when they stand alone – but to have limitless confidence in God, with whose help there is nothing they cannot achieve, because his help will always suffice (II Cor. 12,9) – in God to whose goodness they must be ever grateful for their help they derive from the company of their brethren. As the Holy Spirit assures us in Pr 18,19 : *frater qui adjuvatur a fratre quasi civitas firma* (“When brother helps brother, theirs is the strength of a fortress”/Vulgate version).

*Rule of the Association of teachers of the collège of Nîmes,
December 27, 1845,
from The Essential d’Alzon (ES, p. 1284-1285)*

The term *alliance* is preferred to *collaboration* today in speaking of possible lay-religious ties.

January 8

Live the faith boldly

My third piece of advice invites you to slough off a certain prudence which is too often the refuge of a shameful laziness. “Prudent” sometimes means faint-hearted. Now more than ever is the time to repeat Bossuet’s saying: ‘*Faith is daring*’. Therefore, let us have the boldness of faith, even if some may call it foolhardiness. Real prudence is the queen of the moral virtues; and a queen commands, acts, and, if necessary, fights. Some have transformed prudence into a frightened, old lady. Such prudence wears slippers and a nightdress; it is sick with cold and coughs a lot. I want nothing to do with this conventional prudence. You must not heed such prudence. As far as I am concerned, I always want to entrust myself madly to God’s providence, lest, abandoned by all, I end up dying in a hospital!

*Instruction of 1873,
from The Essential d’Alzon (ES p. 189-190)*

At the Assumption, according to the teaching and example of Fr. d’Alzon, we greatly value the triple character of a bold, generous and selfless apostolate. It is a trait present in its origins, its goals and its accomplishments. In this quote Fr. d’Alzon stigmatizes the caricature of a (distorted)

prudence, the conventional social one, but not the evangelical virtue of wisdom that knows how to put into practice the energies of the intelligence, the will and the heart.

January 9

The sunshine of the charity's Love, the basis of friendship

See how it takes shape, grows, develops and produces its fruit. Charity can be compared to some magnificent tree. God the Holy Spirit plants it where he will. He drops its seed into that fertile ground which is the human heart. It lies there – then if the soil is well prepared, it begins to appear on the surface. But the hand of God is still there. With due respect for human autonomy and free will, the love of God caresses the newly born plant like the rays of the sun caress the flowers in our garden. It begins to take shape – it begins to grow. God's influence becomes more effective, the more we listen to His voice.... and it is thus, as Saint Paul writes to the Romans (5:5) that *Charitas Dei diffusa est in cordibus nostris per Spiritum sanctum qui datus est nobis* (“the love of God is

poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit who has been given to us”).

*Thirteenth Meditation,
from The Essential d’Alzon (ES p. 412)*

This comparison of love-charity, of divine impulse and origin, is implicitly an evangelical inspiration in the writings of Fr. d’Alzon with reference to the parables of the sower and the grain of wheat: e.g. Mt 13:18... As for friendship, Fr. d’Alzon offers a magnificent definition attributed to Leibniz: *‘the joy that one tastes in the happiness of others’* (Letters, vol. XIV, p. 374).

January 10

The Prayer of imitation in the union with God

Lord, I wish to imitate you. I wish to transform my earthly life into a heavenly life on Earth. How can I bring this about other than by imitating you better and better, day by day? The Gospel affords me so many examples. It would be blasphemous to pretend that I could do better than you. If I wish to become a saint, all I have to do is follow your example as best I can.

At the Last Supper you washed your Apostles' feet. It was to sanctify their lives with the final

touch of complete purity -you could say to them as you gave them Holy Communion: *Jam vos mundi estis* (“Now you are clean”). But you had this to add: *Exemplum dedi vobis, ut quemadmodum ego feci, ita et vos faciatis* (“I have given you an example because I wish you to do the same as I have just done”). It was an example of humility and an example of charity. What more impressive example could you have left to the genuine Christian? “Learn to humble yourselves and learn to love.”

*Sixteenth Meditation,
from The Essential d’Alzon (ES p. 452-453)*

The doctrine of imitation of which one of the most famous written works is the *Imitation of Christ*, greatly inspired the prayer and life of Fr. d’Alzon. Its source was the evangelical precept of Christ: *You, therefore, must be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect* (Mt 5:47c). This path of holiness is offered to all the baptised. It takes as its model the exemplary life of Christ with his disciples.

January 11

Social involvement in the Assumption

Evangelizare pauperibus misit me (“He sent me to preach the Gospel to the poor” (Lk 4:18; Is 61:1). Such was the program Jesus Christ drew up for himself – and to reassure John the Baptist in prison, he gave as proof of his mission that the poor were having the Gospel preached to them (*pauperes evangelizantur* Lk 7:22). Very well, we must evangelize the poor all over again, beginning from “square one.” We must look after them – we must see to all their needs in advance. If there is one sign of hope for the future, it is the devoted care with which the poor are being served by a number of priests, religious and valiant layfolk. Charitable organizations are rapidly spreading. We have the Conferences of Saint Vincent de Paul (the S.V.P.) – the Association of Saint François Regis and that of Saint François de Sales. We have working men' s circles, youth clubs, industrial federations.... who could name them all? And though no single one of these admirable initiatives would be powerful enough by itself to save France from ruin, banded together they form an Army-Corps of no mean proportions. They may appear humble and insignificant as they assemble in their parish halls and back-street back rooms – but they

are united in a common bond of fraternal charity – and one day, despite their ragged and amateurish origins, they will emerge as a formidable force to be reckoned with by those who would snatch Christ from the hearts of His brethren.

We must look after our working people. We must look after the abandoned. We must go forth to meet them. We must preach the God they have come to ignore. We must show them the path of peace and reconciliation. We must teach them the positive value of human suffering.

Do this, and see how, little by little, faith is restored to warped minds and peace to broken hearts. These are not lost souls – just souls who have got lost. Win them over to Christ, and watch His Church triumph over the whole world. Amen.

*Eighteenth Meditation,
from The Essential d'Alzon (ES p. 470-471)*

January 12

The Kingdom of God in all things, everywhere

It seems important to me to remind you, in a more positive way, that our life is built upon a broad vision which must nourish our common life

and serve as a bond to bring together all our various efforts.

Our motto, *Adveniat Regnum Tuum*, gives us this main idea. We want to cooperate as much as we can in any effort to extend the reign of the three persons of the Holy Trinity. In this way, we will combat the three great errors of modern times. We want to help bring about: 1° The reign of God the Father. His existence is denied as well as his sovereign dominion over all creation; 2° The reign of God the Son. We must defend his reign of revealed truth; 3° the reign of the Holy Spirit. We must defend the supernatural world of holiness. The Reign of God the Father in the universe, reign of God the Son in the Church, reign of God the Holy Spirit in souls; this must be, it seems to me, the chief aim of the family of the Assumption.

*Third Letter to Master of Novices,
from The Essential d'Alzon (ES p. 160-162)*

This text was a particular inspiration for Fr. Edgar Bourque (1921-1995) who came up with an exercise entitled "A D'Alzonian Examination of the Kingdom or Path for the Reign of God," consisting of three phases: an examination of the Kingdom of Christ from the Scripture, a personal examination of this growth of the Kingdom in our individual lives, and finally a time of praise, decision-making and forgiveness in prayer.

January 13

The Doctrinal character of the Assumption

“By studying the dominant ideas which governed our beginnings, you will advance in the perfection to which you are called.” [*This invitation of Fr. d’Alzon in the preface of the Directory demonstrates the vigor with which he called his communities and all the baptized to a love of study and to a sustained doctrinal penetration of the Gospel message; these calls to study are quite unambiguous.*]

Study is indispensable for a religious who does not work with his hands. It is the means of earning his livelihood by the sweat of his brow. Those who don't work damn themselves¹. Although study is not our only means of salvation, let be understood that if ever religious stop studying, it will be a sign that the Congregation has outlived its usefulness and has been cursed by God. Study is a penance, an atonement, a safeguard... It is not sufficient simply to study; we must have a goal. For us, everything must be related to God, to Jesus Christ, and to his Church².

*Fourth Circular,
from The Essential d’Alzon (ES p. 208-209)*

¹ One also finds an equally strong expression in Saint Paul: *'If anyone does not want to work, then he should not eat'* II Thes 3:10, which shows a parallel concern, one for the life of the body and the other for the life of the spirit.

² The doctrinal character of the Assumption has been summarized in a fortuitous way in a formulation of the Capitular Rules of 1964: *'The Assumption, with all the weight of its origin and its history, tends strongly towards doctrinal, social and ecumenical works, with a preferential accent being placed on the concern for doctrine'* (n° 186).

January 14

The Word of God is the first source of inspiration

We derive our Mystical Theology from the same sources as our Dogmatic, though not in the same manner – first and foremost from the Bible¹. It is the surest guarantee of its authenticity that our spiritual life should be based fairly and squarely upon God's written word. So let us make a serious study of Scripture and become thoroughly acquainted with it.

Saint Augustine has left us two directives if we are to draw the maximum benefit from studying our Bible. Here they are: 1) Some passages of the Bible are transparently clear, others veiled in deep

obscurity. God gave us the former so that every Christian who reads the Bible should find therein precise rules of conduct. He gave us the latter for pastors and professors to explore its hidden treasures, there to find the solution to difficult problems and thence to pit their sagacity against the cunning of our adversaries.....

2) The Holy Spirit wished to endow the Scriptures with every shade of meaning it can bear.

*Course in mystical theology,
from The Essential d'Alzon (ES p. 854)*

¹ This now generally recognized truth, reiterated in the 20th century by the Second Vatican Council, did not escape the different commentators on the writings of Fr. d'Alzon, even if it would need once again to undergo a complete re-examination with reference to all his implicit and explicit references to Scripture.

January 15

***The ground of Christian life:
prayer, fasting and sharing***

We needed financial resources to support our budding working-class enterprises. We also need prayer to appease God's anger¹. Expiation by

prayer on the one hand, expiation by constructive almsgiving on the other – such was the twofold aim of what we set out to do, two kinds of expiation blended into one – such was the twofold thought which presided over the foundation of “Notre Dame de Salut” (Our Lady of Salvation)! The Association organized public prayer on a grand scale, so necessary for France’s rehabilitation, and reinvigorated a host of works that had languished because of a lack of funds. It has given birth to pilgrimages, which we had at the back of our mind from the very beginning. These have touched the very heart of God and have obliged the Mother of our Saviour to renew her miracles. And these public professions of Faith, which we were told no longer corresponded to the modern mentality, have now become not only popular but fashionable². This, then, my Brothers, is only a very sketchy outline of what you have accomplished, of the works in which, for five years, you have more or less directly been involved. You haven't done all that had to be done – far from it. But your involvement, slight as it may have been, has been more than sufficient to reveal your intentions, establish your line of action, and show the world what kind of men you are.

*Instruction of 1873,
from The Essential d'Alzon (ES p. 179)*

¹ This expression in which d'Alzon does not mince words is, however, clearly Biblical: Ex 32: 10 or Nm: 11:1, as one is wont to find in the language of atonement, purification, and the offering of sacrifices. The practical means used, which are recalled here under the name of various generic works, are necessarily shaped by the mentality of the epoch.

² An allusion to a statement by Adolf Thiers, president of France (1871-1873), in the French Chamber, which was quickly refuted by the facts.

January 16

Love for the Pope in the Assumption

Who will our guide be? The Pope. It can be said that, since Philip the Fair¹, politics has consisted in a massive conspiracy against the papacy. Kings wanted no Pope; today no one wants kings. Where is this hatred of monarchy leading us? But what difference does it make? Someone must rule, but must this “someone” wear a crown? When the sons of Jacob asked for a king, God considered it an insult². No need to labour the point, but why deny it? If one thing is clear, it is that the tide of democracy is ever rising and is thick with revolution. Who knows what minor incident will set the storm off? As for me, I consider the Church and what she has done in the

past and I wait. There is no need for excessive despondency or for exaggerated optimism. The essential is to place all our trust in Our Blessed Lord, in Our Lady and in the Church, and to keep working. All the rest does not matter. But I am mistaken. Who can say that our efforts will not bring joy, as long as we proceed intelligently.

*Instruction of 1868,
from The Essential d'Alzon (ES p. 143)*

¹ The Gallican tradition was based on the policy of centralizing monarchical power in this sovereign (1268-1314); in fact, it strongly opposed what popular opinion considered to be the practice of papal interference in state affairs, at a time when the Church was involved in the State and the State in the Church. The French Revolution, which was firstly antimonarchical, then anticlerical, and even antireligious, gave rise to this Providentialist reading of history, which Bossuet exemplified in his day.

² One tradition can be found in I Sam 8.

January 17

The privileged place of the liturgical prayer of the Church

When I recite the Office [*the prayer of the Breviary or Liturgy of the Hours*], I should make my own all the intentions of the Church, that Communion of Saints discharging its obligation to God and asking for the perseverance of the just and the conversion of sinners. The Church itself prays only in the name of Jesus Christ, whose prayer it continues on the earth, just as the great High-priest unceasingly offers the prayers of the Church to God his Father, at whose right hand he sits. I pray in union with Christ and if, indeed, I am united to the Divine Mediator between God and man, my prayer will be heard.

The Directory, III, 16, "The Divine Office"

January 17 is the feast of Saint Anthony of the desert, the father of monks. Monastic prayer, from its origins, always gave a privileged place to chanting the prayer of the psalms in their entirety, in one week or in one month, depending on the era; this tradition gradually passed into the structured organization of the Office.

The Second Vatican Council renewed the structure of the Liturgy of the Hours and strongly recommended the practice to all the baptised.

January 18

*The Beginning of the week of prayer for
Christian Unity¹*

God seems to be manifesting his will. Our little brotherhood has now been given a precise task: that of reconciling the Oriental Churches. So it is to be the fight against schism² and this calls for deep humility and glowing charity, because we are up against that spirit of pride and contention which tore the seamless robe of Christ³. In our love for unity we must practice absolute obedience to him whom Christ appointed head of his Church. To accomplish our task we will have to study the oriental languages – their rules and rites, their religious history, not to mention their theology properly so called.

It is now urgent for me to practice a further degree of poverty by selling my estates as soon as I can.

I am asking Our Lord to set the seal of his approval on this enterprise by giving Mademoiselle Correnson a religious vocation.

*Diary note dated December 22, 1863
in his Personal Reflections,
from The Essential d'Alzon (ES p. 826-827)*

¹ The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity began in 1908 as the Octave of Christian Unity, and focused on prayer for church unity. The dates of the week were proposed by Fr. Paul Wattson, cofounder of the Graymoor Franciscan Friars. He conceived of the week beginning on the Feast of the Confession of Peter, the Protestant variant of the ancient Feast of the Chair of Saint Peter, on 18 January, and concluding with the Feast of the Conversion of Saint Paul on 25 January.

² The characteristic designation in Catholic circles of the rift between the Oriental Catholic Churches and the Orthodox tradition. In the 21st century, one speaks of separated Churches or, better yet, Sister Churches.

³ An image originating from the Scriptural narrative in Jn 19:23.

January 19

To focus on the essential, the love of Our Lord

You know that when Our Lord entrusted the Church to Saint Peter, he asked him only this question: *Diligis me plus his*¹. What is essential is that you love Our Lord greatly and everything that he loved, the Blessed Virgin and the Church. Love Our Saviour with all your soul, so that every Mass you celebrate adds another degree of love to your heart. It is of the priest that it is especially said: *Ascensione in corde suo disposuit*². It is before

Our Lord that you must soften the harshness of your character; it is under his gaze that you perform all your actions; it is from Him that you must constantly ask for advice. Your studies must even take on a completely new character with a faith which will lead you look for supernatural light in all human knowledge.

*A Letter to Fr. Picard for his ordination,
June 5, 1856
(Letters, vol. II, p. 93)*

¹ Jn 21:15: '*Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?*'

² Ps 84:6 (Vulgate): '*Happy the man whom you strengthen to make the ascent to you*'. At times it has happened that some have set at odds, but in an artificial enough way, especially since the 17th century in France, the Christocentric understanding of modern spirituality (in which Fr. d'Alzon was steeped) and the Theocentric or Trinitarian understanding of the great Oriental theological tradition. Moreover, some have facilely superimposed on this distinction the concrete psychological understanding of modern spirituality with regard to the one of the Fathers which is ontological and abstract. These distinctions have little foundation. Christ is at the centre of the Trinity, as he is in the history of salvation and of Redemption. Dichotomies are often the work of the theological schools, leading to real impoverishment or spiritual distortions.

January 20

The Eucharist, the strength of God in our lives

If I really love Our Lord I will seek him, above all, in the Sacrament of his Love. He is there as the object and the model of my adoration – and it is there that I will acquire the strength of persuasion in order to get others to come and adore him too.... Think of the power which lies in the hands and the heart of a priest. Day by day he summons down to the altar this Divine Victim offered up since the world began. Think of that confided to a religious. By fervent Communion and voluntary self-sacrifice he identifies himself with Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament. Why are we not making better use of the power and authority God has given us?

The century which has witnessed the foundation of our religious family is a century in revolt. We are worshipping Man and denying God his rights. The Church has counter-acted this deplorable tendency by making it the Century of Our Blessed Lady and the Century of the Blessed Sacrament¹. With the same end in view I have taken for my motto: “Thy Kingdom Come”! To proclaim the rights of God and the Kingship of Christ in the Holy Eucharist – to enhance Devotion to the Blessed Sacrament, to love the

liturgy, to encourage Forty Hours and outdoor processions – in other words, to develop every possible aspect and reminder of Jesus' Sovereignty and Jesus' triumph through the Holy Eucharist – such has become my mission.

*Meditation on the Eucharist,
from The Essential d'Alzon
(ES p. 949, 952)*

¹ In 1854 Pius IX proclaimed the dogma of Mary's Immaculate Conception. The 19th century was a century of Marian manifestations with the apparitions at the Rue du Bac (1830), La Salette (1846) and Lourdes (1858). This century also saw the development of numerous Eucharistic devotions: Forty Hours, Perpetual Adoration, and International Eucharistic Congresses.

January 21

Saint Agnes

No one can say that because one is young one is less of a saint. The day before yesterday, it was the feast of Saint Agnes, a virgin, martyred at the age of twelve. It is a great feast day in Rome. In the Piazza Navona where I went to celebrate Mass for Miss Agnès Veuillot, I saw the place where

she was protected by an angel against ignoble attacks. In the evening, I went to Saint Agnes Outside the Walls, where her body lies in rest. Here you see the honour that the Church shows this little girl, because she was so full of energy. Oh! If only the great had half of this energy! In your place, I will make a novena to Saint Agnes so that you may be able to imitate her in her virginal integrity. By the way, God deliver us from the chicken-hearted, even if they are roosters.¹!

*Letter to the Children of Mary of the Assumption in Nîmes,
January 23, 1870
(Letters, vol. VIII, p. 142-143)*

¹ The expression “poule mouillée” in French means a coward (as in the English phrase be “chicken-hearted”). Here we see a little bit of Fr. d’Alzon’s wit. He was in Rome at this time for the First Vatican Council. He makes the analogy between wet hens (poules mouillées) and wet roosters (coqs mouillés); ‘wet roosters’ referred to members of the hierarchy of the First Vatican Council whose sluggish ways d’Alzon found unbearable.

January 22

Catholics all of one piece

First of all, we must recognize this first trait of our Institute: simplicity of means. It is often said that the least common thing in the world is common sense. Would it be a paradox to say that in the Catholic world the least common thing is Catholic common sense? That is why we seek to appropriate it to ourselves as an original trait. We are quite simply Catholic, but as Catholic as it is possible to be. We are Catholics all of one piece. And, because there are in our day many half Catholics, Catholics of their time, Catholics by accommodation, Catholics who consider themselves Catholic, we who are frankly Catholic, Catholics above all else, we pass, in the eyes of the crowd, as men set apart, maybe even extraordinary. This is the first trait of our character as Augustinians of the Assumption¹.

*Instruction of 1868,
from The Essential d'Alzon (ES p. 131-132)*

¹ This definition or trait of the Assumptionist, such as Fr. d'Alzon described it and desired it, did not escape a certain typology of Catholic sensitivity in the 19th century, shared as well with other currents of thought, sometimes at odds with each other. Personally Fr. d'Alzon belonged to the

current of Catholic die-hards called Ultramontane, in opposition to the liberal or national currents, that is to say in favour of papal pre-eminence and in opposition to certain liberal tendencies of contemporary groups and currents of thought which were taking shape in political, economic and philosophical spheres.

January 23

The freedom of the sons of God

The Kingdom of God within us consists in the most absolute dependence of our being and all our faculties on the intimate action of God. God is the master, we are the subjects: *Ego autem servus tuus et filius ancillae tuae*¹. Since he is our king – since he has the right to command us – since this right is as unlimited as his almighty power, his infinite knowledge and his boundless love for us – then we have no choice but to submit. We must obey him out of gratitude for all he has done for us – we must obey him with all the faculties which he himself has placed at our disposal.

What do we possess which doesn't belong to him? What is there that belongs to us and has not to be freely and willingly given over to his service? The most precious of all his gifts is, after

all, the gift of freedom – and since he is entitled to the best we can give, it is by surrendering our very freedom that we honour him most.

It is a wonderful mystery how the more completely we allow God to reign over us, the freer we become – perfect obedience produces perfect liberty.

*First Letter to the Master of Novices,
from The Essential d'Alzon (ES p. 152-153)*

¹ Quotation from Psalm 116:16. The history of salvation is like a thread running between human liberty and the confrontation with the tempter (our spiritual combat). Human beings must be on their guard: it is better for them and their happiness not to bite the fishhook of the tempter and fall prey like the gluttonous fish that swallows the lure along with the hook. The path of liberty is made up of experiences of liberation and purification.

January 24

*Saint Francis de Sales, Bishop of Geneva and
Doctor of the Church, Patron of journalists*

A method of prayer is indispensable. There are several of them, and I do not insist too much on any one in particular. However, it may be good for

the Novice Master to propose the method of Saint Francis de Sales, as it is described in *The Introduction to the Devout Life*. Sometimes, one can and should practice mental prayer in the presence of the novices in order to initiate them to the kind of reflection with which they must become familiar. As for topics of meditation, I hope to provide you with some very shortly for every day of the year. Meanwhile, I leave you free to choose those you want. Moreover, there are certain principles to be studied by those among you who wish not only to practice mental prayer but to train others in it later on. I would recommend two authors: Saint John of the Cross and Saint Francis de Sales. I am not excluding others; in fact, it would be good to consult them. But the two I suggest have been canonized. One belongs to a contemplative order; the other lived in the midst of apostolic activity and was in contact with Christians from all walks of life. The Church, by placing them on our altars, has guaranteed the purity of their doctrine.

*Fifth Circular,
from The Essential d'Alzon (ES p. 216)*

Fr. d'Alzon, whose family traced its ancestry to this saint through the Roussy de Sales, also appreciated this founder of the Visitation nuns for his action with regard to Protestants, for his desire to make the spiritual life

accessible to the laity and for his initiatives in favour of the media.

January 25

The Conversion of Saint Paul. To strip oneself in order to be robed in the garment of faith

The whole work of perfection consists of two things, according to the writings of Saint Paul, to strip oneself and re-clothe oneself¹. One strips oneself by an effort whose goal is to destroy in oneself every defect, every human attachment, and every imperfection. Harshness of character, over-indulgent bouts of sadness, discouragement, pride, touchiness, attachment to creatures, consolations, human joys, self reliance, a simply human way of thinking when all is going well, a certain laziness, a strong desire to avoid certain ordeals; all this and everything that resembles it must be carefully rooted from our souls. And most of all, the effort must be continual, if we do not want tepidness and cowardice to spread their moss into those small corners of the ground we have earned over the enemy. Yes, it is necessary to strip yourselves, and the more we are covered in the rags of our bad nature, the less we will be able to

seek the garment of light that Our Lord destines for us.

*Letter to the Adorers of the Blessed Sacrament,
July 31, 1857
(Letters, vol. II, p.295)*

¹ A reference to Rom 13:14.

January 26

Desire for Holiness

The lover wishes always to please his beloved, and if my heart belongs entirely to Jesus, this desire will be equal to my love for Him. Above all else, he wants me to be holy; if I do not strive to cooperate with this wish, there is something lacking to my love.

God alone is absolutely holy, yet Our Lord directs me to imitate Him: ‘Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect’¹. Jesus, God-made-man, and Mary, His mother, are also models I must imitate. When do I intend to take up this task in earnest?²

The Directory, I, 5 “Desire for Holiness”

¹ Mt 5:7

² The desire for holiness is ever present in the life of Fr. d'Alzon; in particular he was inspired by a vow he took to be as perfect as possible (September 24, 1861).

January 27

Expansion of the heart and spiritual fatherhood

Dear friend, I often think about you and, as I have already told you, in my dreams themselves I picture you surrounded by a lovely and virtuous wife and a bunch of little ones. By giving up the pleasures of a family, I consider as compensation – if I could possibly desire compensation - your children, on whom I extend the enormous love I bear for their father.

Where am I going to lose myself? Friend, it is because I love you and, having called you to mind, my imagination can go far, as you see. Be happy, Luglien, within the family that God will bring to birth through you. For me, I feel my heart is being formed for another kind of fatherhood. Yes, it is true, my heart is enlarged with a universal love; I have an idea in myself of the immensity of a priest's heart, and it seems to me that mine is beginning to achieve it. Ah! my dear

friend, you do not know what it is to give birth, like Saint Paul, to Christians until Christ is formed in them¹. In my instructions to people living at home, I offer a very gentle training. From four or five families, I make only one family, for which I am the link, and whom I unite to Jesus Christ.

*Letter to Luglien de Jouenne d'Esgrigny,
February 11, 1832
(Letters, vol. A, p. 268-269)*

¹ I Cor 4:15b

January 28

*Saint Thomas Aquinas, theologian,
Doctor of the Church (in the interest of a
theology constantly being renewed)*

I will, I believe, take another advantage from my entry into this seminary: to be able to observe clearly in these places the decrepitude of the Scholastic carcass and its decomposition. It is both laughable and pathetic to see the torture that the students undergo once a day with one of their professors who persists in following the bastardized method of syllogism that resembles

the logic of Saint Thomas in the same way that the Sorbonne resembles a council. It is also consoling to observe how some novel trends are taking root in a few heads that persist in crawling along worn-out roads. Several individuals who would be really annoyed if people thought they loved common sense have confessed to me that theology needs to be reworked, that reasoned proofs and all those drawn from Scripture and the Fathers are weak, unless one relies on the major principle of the authority of the Church. This makes me think that a well-written treatise on the Church would be sufficient to put many minds on the road of new theological developments and, in this way, bring back many of them from their illusions and even resolve their uncertainties.

*Letter to Charles de Montalembert,
April 27, 1832
(Letters, vol. XIV, p. 8-9)*

The end of the 19th century marked a return to the study of the thought of Saint Thomas Aquinas, a return officially encouraged by Pope Leo XIII, a more scientific theological study known as Neo-Thomism that should not be confused with the Scholastic movement.

January 29

Apostolic zeal offered in a spirit of service

Since we belong to an apostolic Order¹, we must endeavour, in so far as we can, to acquire the virtues demanded by such a sublime vocation. We must remember that *Our Lord came on the earth not to be served but to serve*², and we must consider ourselves as humble dependents of those for whom we work. They have rights over us, and we have no rights over them other than the one that Christ entrusted to us to lead them, however we can, to the holiness to which they are invited. This attitude is a source of reverence, which is a safeguard both for them and for us. It is in the heart of Christ that they are dear to us. He loved them to the point of shedding his blood for them, and this will be the measure of our devoted efforts to help them to the holiness to which they are called.

*The Directory, II, 11
On the Zeal for the Salvation of Humankind*

¹ In 1845 it was Fr. d'Alzon's intention to form a religious order. History decreed that the Church would only permit his first foundation to be in the form of a congregation.

² Mt 20:28 or Mk 10:45

January 30

The spirit of a child as the spiritual way

I believe that to recapture a little love and the original freshness of love, it is necessary to become once again like a little child with Our Lord. This is what happened to me last night. After going to bed, I remembered that I had not said the prayer. *In Ego...*¹, which is offered for the souls in purgatory. I relit my candle, I got up, and I offered the prayer before my crucifix. I detached it from its hook, and I took it with me to bed. I assure you that this childhood practice succeeded marvellously. I made a long meditation, better than I had made for a very long time. I believe that in general we make ourselves too important before God. Some acts of humility, of simplicity, of mortification would expand our hearts and would allow them to be filled more easily with the grace of a tender love.

*Letter to Mother Marie-Eugénie de Jésus,
June 20, 1857
(Letters, vol. II, p. 265-266)*

¹ The beginning of the very well known prayer, 'Oh good and very sweet Jesus' that Pope Pius IX in 1858 had enhanced with a plenary indulgence, was to be recited before a crucifix and inserted in the prayers of thanksgiving

for private graces said after Mass. The spirit of a child constituted one of the prominent features of the spiritual way of Saint Thérèse of Lisieux. Another reference: *Letters*, vol. I, p. 34.

January 31

Saint John Bosco, patron of Christian educators

All Christian and religious education is summed up in these words of Saint Paul to the Galatians: *Fillioli mei quos iterum parturio, donec formetur Christus in vobis*¹. The formation of Jesus Christ in souls: that indeed is the unique goal of education. In view of the fact that Jesus Christ reached perfect manhood (*in virum perfectum*), we will have given our students the best possible preparation for life when we will have provided them with the means of reaching the perfection of the God-man. The ideal purpose of education, it seems to me, is to transmit the following: a knowledge of Jesus Christ that takes into account all that he is and all that he does both as man and as God; a love of Jesus Christ based on the attractiveness of his gifts and of his beauty at once human and divine; a dedication to Jesus

Christ in keeping with the sovereign rights of our King; an awareness of the rewards to which he invites us; a desire to carry out the duties and practice the virtues stemming from our relationship with Jesus Christ seen in this perspective².

*Seventh Circular,
from The Essential d'Alzon (ES p. 235-236)*

¹ Gal 4:19, "My dear children, once again, just like a mother in child-birth, I feel the same kind of pain for you until Christ is formed in you."

² The faces of Don Bosco and Fr. d'Alzon as educators of young people are united symbolically on a medallion decorating the modern altar in the church of Our Lady of Victories in Paris. Fr. d'Alzon dedicated the Assumption to the apostolate of education and teaching; this priority remains a living tradition in a number of its provinces today.

MONTH OF FEBRUARY

The selections for the month of February have also been partly determined by the ordinary liturgical calendar, as well as by the feasts of the Presentation (2/2), Pius IX (2/7), Our Lady of Lourdes (2/11), and St. Bernadette Soubirous (2/18). The other days focus on the regular course of the Christian life, especially the sacramental journey (2/1, 2/3, 2/4, 2/5, 2/6, 2/8, 2/9) and then the distribution of the gifts of the Spirit, promised to the faithful at Pentecost according to Isaiah's prophecy.

D'Alzon's spirit is particularly alive in certain of the directives he gave to the Assumption, with regard to love of the Church, a sense of ecclesial communion, concern for doctrinal fidelity, the endless search to discover God's will, and knowledge of the faith, lived, studied, and re-examined at times of retreat. One easily finds here

*an echo of d'Alzon's personal example inviting
one and all to the evangelical path of holiness.*

February 1

The spiritual garment of Baptism

For the baptised Christian Jesus Christ is a kind of garment. Saint Paul tells his Galatian converts: “*Quicumque baptizati estis, Christum induistis*”¹. So he is our spiritual garment. When I was baptised I became clothed in his grace. And what can this mean except that my whole being – whatever I think, feel, say or do – must bear witness to him by whose blood we have been cleansed, renewed and regenerated. This is no trivial observation – it must be taken dead seriously because the Apostle (i.e. St. Paul) keeps on repeating it: “Circumcision means nothing, and the want of it means nothing – when a man is in Christ Jesus there has been a new creation” (Gal. 6:15). “*Induat vos Dominus novum hominem*”². And what is this “new self” which was Adam. I am, indeed, a son of Adam. I bear his mark, which is that of Original Sin. “*Exuat vos Dominus veterem hominem cum actibus suis*”³. But my new self has superseded the old. What were the operative words when I took the religious habit?

“May the Lord divest you of the old man and his acts” – that is to say his influence, the things he inclines you to do. This, then, is my task: to divest myself of Adam, of his sinful state and inclinations, and of the punishment they entail – and re-clothe myself (as I did when I was baptised, but more so now) in the “newness” of Jesus Christ – in his grace, in his gifts. But this does require my co-operation. I am offered the new garment – I must put it on, and prove myself worthy to wear it.

*An Instruction by Fr. d’Alzon,
from The Essential d’Alzon (ES p. 915)*

¹ An approximate quotation of Gal. 3:27, “*All you who have been baptised in Christ’s name have put on the person of Christ.*”

² Eph 4:24, “*You must be clothed in the new self which is created in God’s image*”

³ Col 3:9, “*You have stripped off the old self with its practices.*”

Fr. d’Alzon never ceased to mention his first spiritual birth, his baptism, in Saint Peter’s Church at Vigan, September 2, 1810.

February 2

***The Feast of the Presentation
of the Lord in the Temple***

Tomorrow we celebrate the feast of the Our Lord's Presentation in the Temple. This is his consecration for the sacrifice on the cross. Renew yourselves tomorrow with an unconditional consecration to everything that the Divine Saviour may ask of you. Offer yourselves as a victim to his love and undertake all your actions in the great spirit of such a victim. Oh! Why don't you enter more deeply into all the mysteries of the Saviour's life? If you allow him, he will himself will help you; but for that to happen it is necessary to have very great humility, a deep contempt for yourself, and a perfect disposition to accept every difficulty that may come your way, from the Divine Master. Tread this path gently but also courageously.

*A Letter to Miss Céline Favier,
February 1, 1879,
(Letters, vol. XIII, p. 29)*

Miss Céline Favier, a member of the Third Order of the Franciscans, lived in Le Vigan, first given spiritual direction by Fr. Hippolyte Saugrain and after 1874 by Fr. d'Alzon.

February 3

The gift of the Spirit

The Cenacle was the first seminary and could be called the most perfect apostolic seminary of them all. It only lasted a brief time because Christ had spent three years preparing for ministry men who understood hardly anything, *ipsi autem nihil horum intellexerunt*¹. How many limitations these first seminarians had! Yet, when the Holy Spirit bestowed his gifts on them, what marvels did their words not accomplish! Let us ask the Holy Spirit to place himself on the lips of our priests and bishops and that he bestow the fullness of his light and his strength on the leader of his Church that he might be able to guide it by the hand in the midst of the dangers wrought by the malicious. Lord, do not leave us orphans; send us the spirit of obedience, so that, guided by the leaders inspired by you, we may have as pastors true apostles who will lead your Church to triumph over all its enemies with the virtue from on high.

*A Homily by Fr. d'Alzon, published in Le Pèlerin,
1st June 1878, p. 359*

¹ cf. Lk 18:34. The sacrament of Confirmation, given to the pupils at the prep school of the Assumption in Nîmes, marked one of the symbolic dates in the annual calendar in

the life of this institution. In his instruction of 1847, Fr.d'Alzon reminds and questions: '*We received wisdom, however, in the sacrament of Confirmation. How have we used it?* (*The Essential d'Alzon*, p. 1319-1320).

February 4

The sacrament of the Eucharist: 'I am the living bread, come down from heaven'¹

The Eucharist is a living bread, a divine bread, a thoroughly heavenly food and it is this mystery, considered to be the food of the Christian soul, that demands all our attention. The catechism gives the following definition of this adorable Sacrament: *the Eucharist is a Sacrament that really and truly contains the body, blood, soul and Divinity of Our Lord Jesus Christ*. We are going to meditate on the Body of Our Lord, the principle of purity; on his blood, the principle of life; on his soul, the principle of holiness, on his entire Divinity, the principle of glory.

*Lent 1862,
from The Essential d'Alzon (ES p. 953)*

¹ Jn 6:51: '*Ego sum panis vivus qui de caelo descendi*'. This passage of John's Gospel is part of a larger text, chapter 6,

dedicated to the Passover of the bread of life, where after the miracle of the multiplication of the loaves, Jesus in Capharnaüm presents himself as the real bread, the new manna and the new food in his flesh and in his blood, accessible by faith. The Christian is called to be fed by the Word made flesh, as he/she does with the bread which is the Word of God.

February 5

The sacrament of forgiveness and reconciliation

I am a sinner, and God, in his mercy, unceasingly offers me the blood of His Son so that I may be made clean in the pool of repentance. With what great respect must I not approach a sacrament in which I receive forgiveness for my sins through the merits of the blood of God!

My examination of conscience should be thorough; my confession, sincere and frank, and therefore short. It is to contrition that I must pay the greatest attention, because, if, through the grace of God, I have as a rule only venial sins to confess, it is not so much the detailed enumeration of them that is important, as the sorrow with which I make my accusation and the firmness of my resolution not to commit them again.

The ministry of confession constituted one of the most time-consuming tasks of Fr. of Alzon, as Vicar General, in the cathedral of Nîmes where his confessional was besieged from the earliest hours of the day, and then also at the college. One can find reference to this reality, brief but eloquent, in one of his letters (vol. XIV, p. 395).

February 6

The sacrament of love in marriage

Before I address you, my dear cousins¹, permit me to congratulate those around you who accompany you with their good wishes and to congratulate you myself for the act that you are about to make. Do we not see here two children of the most honoured families in the city of Nîmes? As we have enjoyed the example of those who preceded you, everyone here hopes that from these wonderful legacies the most precious part for you will be in reliving and carrying on their virtues. It is beneficial for our illustrious city to see these traditions continued in her midst, strong influences that, to various degrees and in various shapes, provide precious support for our admira-

ble Catholic population... But I come back to you, young spouses, you are already happy with what you know of each other. You will continue to be so if, to the commitments you are about to take, you add the promise to be always worthy of those who formed you. Those who are no more with us ask this of you from on high; those who are alive expect from you, in return for the love that they poured into your hearts, Christian consolations, holy joys and life-giving hopes.

*Sermon on marriage,
(Letters, vol. XV, p. 254-255)*

¹ Fr. d'Alzon descended from the Mérignargue family. This 23rd April 1873, Amédée of Mérignargues, a former pupil of Assumption high school, married Paule Demians, daughter of a former mayor of Nîmes, a friend of Fr. d'Alzon. How many such unions did he bless?

February 6 is the national holiday of New Zealand. Let us pray for the community in Tawa.

February 7

Blessed Pius IX

The great figure of Pius IX has hovered over the second half of the XIX century to teach people how to be appealing, gentle and firm, how to suffer with joy, how to persevere through ingratitude and lies, how to bear one's cross and follow Jesus Christ. He was a true vicar of God, a great pontiff, with a royal character not seen in a sovereign for centuries. But because the Church has lost its leader, it is not true that it has lost him forever. Shortly he will appear again, the chosen one of God, inspired by the Holy Spirit. One man succeeds another, the papal institution is imperishable as God promised. Yes, the institution on which the Church is built, the papacy, will remain. Only, remember that in so far as it contains two elements, the divine element and the human element, it is up to us to obtain all the perfection for the man who is assigned to provide what is necessarily called the inferior part of the papacy.

*Homily by Fr .d'Alzon, published in Le Pèlerin,
23rd February, 1878, p. 122-123*

Pope Pius IX died on 7th February 1878. Pope John Paul II (1920-2005) promoted him to the ranks of the Beatified along with John XXIII (1881-1963) on 3rd September 2000, during the jubilee year. Fr. d'Alzon, tied up in Paris, went hastily to Rome in 1878 to pay him homage for the last time. The reputation of holiness of Pius IX was already great since the beginnings of his pontificate: (*Letters, vol. XIV, p. 362, n. 7*).

February 8

The sacrament of Orders

Here you are, a priest, my dear friend¹! You have received such an awesome power over the body of Jesus Christ. May the sacred deposit of faith be henceforth the object of your greatest respect, of your most tender care...that is, after the consecrated body of Jesus Christ. At the same time, care for the Word, that is to say, your preaching. Saint Augustine said: *Non est minus Verbum Dei quam corpus Christi*². The priest's jurisdiction over the Word of God flows from his jurisdiction over the body of Jesus Christ. You are aware of the words of Saint Alphonsus. Take care of your preaching, therefore, with respect, with faith, concerning yourself solely with the glory of God and the good of souls, and keeping yourself

in the background as much as possible. I also want to quote the great Bishop of Hippo, whose teachings have always been my guiding rule. Listen to this magnificent passage: *non minus reus erit qui Verbum Dei negligenter audierit, quam ille qui corpus Christi in terram cadere negligentia sua permiserit*³.

*Letter to Father Galeran,
June 30, 1857
(Letters, vol. XV, p. 85)*

¹ He is writing to Father Galeran (1831-1915), a former pupil of the Assumption, ordained a priest 29th June, 1857 in Montpellier.

² A quote from Saint Cesarius of Arles, sermon 79: 'The Word of God is not less important than his body.' *Corpus Christianorum*, series latina, Vol. 103, p. 323.

³ Also from Saint Cesarius, o. c., p. 324: «the one who has listened inattentively to the word of God will not be less guilty than the one who, through carelessness, will have allowed the Body of Christ to fall on the ground».

February 9

The Sacrament of Anointing of the Sick

The death that, within five days, struck a devout person with whom I had a strong

relationship, the manner in which she attended to her agony analyzing all her impressions, the terror that she had of her last breath until she received Extreme Unction, the calmness that followed her terror, then the death of a priest close to my friends who, in departing, carried away the existence of a work to which he had dedicated eight laborious years, the grief that hastened his end, all of this gave me as it does you, a deep sense that life is a small thing and that everything that does not rest in God is fleeting. On this point we are both in perfect agreement and the conclusion is that, above all, it is necessary to work solely for God.

*Letter to Mrs. de Chaponay,
December 29, 1865
(Letters, vol. XV, P. 167-168)*

Mrs. de Chaponay, a native of Gard, born in Lascours, had Fr. d'Alzon as her spiritual director. A happy coincidence led to the discovery in 2001 of 71 of the Founder's signed letters, written between 1864 and 1880, preserved and classified in the Archives Department of the Rhone.

February 10

Meditate on the gifts of the Spirit

Since you are so happy to be a religious, it is necessary to be one to the end and to sacrifice yourself, not as you understand it, but as Our Lord understands it. I call you, during the retreat you are about to make, to meditate on the gifts of the Holy Spirit, especially on wisdom, understanding, counsel and fortitude. As for knowledge, reverence and fear of God, we will reflect on them later¹.

*Letter to Sister Mary of the Blessed- Sacrament
at the end of September 1858
(Letters, vol. II, p. 537)*

¹ According to the Christian tradition based on an exegesis of Isaiah 11: 2 seven gifts are assigned to the action of the Holy Spirit: 'On him will rest the Spirit of Yahweh the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and fortitude, the spirit of knowledge and the fear to Yahweh', detailed as follows according to theological and spiritual terminology: wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, fear of the Lord and piety, included here nearly word for word by Fr. d'Alzon in his counsel for the spiritual direction of a Religious of the Assumption. It also appears at the end of his letter to Fr. Picard, on 11th March 1878 (*Letters, vol. XII, p. 36*).

February 11

***Our Lady of Lourdes
(Patron of the Provinces of France
and Latin America)***

[In order to purify the air with the breath of pilgrimages] we have commissioned steam locomotives to carry crowds of pilgrims to a host of shrines. We have sanctified these instruments often so sadly enslaved to a soul-destroying industry. Watch them puffing along on their new mission, shuttling thousands of fervent pilgrims to the famous shrines of our land. How well they beautify the fair face of France with their long caravans of repentance, atonement and love. Pilgrimages have come to stay – though there may be fewer of them when equally impressive manifestations of faith become more popular. What, after all, is a pilgrimage? It's a long procession, longer than the usual sort, and more efficacious because more penitential and demanding. By undertaking these prayerful journeys, the Church assumes possession of the public forum and comes out into the open air. We affirm our Faith for the whole population to see. Christians unafraid to affirm their Faith are well on their way to triumph

*Instruction of 1873,
from The Essential d'Alzon (ES p. 180)*

Very early on the Assumption was involved in the ministry of animating pilgrimages that has in return served to make it more visible and more known, in France and in the world. The first Assumptionists in Latin America fostered this culture of pilgrimages and the popular face of Christianity in particular (shrines, magazines). The Feast of Our Lady of Lourdes occurs on 11th February.

February 12

From one Council to another, doctrinal fidelity to the teaching of the Church

I am following with very great attention the progress of the Council, not so much in its deliberations as in the private conversations taking place outside and in the effects that may arise from the shock of so many contrary ideas and so many opposing trends. Oh well! I have come to the conclusion that that Congregation which seeks to draw, as far as it depends on it, all of the practical consequences of the Council, will be the one that God blesses most. From this point of view, it is very important that we render a positive account of ourselves before God of what we have

to do, that we circumscribe our action to a certain extent and define it so as to make it as fruitful as possible and so as not to waste our strength... Without using a heavy hand but with a consistent plan, you must gather lay-people and priests around you, and, through your conversations, propose to attract to the workings of the Council all powerful minds over which you have some influence. Believe me, work as hard as you can in this sense.

*Letter to Frs. François Picard and Vincent de Paul Bailly,
February 10, 1870
(Letters, vol. VIII, p. 192)*

Clearly, the work of beginning to mobilise the conciliar spirit consists as is very often the case in taking advantage of so many other opportunities. It means taking into account one's real strengths, consolidating resources, enhancing existing efforts, and pulling together individuals who are dispersed.

February 13

To pass through the superior door of Wisdom

Wisdom is that virtue which supplies our good actions with better motives. It is one of the Gifts of the Holy Spirit (Isaiah 11,2) – a precious gift,

as precious as it is rare. If we examine the reality of Christian conduct, even at its best, we ascertain that it is far from perfect. It is tarnished by stains – it is of diminished brightness. The reason is that all our Christian acts are not performed for the highest Christian motives. Wisdom demands that they should be. Wisdom prescribes that whatever we do must be done with the thought of God at the back of our minds: *Sapientia timor Domini*¹. Yet, far from this being the usual case, we perform the majority of our actions 'any old how' as if they didn't matter, without taking God into consideration.

*Instructions to the students at Collège de l'Assomption,
from The Essential d'Alzon (ES p. 1315-1316)*

¹ “*The beginning of wisdom is the fear of the Lord.*” See Ps 110: 9, Sir 19:18 or Prov. 9:10 or 15:33. It is good concerning this biblical expression ‘fear of the Lord’ to recall this commentary from the 1st Letter of Saint John 4:18: “*There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment and whoever fears has not reached the perfection of love.*” One can conclude that the expression ‘fear of the Lord’ can no longer justify at all any Jansenist belief in the expression of the Christian faith.

February 14

*Saint Cyril, monk, and Methodius, bishop,
patrons of Europe*

What is essential is that we pray a lot and put all our confidence in God. Sanctify yourselves, therefore, my dear children. Remember that Saints Cyril and Methodius, the first two apostles of the Bulgarians, were blood brothers¹. Be courageous and always move forward! I don't know if I will be able to send you any help soon, but I dearly want to. You must perform miracles, in order to get vocations.

We have just taken charge of an orphanage of 300 boys, in Arras. We are going to send Father John Baptist, Brother Vital and Brother Joseph Maubon there. Undertaking this work meant that we have acquired a saint, Fr. Halluin, who lived for seven years on soldiers' rations in order to get his work off the ground.

*A letter to Fr. Alexandre and Brother Jacques Chilier,
November 5, 1868
(Letters, vol. VII, p. 185)*

¹ There is a double allusion: the two Slavic saints were, on the one hand, two brothers like the recipients of this letter and, on the other hand, Fr. Halluin, almost canonized by Fr. d'Alzon, developed his work with little means. It was an

invitation for them to do the same in the Orient. Pope John Paul II, on 31st December 1980, raised the commemoration of the two Slavic Saints to the ranks of a feast and proclaimed them saints equal to Benedict as patrons of Europe. Saints Cyril and Methodius are celebrated on 11th May in the calendar of the Oriental Church. Since then, the patronage of Europe has been enriched by Pope John Paul II with the feminine figures of Saint Catherine of Siena (29th April), Saint Bridget of Sweden (23rd July) and Saint Theresa Benedicta of the Cross [Edith Stein] (9th August).

February 15

Set free that understanding which leads to faith

A powerful means of communicating the power and strength of God lies in the hands of the teacher. It is by teaching, in the class-room, that we make his truth known. But see how inadequate our own intelligence is – surrounded by ignorance and uncertainty! This darkness must be lifted – this dense fog dissipated. How do we ourselves stand? We must take into account those obstacles which dwell in the depths of our own heart. We must be thoroughly conversant with the disciplines we shall have to impart and appreciate them for what they are worth. We must come to disown our purely personal inclinations which,

though we know what is good, drive us constantly in the direction of evil (Rom. 7:15). The light of faith brings these miseries into clear light. Stripped of pride, stripped of deception, stripped of self-illusion, we will at last be disposed to open the doors of our mind, and welcome truth – the truth to which we must henceforth be willingly and courageously crucified. It is this truth which will set us free (John 8:32): free from the slavery of our own flagging will. It is this truth which will make us long to escape from this confusion in which we find ourselves entangled – and out into God's fresh air and bright sunshine.....The truth is not only the object of a system, an object of thought for the Christian. Truth is something we learn to love. He who searches for it – he who yearns for it – finds it, clings to it, and will not let it go (Song of Songs 3:4). Truth has become his consuming passion.

*Instructions at Collège de l'Assomption,
from The Essential d'Alzon (ES p. 1331-1332)*

February 16

The spirit of discernment and good counsel

Beware of those people who come to new confessors with all kinds of stories. They really are not telling you the whole story. It happened to me as well; I gave my crucifix to one of these Bohemians, and then I heard later from the police that she had deceived I don't know how many people. For my part, after having dealt with her so well, I would treat her a little less gently in the future. There are vipers who make deception a profession. I am not saying that you should never believe anyone, nor that she may have done something four times more than she admitted; but if she ended up by delivering a beautiful declaration of love, as ugly as you are, nothing would surprise me in this merry-go-round, and later she would hand you back your crucifix as proof of your connection. You should tell her to make a novena, do the Stations of the Cross, and fast. Only fasting and prayer can cast out some demons, says Our Lord¹.

*Letter to Fr. Victorin Galabert,
September 4 or 5, 1859
(Letters, vol III, p. 144)*

¹ Mt 17:21. Fr. d'Alzon did not confuse the virtue of prudence with pusillanimity. He knew from experience that a priest's conduct in his ministry demanded a sharp sense of psychology as much human as spiritual. Fr. Galabert was sufficiently humble not to be offended in any way by this rather unflattering portrait he received from his superior in this situation.

February 17

*Seek out and accept God's will as you ponder
with faith the signs of his action*

What if I compare myself to Abraham who had but one son, who in his turn had only two, one of whom was exiled, and yet Abraham became the father of God's people¹? This was the experience of Dom Guéranger²; there were hardly any novices at Solesmes during his lifetime. Since his death, more than eighty have entered and his debt of nearly a million had nearly been paid off. I try as hard as I can to follow God's will that has appeared little by little, in a way so wonderfully his own. Our alumnates in the South of France cost us 30,000 francs a year, and we find the money day by day. For me this is an endless miracle which makes us to practice poverty by

forcing us to sacrifice our many extravagances to the need of raising money for these dear children, one coin at a time. For six weeks I have not had a red cent in my possession. If I want to go out, I have to ask, like some schoolboy, for the price of the train ticket.

*Letter to Mother Marie Eugénie de Jésus,
March 17, 1879
(Letters, vol. XIII, p. 62)*

¹ The story is in Genesis 21.

² The abbot of Solesmes, Dom Guéranger (1825-1875), died on 30th January 1875.

February 18

Saint Bernadette Soubirous

You are absolutely right: we must become saints. At Lourdes I asked for my conversion, for the spirit of prayer and for the gift to inflame souls, and to make Our Lord and the Blessed Virgin loved. I send you Bernadette's photograph, who is today a Sister of Nevers. Why did the Blessed Virgin choose this ignorant and unrefined peasant girl, who did not know how to read or

write, nor understand what the Immaculate Conception meant? I will bring you a small plant picked from the very place where the miraculous spring flowed.

*Letter to Mother Marie Correnson,
August 17, 1868
(Letters, vol. VII, p. 136).*

Fr. d'Alzon wrote to Mother Correnson on 17th April 1879: "*Bernadette died yesterday, at half-past 3, I was told. God used her for very great things and then placed her in salutary obscurity*". As of 1868 something profound took place in the relationship between Lourdes and Fr. d'Alzon, who held in great esteem the parish priest of the time, Fr. Peyramale.

February 19

To ask for the strength to escape a feeling of spiritual numbness

What gives me pleasure in your letter is that you ask for strength; I believe that you will only receive it through confident obedience. You must let yourself be forced to do that which you would not dare do alone. You know what is good, you desire what is beautiful, holy, great, and perfect.

And if all this could come to your soul, as you look to heaven, how marvellous that would be! Oh well! My daughter, you have to work and strive for the perfection that God wants from you. Your soul is like those sleeping gardens in winter under a double covering of dead leaves and snow. But come the spring, everything grows green again and the repose of the dead season gives way tenfold to the vitality of new life during those first magnificent days. You have been long enough under your snow and asleep. Saint Paul urges that, when the hour sounds, one wake up and rise¹. I do not know why I am persuaded that I will not have lost anything in waiting for results.

*A Letter to Angéline Chaudordy,
October 22, 1865
(Letters, vol.V, p. 428-429)*

¹ Eph. 5:14.

February 20

*To lose oneself is to enter into a state of
selflessness*

How you always remain the same! You can spend half an hour of conversation with a friend and it transforms you. And yet every day you have hours to give to Our Lord, the friend par excellence, and you are not affected at all! Dear girl of little faith and little love¹! When will you begin to understand that self-seeking is vanity, as is seeking to possess every creature? What matters above all else is to lose oneself in God? See, my daughter, in the end it is necessary to begin a life of holiness and you must renounce all your complaints, your whisperings about others, your compassion for yourself. You must seek and want nothing other than God, in all things, everywhere. Oh! When will we be concerned only with his truths and his eternal interests?

*Letter to Eulalie de Régis,
February 5, 1866
(Letters, vol. VI, p.23)*

¹ According to Mt 8:26.

Eulalie de Régis, a girl from the high society of Nîmes, was one of the Adorers of the Blessed Sacrament at the

beginning. She also desired to be one of the first Oblates and wanted to receive their religious habit on her deathbed. A large gift from her inheritance provided for the construction of the chapel on rue Séguier. Fr. d'Alzon undertook to compose for this woman that he directed a biographical note in her memory, partly written and partly incomplete.

February 21

Know how to take time off for retreats in order to let your body and soul breathe

It is already the sixth day of my retreat. I have eight or nine days left but, it seems to me, that I can begin to speak to you about myself. You may well ask me: *'Why make such a long retreat?'* First of all, the saints made forty day retreats. Well, it is because I am not a saint that I wanted a little longer to reflect, and I congratulate myself for this decision. I spent the first days under the weight of a physical fatigue that had me sleeping ten to twelve hours a day, either at night, in the afternoon, or even in my armchair. I believed I had to let myself give in to this need to sleep without too many scruples. Now I am beginning to get a little upset with myself, because it is necessary to put an end to all this. Here is what

I'm thinking; let me share it with you. It is certain that, from experience, this is the time of the year when I sleep more, after the very tiring nights of summer, although this year I did not suffer too much from this; still, I had a lot more mental fatigue, because of the funeral rites for Father Durand, my articles on the English (Oxford) movement, my speeches on the occasion of the distribution of awards, etc. In my opinion I will do well to adopt little by little the habit of sleeping in a way that is not too scandalous.

*Letter to Fr. François Picard,
August 6, 1866
(Letters, vol. VI, p. 110-111)*

Fr d'Alzon seems to stress that a retreat can start with a good period of rest, as long as it doesn't turn into one prolonged catnap. Sleepiness, good for the body, can become mortal for the soul. One author wrote that 'to sleep was to lose interest'.

February 22

***The Chair of Saint Peter in Rome.
An Ecclesial awareness and love of the Church***

We love the Church because she contains within her bosom the sum total of God's bounty. Christ, her Divine Spouse, has confided all these treasures to her keeping, these treasures which the Revolution detests. In her we find truth proclaimed, the law of perfection, the nursery of all virtue. She is the true Kingdom of God here below¹, the assembly of the saints and of Christ's disciples. In her we behold stability amid societies which are crumbling. In her we receive God's assurance of a happiness which man alone could never attain. Through her we are given the necessary impetus to take off from this our land of earthly exile, and fly upwards towards that realm of that eternal and glorious home to which we truly belong. All of this surpasses human nature. All of this belongs to the divine order of things. All of this comes to us through Jesus Christ and is bestowed on us only in his Church. That is why we must look upon and love the Church from God's point of view.

*Instruction of 1868,
from The Essential d'Alzon (ES p.137)*

¹ The formula of Fr. d'Alzon readily identifies the Church with the Kingdom. However, Scripture does not identify the Church with the Kingdom: the Church is the anticipation, the figure that announces the realities of the Kingdom (Mt 13:53; 18:35)

Peter confessed Jesus' divine mission, and Jesus, in exchange, gave him the wonderful mission to be the rock on which the Church would be founded. In this marvelous way Jesus introduced Peter to his own ministry. Wanting to construct a building on earth as lasting as the centuries, he took a fisherman from Galilee and put him as the foundation: *Tu es Petrus et super hanc petram aedificabo Ecclesiam meam*¹

Let's examine: 1° the privilege of Peter; 2° the union that we must establish with him. It is not flesh nor blood that revealed to the son of John² that Jesus was the Christ acknowledged from afar by the patriarchs and prophets. It was a revelation from heaven that enlightened him, but, faithful to the light from on high, he believed and he spoke. *Credidi propter quod locutus sum*³.

*Meditations on the Chair of Saint Peter,
Meditations on Religious Perfection,
vol. I, BP, p. 83-84*

¹ «You are Peter and on this rock I will build my Church»: Mt 16:18.

² Mt 16:17.

February 23

To make provision for God and remain a soul of desire

I hope that you have recovered a little from the first emotions of your arrival. For this reason I take the liberty to speak to you a little more seriously and to remind you that the most legitimate joys are dead, that you must therefore think about God and about what is eternal. What did you do until 15th December for eternity? You were not content with singing throughout the summer, you have to sing in the autumn and even in winter. This is more than the cicada¹. What provisions have you made? What have you set aside for your soul? What are you counting on to put in your storehouse from now on? Your soul, your soul! Oh! My daughter, how foolish to think about anything else, when we do not think about God and his Church! It is a great misfortune of our condition that the most magnificent dispositions of the soul produce so few practical results, and yet it is always a good thing to keep

on desiring. It is impossible that nothing remains. Thus, I urge you to desire much, especially Holy Communion. You must desire to be gentle, humble, patient, poor, despised, mortified, penitent, charitable, a woman of prayer, penetrated by God's presence, obedient, zealous for the interests of the Church, and united with the whole of your being with all the intentions of Our Lord.

*Letter to Mrs. de La Prade,
November 11, 1860
(Letters, vol. III, p. 348)*

¹ Here Fr. Alzon embroiders images taken from La Fontaine's fable on the cicada (grasshopper) and the ant.

February 24

The gift of peace, one of the signs and fruits of the Spirit

Hardly had I arrived here for a short rest than I felt the fatigue of the rather excessive work that I have had to accomplish recently. It resulted in a heavy bout of flu that almost kept me an absolute prisoner, with a violent headache that was

extremely unpleasant. I congratulate you on being able to make your retreat and I find you happy in feeling the closeness of God; benefit from it to be penetrated by the reality of his being and with the falsehood of everything that is not from him. It is with immense happiness that I see you resting under his hand¹; and, in the end, what could I wish for you more than his peace? It is extraordinary that so much time is needed to understand the extent of this word, “peace.”

*Letter to Mother Marie Eugénie de Jésus,
January 9, 1867
(Letters, vol. VI, p. 211)*

¹ Mother Marie Eugénie de Jésus was very worried about the machinations of Father Véron, the former ecclesiastical superior of the Religious, who wanted to encroach on the government of their Congregation to the detriment of the rights of a Superior General. This gave rise to her journey to Rome in May/June 1866, with the intention of seeking approval of the Constitutions and recognition of the Institute with papal rights.

How beautiful is the flow of this prayer of Mother Teresa of Calcutta: *‘The fruit of silence is prayer; the fruit of prayer is faith; the fruit of faith is love; the fruit of love is service; and the fruit of service is peace.’*

February 25

Ask the Spirit of God for the grace of renewal

Be under no illusion. The work must start all over again, not that we need to have new rules, or new practices, but we must have a new spirit. It is the cry of the *Miserere, et Spiritum rectum innova in visceribus meis*¹; it is the continual renewal of this spirit of uprightness to which we must aspire. It is necessary to serve God in his truth and without falsehood. When we say to him: 'My God, I love you', we must prove it by our deeds. This is absolutely what is needed. My daughter, let us walk in the truth and give Our Lord an immense love. In the depth of our heart, and in the details of our life, we are going to love all the sacrifices that come our way, and we will offer them up joyfully and cheerfully. We will move forward propelled by love, and whatever God shows us that is better, we will choose, because in everything we want to reach for the heights.

*Letter to Marie Correnson,
August 26, 1868
(Letters, vol. VII, p. 150)*

¹ According to Psalm 51:1a and 12b: 'Have mercy and restore in my breast an upright spirit' (Vulgate).

February 26

*A benevolent and smiling outlook
salted with the spirit*

I should have sent a reply to five of you; I prefer to greet you with a collective epistle. I have been inviting those who want to come to Le Vigan to come. In fact, no one comes. Thanks! And some will say that I am sensitive! One has to expect to be slandered. Full stop. New paragraph.

A Sister is now asking her neighbour who, then, the fifth person is to whom Fr. d'Alzon owes a response. I cannot count more than four. I answer: it depends. In the style of Fr. Jean-Marie. Another is saying: *'My, there are a lot of paragraphs'*. In the style of Dupanloup.

Would you like another one? For example, like this one. Look at the bees gather about in the light of the rising sun, across the meadows flushed with flowers and how they are collecting the sweet honey from which they form their precious treasure for the winter season. My daughters, for whom my paternal delight ceaselessly swells, I pray that anon you will be gathering about in that garden where the preacher of the retreat will present to your eyes' delight and to your mystical sense of smell perfumed rows of flowers (no

allusion to Sr. M. Julie). Whew! This kind of talk chokes me to death. Does it do the same to you?

Let's try another approach. During that time of progress traversed by a humanity emancipated by the principles of (17)89, it is impossible to conceive of a nun turning back to the Middle Ages in order to become a religious. That civilization which made the byways and imitates them, under the pretext of these paths, required if the century is condemned to see some religious sisters, these sisters are at the height of modern thinking and the sacred tribune that is going to lead you towards those summits which raise up your understanding, into what abysses must your hearts plunge at pushing these poor victims of a past obedience towards the conception of the marvels which fill the present epoch, and to which the general Exhibition has begun to act as cradle. There you are; you have three styles to choose from.

*Letter to Sister Marie des Anges Hugues,
September 10, 1867
(Letters, vol. VI, p. 366)*

Editor's note: In this passage, Fr. d'Alzon is clowning around with his correspondents and uses a style which is as difficult to understand in French as it is in English.

February 27

*Concern for the happiness of others,
fruit of the spirit of charity*

Are you not surprised to see my writing, supposing that you still remember it? I am in Bagnères enjoying the waters, and while thinking things over, I thought of you. I received news about you a little while ago. I was told that you were “a charming young man.” It does not surprise me, but I was feeling a bit conceited¹. Good gracious! I said, puffing myself up, hasn’t the Assumption helped me at all in this regard? For I attributed to myself, very humbly, some of your charm. I added – for my part - but these charms, will he only use them for himself? If only I could help him bring happiness to someone else! There is in the world a certain individual in whom I have an interest, whom I have known since he was a child, of impeccable character, – I can guarantee that– from a very honourable family He could help you in your career, although I am told that you do not lack your own patrons.

*Letter to Paul Fraisse,
August 8, 1868 (Letters, vol . VII, p. 120-121)*

¹ Translation of the French *faire jabot*.

February 28

*To live his faith with a sense of ecclesial
communion*

There is probably a very strong and very Catholic reason for this divine insufficiency, if I can put it thus; because if by throwing ourselves into the arms of God, we were always and on all occasions able to pass ourselves off as His creatures, we would quickly become Protestant, that is to say isolated, and the bond with the spiritual society that God wanted to establish among souls through his Church would disintegrate very quickly. But it is not less true that it is quite humiliating for us to think that Jesus Christ, reigning in the fullness of his love in the depth of our hearts, is not enough for us. Or maybe we should say that he no longer reigns there as sovereign But in this case how can we be at rest inasmuch as his empire is not unshakeably established?

*Letter to Mother Marie Eugénie de Jésus,
October 8, 1851
(Letters, vol. I, p. 101)*

February 29

*A path of holiness through the doors of
regularity, obedience, charity and humility*

I am doing my best to attract lots of individuals to come and drink the water of desire to become Oblates. Will we succeed? Yet is it not necessary for us to do this! This year must be for those who stay another year of progress and growth in holiness!

That is why it might be much better, than it would seem, that I delay my trip for 48 hours. I give you this additional time to begin the work of your conversion; I want you to sanctify yourselves by all means possible, but especially by regularity, obedience, charity and humility. We will continually come back to these points during the year.

Regularity. What will become of a religious who does not observe the rules? Obedience, which is continually exercised in imitation of *Our Lord who was obedient and obedient unto death on the cross*¹. Charity. The love of Our Lord that produces a love for souls, especially the souls who belong to our spiritual family. Finally, humility which prevents the little good we do from being spoiled by self-importance. By keeping us in our place, which should always be the last place, it

also leads us to accept happily everything that will really help us really to forget ourselves.

*Letter to the Oblates of the Assumption,
August 28, 1868
(Letters, vol. VII, p. 155)*

¹ Ph. 2:8

MONTH OF MARCH

In its turn the month of March features several feasts in the liturgical calendar: Sts. Perpetua and Felicity (3/7), St. Marie-Eugénie de Jésus (3/10), St. Cyril of Jerusalem (3/18), St. Joseph (3/19), and the Annunciation (3/25). We have deliberately given a Lenten tone to the month of March by favoring the spiritual accents of this liturgical season: love of others, spiritual combat, correction of faults, selflessness, letting God act, sickness, decision-making, patience, character reform, life-style, and strength of will. The last days of the month of March are dedicated to Holy Week whose occurrence varies from year to year depending on the date of Easter: Palm Sunday (3/24), the Washing of the Feet (3/26), Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane (3/27), The Passion of Christ (3/29), the Cross of Christ (3/30), the Darkness (3/31).

March 1

An invitation to supernatural effort and distinction

We find ourselves at a crossroads. We can choose between a bare and rugged mountain track and a pleasant path through rich and fertile valleys¹. Few travellers choose the mountain track – whereas the road through the valleys echoes to the tread of millions of comfortable feet. They represent, respectively, the path of distinction and the path of banality. To distinguish ourselves we must climb up that steep slope onto the mountain. It's much easier to walk down into the valley – but beware! There are hidden dangers down there – fatal pitfalls where least expected.

Up you go! – higher and higher still. We can see the mountain top before us and it is there that God lives. Efforts will be called for, pain and perseverance – but take courage. Keep your eyes fixed on the goal and the loving presence of our God will give you strength to surmount every obstacle.

¹ This small apologue of Fr. d'Alzon, contrasting a mountain with a small valley, is inspired by biblical passages, either Lk 13:24 (story of the narrow door), or others that refer to the holy mountain, a symbolic place of divine revelation and of the days of Jesus' prayer, and the plain and the city, places for meeting people or the crowds. In this sense, Lent evokes the time of a spiritual journey upwards for the preparation of the feast of Easter, comparable to the exodus in the Old Testament and to the time of the going up towards Jerusalem in the New Testament on the way of Jesus' Passion.

March 2

The Spiritual fight, illuminated by love

I cannot repeat this to you too often: the condition of all human life, and, for even greater reason, of all Christian life, is a struggle, it is a fight¹. For one who claims to have reached perfection, what's the use? To suffer and to fight, this is our lot until our last breath. I have to admit that this perspective is sad for those who do not love; but when God's love is deep within the soul, suffering, trial, and the combat become necessary.

Letter to Eulalie de Régis
Octobre 2, 1851
(Letters, vol. I, p. 96)

¹ 1 Tim 4:10 and 6:12. Fr. d'Alzon mentions and recommends reading works dedicated to this theme of spiritual combat repeatedly, notably in the monastic tradition in the works of John Cassian or Saint Theodore the Studite or Lorenzo Scupoli, an Italian Theatine, author of a work with this title, which saw more than 600 printings.

March 3

Serving the Lord requires a positive choice

Today I want to share some of my reflections with you. The first is that you are cut out much more for a life as you envisage it than for any other. You are obliged, therefore, to seek Christian perfection, that is, a more perfect imitation of Our Lord. To do so, you must know him and love him; and no one can get to know Our Lord well except through persistent prayer; then, the only way to imitate him well is by mortification – this is what he himself said¹. My dear child, there are two rules, somewhat strict, that I give you at the beginning: pray and engage in asceticism. It is impossible to serve two

masters²: your body, your senses, your imagination, your heart, your self-esteem, and, at the same time, Jesus Christ. This is the reason why you have to make a choice and take it seriously.

*Letter to Amélie de Pélessier,
December 12, 1851
(Letters, vol. I, p. 116)*

¹ This may refer to the Gospel texts of Lk 18:1 or Mt 6:24.

² Mt 6:24.

March 4

Holding on to the language of faith: renunciation and death to self

God grants you many graces, therefore, and urges you ever more to give yourself to him. Take heart! Take heart! Do not waste a moment and remember that we must renounce ourselves continually, to die to ourselves and to take advantage of every consolation that overflows into our souls so that we may always be able to give of ourselves with greater zeal to that which is asked of us. How many sacrifices must we not make in

return for the grateful heart which God has put into us! I hope, then, that this devotion that you tell me has come to comfort your misery will be a totally new starting-point for you and that, with the grace of Our Lord, you will become quite another person. After all, is this not the only thing for which we must strive?

*Letter to Mrs. de Rocher,
March 22, 1852
(Letters, vol I, p. 151-152)*

Mrs. de Rocher, born de Forton, a relative of Fr d'Alzon, was also one to whom he gave spiritual direction. A mother of a family, a member of the Third Order of the Assumption, she had several children, two of whom became nuns, Thérèse, who joined the RAs ,and Marie, the Sisters of the Sacred Heart. The letters of Fr. d'Alzon have also made us familiar with the first names of three of her sons: Henri, Joseph-Gaston and Paul-Louis, pupils at the collège in Nîmes.

March 5

*In the spiritual life, favor the spirit of love over
the spirit of fear*

I know that it is sometimes difficult to choose the right path when one is seventeen or eighteen years old. I don't believe that there is an age for which Our Lord reserves more mercy than that one. There are, at this age, so many dangers to face that it is necessary to discover from Our Lord which of our weaknesses seem to prevent us from doing good.

Continue reading, my dear Adolphe, what you have told me about. Only, I confess that I do not really like the tone of hopelessness found in Massillon: he is a man who damns you by dint of threatening you with hell. Certainly, it is very important that we reflect on salvation and eternity; but, next to God's justice, I think that it is always important to speak about his goodness; and, although one should not abuse this, there is something in the feeling of filial trust that touches God's heart more and disposes him more in our favour.

*Letter to Adolphe Amouroux,
December 4, 1852
(Letters, vol. I, p. 220)*

Adolphe Amouroux was a former pupil of the Collège de l'Assomption in Nîmes, originally from Perpignan, who later became a lawyer and President of the Association of former pupils, very closely bound to Fr. d'Alzon.

March 6

***Patience in education,
like that in the cultivation of the interior being***

A thousand thanks, my dear friend, for the details that you gave me about our children. You should not be overly discouraged because some do badly and others are slow. You must imitate the admirable patience of Our Lord, who was never discouraged. There will come a time, as from God, when the Holy Spirit will breathe on all these small hearts, bombarded by sin, and life will be reborn; and love and warmth will return there, where we could only see dead ashes.

For those who are doing well, do not press them either. Fear those plants doused with lime: forced vegetation is neither stronger nor more lasting. For the rest, dear friend and dear son, how can you hold on? Everybody asks me this question, and I, who love you as you know, I do the same, adding: the Devil, what does he think;

will he let you sleep in peace when you have snatched people from him? As you unmask one of his tempting traps proposed to some of your pupils, doesn't he tempt you to fall into a nasty hole dug by your pride? Is your thinking always quite pure and correct towards God? You understand the reason why I ask you these questions. They are truly my children, but are you not one of my eldest sons?

*Letter to Jules Monnier,
March 29, 1845
(Letters, vol. XIV, p. 139-140)*

A portrait will be dedicated, later, to this lovely person, Jules Monnier, a teacher and spiritual son of Fr. d'Alzon.

March 7

Saints Perpetua and Felicity, martyrs of Africa

This week the church celebrates the feast of a young Christian, committed in marriage. It pleased heaven to show us her vocation as one of the most beautiful examples of the struggle to give oneself to God alone. A simple catechumen, 22 years old and the mother of a child at the breast, it

did not seem the right time for Perpetua to confess her faith in Christ. Her father's ardour in favor of idols preserved her from the suspicion of her persecutors. However, an angel brought her the proposition of martyrdom; Perpetua was arrested and had herself baptized in jail... Perpetua fell asleep; she dreamt about her victory in the circus, the beasts in retreat, a demon coming in the form of an Egyptian, and her flooring him with her heel. And she left in glory by the Vivaria Gate... Perpetua herself guided the executioner's trembling hand to her throat. They carried the precious relic through the Vivaria Gate and today she lies on the altars to obtain for all those whom God calls, strength in the struggles of flesh and blood.

Le Pèlerin, March 2, 1878, p. 146-147

The Collège de l'Assomption in Nîmes was in the parish of Saints Perpetua and Felicity, in Nîmes. Fr. d'Alzon, a friend of the Pastor Goubier, preached there many times.

March 8

Those who do not advance move backwards

You know how much I love you, and, therefore, how happy I am to receive news about you. Send me more and add lots of detail. In this respect, Fr. Ivan is kinder than you, and as a result I learn from him the things that Fr. Galabert sometimes forgets to tell me. Strive mightily for holiness; lead to holiness as well the children entrusted to you; pray for the conversion of the Russians and the Bulgarians. There is so much to do everywhere; no matter how busy you are, do everything energetically. Those who do not advance move backwards, in knowledge as well as in devotion.

*Letter to Francesco Schichkov,
December 27, 1878
(Letters, vol. XII, p. 650)*

Francesco Schichkov or Schiskov, according to different transcriptions, (1850-1929) was one of the first Bulgarian Assumptionist religious in the Congregation. Originally from Philippopoli (Plovdiv) where Fr. Galabert established the first community in the Orient in 1864, he was ordained a priest in 1874 and was the first to pass voluntarily to the Slavic rite in 1883. He dedicated himself mainly to the service of religious vocations in Karagatch (Andrinopolis), but he was also a preacher, confessor and secretary to

Bishop Petkov, according to the needs and emergencies of the mission. The name of Schichkov [Schiskov or Chichkov] was the last name of several Assumptionist religious, notably two brothers, Bartholomew (1867-1931) and Matthieu (1850-1892). Fr. Josaphat Schiskov (1884-1952) was beatified with two other Assumptionists, Frs. Pavel Djidjov and Kamen Vitchev, on May 26, 2002 by Pope John Paul II in Plovdiv.

Since 1977 March 8 has been adopted by the United Nations as the Day of the Woman. Let us honor those women in our communities who serve in many ways, involved in the simplest and the most ordinary services.

March 9

Adopt a regular rule of life

You told me that you wanted a revolution to take place in you, and that you felt that God wanted to seize your soul. Later you asked me for a rule of life. It is important that you recall the ideas that I consider to be fundamental. For example, a Christian is one who never wants to waste any of his time and wants, in fact, to serve God with a certain energy. Also remember that you often told me that, given the independent streak in your character and your inclination to laziness, you needed obedience, penitence and

activity. Based on this, here is the rule of life that I propose to you.

Take the time necessary to sleep. I would like you to go to bed at 10 o'clock and rise at 6: make half an hour's meditation, then go to Mass, which you should miss as little as possible. You should receive communion at least three times a week, more often if you want to. Return home; read some passages from the New Testament. Organise a little time before noon for quiet reflection. In the morning read a serious book for an hour or two at least. In the evening, your exercises should include pious reading, the rosary and a visit to the Blessed Sacrament. Before going to bed, examine your conscience searching for any acts of disobedience, laziness, pointless words, and any failings of charity.

*Letter to Angéline Chaudordy,
July 8, 1875
(Letters, vol. XI, p. 155)*

March 10

*The Feast of Mother Marie-Eugénie de Jésus,
foundress of the RAs (1817-1898)
Reflection on a friendship
in the twilight of one's life*

All said and done, let me repeat to you how happy I was with our conversations; I understood later what you said and what you left me to work out. Evidently, we have to make preparations for our final arrangements here below and our final judgment. Let us pray earnestly for each other, so that we may be treated with great mercy. I understand that what happened in Nîmes¹ exhausted you and broke your heart. That's life. I, who am sheltering myself more and more in solitude, I see many things falling apart, including people. That makes one suffer. Ah! What can I say: Only God remains; and a few friends when God permits it! I place you in the front row of those who remain close to me.

*Letter to Mother Marie-Eugénie de Jésus,
May 24, 1879
(Letters, vol. XIII, p. 121)*

¹ Between 1876 and 1879, concerning the direction of the priory of the Religious of the Assumption in Nîmes, there arose serious disagreements and differences of opinion

between Fr. d'Alzon and Mother Marie-Eugénie de Jésus, but this period of tension, lived out in great openness, did not diminish in any way the esteem, confidence and friendship that existed between them.

Mother Marie-Eugénie de Jésus was proclaimed blessed by Pope Paul VI, in Rome, on February 9, 1975, and canonized on June 3, 2007 by Pope Benedict XVI. Fr. d'Alzon made a commitment to devote himself to her perfection, a commitment that he maintained and that was recognized by the Church.

March 11

A Prayer of blessing

Blessed are you, O Lord, for having arranged all things, creating us in such a way that we cannot reach true greatness unless we search for your glory! Blessed are you for everything that you do for us! Ah! May your name be blessed forever! If until the present we have been possessed by a misguided love of self which has led us far from you in search of deceptive glory or criminal vanity, we now understand that the goal of our existence means putting an end to our own greatness. Have we not done enough for ourselves, and haven't you in some way exhausted

the treasures of your wealth in obliging us to recognize that you alone are the true Lord? Have not our humiliations, our miseries, and the sense of our degradation made us even more aware of the immensity of our crime when we insult your divine majesty and when we try to darken the rays of your glory? Lord, open our eyes to our true destiny, and make us understand that seeking to glorify you on earth is our first duty, and is the surest means of reaching our true greatness in eternity.

On God's glory (T.D., vol. 42, p. 186)

March 12

***Let God act by handing over to him
the control of our wills***

The state of your soul does not surprise me at all; in spite of your difficulties, you must persevere. God acts in you. He saw you two years ago and sees you today; God knows well what changes you have been through. Let God act in the ways that he knows best. I had been waiting for your letter in the country, where I would have

had more time to answer you. Offer to Our Lord some small sacrifice; ask him to inspire you more and more with Christian thoughts and with the Christian sense of things. You will have completely found your mission the moment you say to God, like Isaiah: *'Here I am. Lord, send me'*¹, and then you will have developed a disposition to do anything requested of you.

*Letter to Amélie de Pélessier,
October 19 or 20, 1852
(Letters, vol. I, p. 202)*

¹ A quote from Isaiah 6:8.

Amélie de Pélessier received spiritual direction from Fr. d'Alzon. A native of Nîmes, she hesitated for a long time in making her life choice. She also visited the Religious of the Assumption in Paris and ended up getting married in 1856 to a widower, Louis Joseph-Josias de Gaillard d'Escures. Her sister, Anaïs de Pélessier, became a widow after her first marriage to M. de Chazelles and married a second time to Louis Léon-Raymond de Courtois. The correspondence of Fr. d'Alzon often evokes questions bound up with the complications and family tensions born out of these different alliances.

March 13

To move from good intentions to firm decisions

What has become of you, my dear child? What happened to the series of questions that you were about to ask me concerning your future perfection? Has the post office been unfaithful? Have your wonderful plans taken flight? Are you sick? Why this silence on your part? Did you not receive the few lines that I sent you under via Fr. Emmanuel while waiting for your long letter? Yet, time is running out. ‘*Work, while it is still day*’, says Our Lord; ‘*the night is coming when one will not be able to work anymore*’¹. Hurry up, then, not only in writing to me, but especially setting in motion the wonderful plans of holiness that will result. I am counting on a very prompt reply to my questions and, then, on this set of questions that will prove to me your strong desire to renew yourself; we are fast approaching November 21st and it seems to me that at this moment many excellent things should already be underway.

*Letter to Miss Louise Chabert,
November 16, 1871
(Letters, vol. IX, p. 211)*

¹ Jn 9:4.

Louise Chabert, another resident of Nîmes who received spiritual direction from Fr. d'Alzon, participated in a number of apostolic activities of the Founder and entered the Oblates of the Assumption in Nîmes shortly after the death of her parents, with the name of Sister Louise de Gonzague, but she was not able to continue. The Assumption remained in contact with her until her death in 1930.

March 14

Recovery and counter-recovery (the temptation of the tongue)

In the gospel Our Lord desired to heal a deaf-mute¹. Well, if our Divine Master returned to earth, I would implore him to perform a miracle of another kind: to remove the tongue from a host of people. What horrible abuse they make of it! Leave to one side the injuries, the provocations, and the vulgar lies. Has not the tongue established a reign of lies and errors wherever it can find a foothold? Look at the philosophical systems, the novels, the atheistic courses, and the lodges of the freemasons. To the spoken word attach the written word, from the chair of pestilence², already in the days of David, to the infectious pen of a crowd of journalists. What poisons are abundantly poured

out everywhere with the help of speeches, daily papers, dramas, and conferences! Who can enumerate the forms donned by all this ranting invented to kill purity in the heart and truth in the mind?

Le Pèlerin, March 23, 1878, p. 192

¹ The miracle of the healing of the deaf-mute? Yes, a stuttering deaf person is found in Mk 7:31; yes, a blind mute in Mt 12:22. The only association with a deaf mute is in Mk 9:25 in the recovery of a demonic epileptic.

² The *chair of pestilence* was a favourite expression of the apologists of the XIX century to stigmatize academic teaching. Fr. d'Alzon, who was a journalist in his day and encouraged the vocation of the Fr. Vincent de Paul Bailly in the apostolate of press, was not very kind towards this profession.

March 15

Selflessness, the fruit of divine hope

The ambition of all the saints was to do everything for God. But lots of souls will never become saints because they surrender to the appalling hypocrisy of disguising their human hopes with a divine veneer.

The Holy Spirit reminds us: *Beatus vir qui post aurum non abiit*¹. The “gold” to which the Spirit refers, which he tells us not to seek after, refers to whatever attaches our heart to earthly things.

The Spirit of the Assumption is, first and foremost, one of disinterestedness, selflessness. Woe to whoever seeks for anything except God. Happy the one who appreciates with all his being the loyalty of selflessness! It is a question of poverty, but, even on a higher plane, one is called to disdain any wealth that does not flow from the heart of Jesus Christ, any treasure that is not divine, and any reward that is not God Himself.

*The virtue of hope,
from The Essential d'Alzon (ES p. 712)*

¹ Sir 31:8: «*Blessed are the rich that do not run after gold*».

March 16

From good will to a good and firm will

Supernatural virtue is composed of two elements: God's grace and the cooperation of the human will. This cooperation calls forth the

human will. Because of the need to fight against what has fallen, it requires effort.

It consists in combating: 1° the spirit of independence, 2° stubbornness, 3° fickleness, 4° caprice, 5° weakness, 6° stubborn habits.

What is needed to oppose all this is: 1° energy, 2° seriousness, 3° simplicity, 4° straightforwardness.

*Notes for a talk during the 29th conference
given to the Religious of the Assumption
at the Priory of Nîmes, 1870-1871
(T.D., vol. 42, p. 278)*

From November 5, 1870 to March 20, 1871, in Nîmes, Fr. d'Alzon gave to the Religious of the Assumption no less than 53 spiritual conferences on the spirit and virtues of the Assumption. Mother Marie-Eugénie de Jésus who, by way of precaution, had left Paris in flames at that time, was present for them with the novitiate which had taken temporary shelter in the South of France. A number of these conferences were published for the first time in the magazine of the Bonne Presse at the time, known as *Priest and Apostle*, from 1927 to 1930.

March 17

*A Transfusion of prayer as a remedy for the
aridity of pride*

It seems to me that Our Lord told me to remind you again what you are, and, while returning from the feast yesterday, I reflected on this stanza of our Divine Office: *Ecce sedes hic Tonantis, Ecce coeli janua, Hic sacerdos, ara, templum, Hic Deus fit hostia*¹. I was applying these words to you, and in my heart I saw a throne for God, the gateway to heaven for your pupils, a priest, an altar, a temple for Jesus Christ who can come and make himself a victim there, in order that we might become a victim with him. Here, my dear child, is something of what I thought about in your regard. I am not saying it well at all; what I am not able to do, it seems to me, is to express to you the desire that poured forth in some way from my heart with such plenitude at the feet of our Divine Master, to obtain from him that you place your soul before Our Lord like a flower before the sun. Oh! If only my prayer could carry a drop of dew to this dear small plant and prevent it from drying up in the wind of pride!

*A Letter to Sister Marie-Augustine Bévier,
November 10, 1845(Letters, vol. XIV, p. 150)*

¹ From the office of the feast of the Dedication of Saint John Lateran. “Behold this is the seat of thunder. Behold the gateway to heaven. This priest, this altar, this temple God has made into a sin-offering.”

March 18

Saint Cyril of Jerusalem, Bishop and Doctor of the Church (Faith in the divinity of Christ)

Jesus Christ, Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, God made Man, equal in all things to the Father, proves his divine power by giving us the Holy Eucharist.

God the Father proved his power by creating the universe, and creating man. Later on he went a step further – he manifested both his power and his love by giving us his only-begotten Son in the mystery of the Incarnation.

God the Son goes a step further still. This human nature, to which by his Father's decree he became hypostatically united, does not seem to satisfy his burning love for us. He goes so far as to confine himself under the appearance of a little bread. He conceals himself to the point of being contained within the limits of lifeless matter, which we call the host.

God the Father, in creating man, had this Perfect Man in view whom we honour and worship as Our Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ completes the work of his Heavenly Father by becoming, in a sense, the creation of his creatures. He bestows upon some of these creatures –who came forth from nothingness because of him and with him in view – the power to create, and they are to exercise this power by creating Him, the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity!

*A sermon for Lent, 1862,
from The Essential d'Alzon (ES p. 979-980)*

¹ Saint Cyril, Patriarch of Jerusalem and Doctor of the Church, had to fight the Arians who denied Christ's divinity. His instructions on Christian doctrine, addressed to catechumens, are pearls of theological literature.

March 19

*Saint Joseph, spouse of the Virgin Mary, a
model of love for children*

As for your plan to write a book on education, I find it is an excellent idea, and you are right that I did not remain a schoolmaster for eight years

without wondering if I could not, I as well, write a book thereon. However, I was told that you know things of similar matters which I don't know Likewise, you yourself are unaware of some small thing that, by chance, I know from my time with children, in the midst of whom I spent my life, always loving them more as dear small children of God, and who represent to me the small divine infant, as he grew in grace and wisdom in the land of Nazareth¹, in the company of his mother and the Eminent Saint Joseph. I would like to resemble him who, having carried the child Jesus in his arms, deserved to have Jesus do the same for him when he became old and had to leave for heaven.

*Letter to Henri Gouraud,
January 3, 1853
(Letters, vol. I, p. 232)*

¹ Lk 2:52.

Henri Gouraud is a physician and French writer, a friend from youth of Fr. d'Alzon, who helped many of the Religious of the Assumption in Paris and also devoted himself to the Collège Stanislas. He would have liked to attract Fr. d'Alzon there but he could not persuade him. The physician's beautiful sister, a Sister of the Sacred Heart, Marie-Pauline Perdrau, is the author of the famous painting of the Virgin, Mater Admirabilis, situated inside the convent adjoining the church of the Trinity of the Hills in Rome. A

replica decorates the cloister of the priory of Layrac that, in XIX century, was a convent of the Sisters of the Sacred Heart. This religious sister is buried in the cemetery of Layrac.

March 20

In order to create new foundations, take the time to cultivate solid workers

I will tell you that anyone who leaves a congregation, after having spent three years there, does not seem to be good material for a new congregation... I believe that it is better to wait. This is not a reason to get discouraged, but it is important to have good elements, especially at the beginning. I ask you for a thousand pardons for the pain that I caused you, but you understand the importance of having at the beginning very solid and firm stones to support, one day, the walls of our small building. Here, we are not doing too badly, thanks be to God, but we still have very few religious. Let's hope that God will send them to us when the time comes, if we do not make ourselves too unworthy of them.

*Letter to Sister Theresa-Emmanuel O'Neill,
January 10, 1852
(Letters, vol. I, p. 129-130)*

Sister Theresa-Emmanuel, of Irish origin and English citizenship, was one of the first companions of Mother Marie-Eugénie de Jésus who made her a partner with her talents and virtues in the foundation of the Sisters. Of mystical temperament, she left her mark on the first generations of religious as Novice Mistress. She was chosen by Mother Marie-Eugénie de Jésus to found the second mission in England, at Richmond. She had an acute awareness of the necessity to encourage native vocations very quickly in the different mission lands of the Assumption and did not spare her efforts to discern English-speaking candidates for the family of Fr. d'Alzon.

March 21

*A Spiritual acrostic from the name Emmanuel,
in view of correcting his shortcomings*

God sees your desires and that is enough. But what is important is that you set about correcting your shortcomings. Here is an acrostic I made for myself:

Espirit: Spirit of faith,
Mortification of the senses,
Mortification of the heart,

Amour: Love of God and neighbour,
Nonchalance overcome,
Usefulness of watching my tongue,
Etude: Study and manual work,
Lecture: Reading with the supernatural desire
to benefit from it.
What's your reaction to all this?

*Letter to Sister Marie de la Croix Aubert,
at the end of December 1872
(Letters, vol. IX, p. 474)*

The season of Lent invites us to make a spiritual effort; the example above might inspire a similar personalised acrostic exercise using one's first name or last name.

March 22

A request for the grace to do interior work (reforming one's character)

What temperament is to my body, character is to my soul. It is a nobler enemy, but stronger. Its superiority increases the danger of assault. Where has my character not taken me? As far as it is influenced by time, it acquires stiffness and demands; it becomes decadent, it decomposes

itself in a way as to make me suffer and make others suffer.

My God, bend my character to your will, and may all its shortcomings be transformed by the grace of the one whom the Apostle calls the character, the form of your being¹. By imitating your Son I engrave within myself that by which I will resemble you in my nothingness, and in this way may my character become an image of your perfection.

*Meditation: Fighting against oneself,
Meditations on Religious Perfection,
vol. I, BP., p. 109-110.*

¹ An implicit reference to Heb 1:3: «Christ is the radiance of the Father's glory and a reflection of his being».

March 23

On Christian love of neighbour

I must love my neighbour as myself for the love of God. We must study, therefore, how much God loves souls. 1° He created them in his likeness to converse with them in earthly paradise if they had remained in their original justice, and

then to establish them in an eternity of happiness. 2° The first man, having violated his vocation, brought sin into the world; death came also, but a God loved the world enough to give his Son, so that by the death of this Son, God-made-man, the world was saved. *Sic Deus dilexit*¹. 3° He made himself our food so that, sustained by such a food, we can overcome all obstacles that come between heaven and us. He founded his Church in order to unite the elect. He accepted that his saints be persecuted by the wicked. He accepted all kinds of abuse, and all for love of us... Lord Jesus, make me bear witness of my love for you and may I pay my debts to you in such a manner that, in union with you, I will devote myself to the work of the sanctification of souls.

*Meditation: Relations with our neighbour,
Meditations on Religious Perfection,
vol. I, BP., p. 125-126.*

¹ I Jn 4:11

March 24

Palm Sunday. Entering into Holy Week

Let us enter the great week of our redemption; let us enter with palms in hand; it is the week of triumph. A triumph of light over darkness, of truth over falsehood, of suffering over guilty pleasure, of sacrifice over selfishness, of humility over pride, of obedience over rebellion, of life over death, of heaven over hell, and of God over Satan.

But remember that in this astonishing fight, Jesus Christ, the true David, leaves Goliath with his powerful weapons, and uses only the sling to strike him on the forehead and reverse death¹. Goliath is defeated, frightened Israel is the victor, without hardly the time to doubt, so quick and unexpected was the blow. Satan has his weapons, Jesus Christ has his. Satan has riches, knowledge, passions, hatred, rebellion; Jesus Christ has selflessness, suffering, the ear-splitting cry of prayer, and love: he loves these men, his disciples, to the end, *in finem dilexit eos*², and he goes to Jerusalem, riding on a donkey, to the shouts of the crowds who proclaim his victory over death at the tomb of Lazarus, until they themselves put him to death.

Le Pèlerin, April 13, 1878, p. 240.

¹ I Sam. 17:32-54.

² Jn 13:1: «*He loved them to the end*».

March 25

The Feast of the Annunciation of the Lord

I contemplate the mystery of a God being fashioned in Mary's chaste womb and I try to penetrate this mystery and discover what is applicable to me. For that, I focus on three operative sentences spoken on this wonderful occasion.

The word of the angel to Mary: *Spiritus Sanctus superveniet in te, et virtus Altissimi obumbravit tibi*

The word of Mary: *Ecce Domini ancilla, fiat mihi secundum verbum tuum.*

The word of the Holy Spirit: *Et Verbum caro factum est, et habitavit in nobis*¹.

These three sentences are so important that the Church has enshrined them in the "Angelus," to be recited three times a day.

1° God the Holy Spirit taking the initiative on behalf of the Three Divine Persons.

2° The consent of the creature to the plan of the Creator

3° The result of a human will co-operating with the will of God.

*Retreat on knowing Jesus Christ,
from The Essential d'Alzon (ES p. 883-884)*

According to the narrative of the Annunciation, Lk 1:26-38, and John's Prologue, Jn 1:14: «*The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. I am the handmaid of the Lord. Let it be done to me according to your word. And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us*».

March 25 is the national holiday of Greece, commemorating the Revolution of 1821. Let us pray for and with our community in Athens (St. Teresa's Parish).

March 26

*The sign of the fullness of love,
the washing of the feet*

Jesus sees the hands of Judas soiled with the pieces of silver that he received for selling him, and still he washes his feet. Here is how far he goes in humbling himself, and why he wants to repair through his humiliation the injury to his Father that our pride constantly produces. Human

pride constantly rises up against the majesty of God; the humility of a God that leads him to lower himself before the taintedness of man. So Satan, who uses our pride to insult the divine power ever more, is confounded by divine abasement.

And in this humility, what love! Why wonder at the fact that he pours water into a basin to wash the feet of his disciples, he who will pour out all of his blood on the earth to cleanse all sinners? Thus, according to the thought of Saint Augustine, our Doctor, «*all of his Passion is but a long purification*»¹.

*Meditation on the Passion,
Meditations on Religious Perfection,
vol. I, BP., p. 292-293.*

¹ Commentaries on the Gospel of John, treatise LV:7

March 27

Jesus, alone in the Garden of Olives

Jesus knows that the hour approaches, and he accepts it all, not that, if he had wanted, he could not have escaped. He could have slipped off into the desert during the night; but his hour had come,

and, although aware of the desertion, he wants the sacrifice to be accomplished. Of the twelve apostles, one is absent, gone to betray him, eight remain in the valley, three come with him until the end, and they will fall asleep. What a group of consolers! And Jesus agrees to remain alone in this terrifying moment when all the horrors of the Passion will, in anticipation, pass before his eyes. Here is a model of the way in which I must accept the acts of Providence.

Oh Jesus, teach me; it is from your example that I learn not to rely on men. What a lesson! May your abandonment remove from me the right to self-pity when I find myself alone.

*Meditation on the Passion,
Meditations on Religious Perfection,
t. I, BP., p. 295-296.*

March 28

A good spiritual use of illnesses

I have learned that you are bearing your illness with great patience (something which made me happy to hear). How important it is to pay great attention to this. An illness which is borne well is

one of the most precious crises through which a soul can pass. It learns from such an experience about the emptiness of life and of all human strength before the power of God. At times it becomes more sensitive to the action of grace, and if it knew how to preserve the fruits, its storehouse would be doubled when health returns. If it does not make you too tired, think about your friends, pray for me. I am facing a period of tribulation. It is not anything too great, but because I am weak, I shout even before I get a scratch, as if I had skin torn off. Yet, it is necessary to bear the weight of all these pains, and this is what I want to do with all my heart, as long as God still gives me strength.

*A Letter to Sister Theresa-Emmanuel O'Neill,
July 7, 1846
(Letters, vol. XIV, p. 209)*

March 29

Christ's Passion (Holy Thursday: celebration of the Last Supper)

Jesus celebrates the Passover with his disciples.
Ante diem festum Paschae, Jesus sciens quia venit

*hora ejus ut transeat ex hoc mundo ad patrem, cum dilexisset suos qui erant in mundo, in finem dilexit eos.*¹. At the beginning of this series of instructions on the sorrowful mysteries of the Saviour, let us examine the goal behind it, which lessons we can draw from our first glance over the Passion of our Master. Jesus wants to celebrate a final Passover with his apostles. What does Passover mean? Passage. It is indeed a great and solemn passage that he accomplishes, since it reveals to us Christ's mission on earth, since it shows us his goal. So the Saviour's last Passover, 1° presents us Jesus Christ as he prepares to complete his passage on earth, 2° teaches us to accomplish ours from earth to heaven.

What drives him? Love. A love that had been prepared by means of figures. Love had led him, had led him from heaven to earth. Love had given him a body. Love had made him man. Love will make him a man of sorrows. Love leads him to institute a summary of his marvels. Love will bring him to death. Love will place the wood of sacrifice on his shoulders. Love will bring him death by nailing him to the cross.

Sermon on the Passion (T.D., vol 44, p. 186)

¹ Jn. 13:1 “On the day before the Passover, knowing that his hour had come, Jesus, already having loved those who were his own in the world, loved them to the end.”

March 30

The meaning of the Cross (Good Friday: Jesus on the cross)

*Judaei signa petunt*¹. Two trees, the tree of knowledge in paradise and the tree of life in the heavenly Jerusalem. Between the two is the tree of the cross. I have come to teach you what it is the cross became through Jesus Christ: in relation to his Father, an altar; against Satan, a weapon of triumph; for us, a pledge of reconciliation; for heaven, a sign of peace.

For God, an altar. Justice is upset; sacrifices figurative. *Impossibile est sanguine hircorum aut vitulorum auferri peccata*². This same Jesus, who descended to earth, will present himself both as pontiff and as victim, and he will be stretched out on the tree of the cross. There, through his sorrow, he will atone for the sins of man, the Father will be satisfied, justice appeased, and mercy victorious.

Satan is defeated and so is his empire that spreads from one end of the world to the other. Jesus came to fight against him, to strike him down and take the sceptre from him. The reign of Jesus over paganism is established, the empire of evil and the empire of hell destroyed. For humankind, the cross is a pledge of peace, a new covenant. Christ pours out his blood, he is the victim. God makes a covenant [with three partners]: the Father, the Son and humankind.

*Notes from a sermon on the Cross
(T.D., vol. 44, p. 16)*

¹ I Cor 1:22 *"The Jews ask for signs."*

² An approximate quote from Heb 9:12: *'Christ entered once for all into the sanctuary, not with the blood of goats and young bulls, but with his own blood...'*

March 31

Office of Tenebrae (Holy Week in Rome, 1834)

You are surprised, I am sure, that two pages of a letter from Rome, dated Holy Saturday, do not contain a word about Holy Week. This is why. It

is what I saw at the beginning that discouraged me from seeing the end. On Holy Wednesday I went to Tenebrae in the Sistine Chapel. Not being a musician, I can say that the Lamentations and the Miserere were beautiful, but the whole affair was a scandal. I was next to people who kept talking, and, although the Blessed Sacrament was not present in the chapel, I was really upset to find myself in the midst of people who considered the Office to be a spectacle. I did not go back there again. On Holy Thursday, I visited some superb churches. Tomorrow, I will go to Saint Peter's, because it is possible to find a good place there and it is not too noisy. Holy Week in Rome is the most beautiful thing that one can see when one is resolved to spend it as an amateur, but in that case I do not know how much one can really take in, because without faith the ceremonies are only a comedy.

*Letter to Henri d'Alzon,
March 29, 1834
(Letters, vol. A, p. 533)*

MONTH OF APRIL

The month of April, as winter takes its leave, prepares the way for spring (at least in the northern hemisphere where d'Alzon lived). It is the season which is the honor of woods and of months ("des bois et des mois"), as Rémi Belleau reminds us in song. In the liturgical calendar, April is usually the month in which Easter and the Resurrection fall. The cycle of saints also presents various celebrations: St. John-Baptist de La Salle (4/7), the Conversion of St. Augustine (4/24), St. Mark (4/25), St. Turibius of Mogrovejo (4/27), St. Peter Chanel (4/28), and St. Catherine of Siena (4/29), among so many others who have made the pilgrimage from earth to heaven, from death to resurrection. Never do the saints become simply luminaries of the past, men and women of yesteryear. They are always men and women of tomorrow, witnesses of a future world, as John

Paul II recalled in Lisieux on June 2, 1980. They color with their sanctified humanity this march of time which the Easter liturgy fills with its springtime aroma. May this verdant splendor walk hand in hand with our happiness for the One who rises to the heavenly Jerusalem, on the day of the Ascension (4/31).

April 1

*The holy day of Easter,
the Resurrection of the Lord*

*Surrexit, non est hic*¹. What an epitaph for a tomb, as Bourdaloue observed, and what power in the one who sends an angel to bear this message! No one had ever announced his own resurrection before. Jesus Christ said: "I will rise again," and he rose again, and it was after having triumphed over death that he came to destroy it. *Oh death, where is your sting?*² The Saviour had said to Martha some days before: *'I am the resurrection and the life'*³, and I will rise again to prove that those who believe in me will live for ever. However, this mystery of the death and resurrection of the Saviour is the perpetual teaching of Jesus, who must die every day in exile in order to live without end in his homeland. As long as we do not strip ourselves of our vices, of our concupiscence, we cannot hope for true life. Death, strictly speaking, is sin; as long as we remain in sin, we remain in death, because we are in opposition to the one who is life. Let us make

the effort, therefore, and rise from our sin as from a tomb, for in this is the resurrection of our soul.

Le Pèlerin, April 20, 1878, p. 257

¹ *He is risen, he is not here:* Mt 28:6, Mk 16:6 and Lk 24:6

² I Cor 15:55

³ Jn 11:25-26

April 2

The apostolic grandeur of the holy women of faith

Two days ago I returned from a pilgrimage to the Saint Marys. Why does God allow these women to be thrown on this shore: helpless, without direction, without apostolic activity --- these women who were his companions on his apostolic journeys, who remained his friends during the ignominies on Calvary, who, with St. John and the Blessed Virgin, almost by themselves formed the core of the Church when Jesus Christ breathed his last¹, he whose love survived death, these women who were the first to learn of the Resurrection? Why this desertion? Why this obvious severity by the Divine Saviour?

Saint Martha evangelized Tarascon, Saint Madeleine is the companion of angels, tradition only gives to two Saint Marys the beaches, the sea and an unhealthy climate. When one of them came to die, what happened in the soul of the one who survived? What a test in this abandonment, what merit in what appeared to be senseless suffering? One of them brought the head of her son, Saint James, the first apostle to be tortured; the other had nothing other than her memories of the cross and the resurrection. It was sufficient for both. May faith be sufficient for you, my very dear child, and help you spread your wings out towards heaven!

*Letter to Mrs. de La Prade,
April 19, 1861
(Letters, vol. III, p. 447)*

¹ From Lk 23:49 or 24:10. April 2, 2005 is the anniversary of the death of Pope John Paul II.

April 3

A community on the road to resurrection

I believe very strongly in the future of the house of Bordeaux, and if Sedan must fall, I would be delighted to have Sister Mary of the Blessed Sacrament closer to me. Your small priory in Nîmes is going really well. Sister M.-Gabrielle is indeed a very good religious, Sister M.-Julienne also; Sister Mary of the Cross seems to me to have come out the clouds; Sister M.-Genevieve seems not to be the same person so much has she been transformed in goodness; Sister M.-Elisabeth is not too foolish, Sister M. Chantal is on her feet again and I think she will be able to do something. Sister M.-Augustine is trying to figure out if she is really obedient; she no longer runs after me, and now I am the one who has to ask her what delights her. I find the simplicity, the peace and the holiness of Sister Françoise-Eugénie more charming every day. A final word: God wants all this to last!

*Letter to Mother Marie-Eugénie de Jésus,
March 27, 1861
(Letters, vol. I, p. 431)*

Bordeaux (1860), Sedan (1854) and Nîmes (1855) formed three R.A communities at that time in France. Fr. d=Alzon knows the members of these three communities which he visited personally and where he preached days of retreat. He is, on the other hand, the ecclesiastical superior of the R.A community in Nîmes under the direction of Sister François-Eugénie de Malbosc, very much appreciated by both Fr. d=Alzon and the future Bishop of Montpellier, Most Rev. Cabrières.

April 4

***Genuine frankness undermines neither
confidence nor friendship***

I also believe that you are mistaken about what could have led me to believe that there is a new trend among the Religious of the Assumption. It was not about me, it was about you. That a few bad apples have spread baseless complaints, who would deny it? That, in addition to them, others sometimes speak well-intentionally, though sadly, yes, yes, yes.

Given the affection I have for your work, I read between the lines of what people are saying. I sensed something in their hints, in the inflection of their voice, and in certain hesitations. When you are aware of what is happening and are deter-

mined not to believe only the accusations that have been made, you catch these sorrows, these clouds, these surprises, as it were, on the fly. And if you experience these things with several people, you begin to say to yourself: perhaps there is something to them.

You seem to have forgotten the observations I confided to you. Now, how is it that after I had pointed this out to Fr. Picard one, two, three, even four years ago, he completely agreed with me? He even assured me that you shared this opinion.

So what was involved? A lot of nothings that nevertheless amounted to something when put together: something less intense at the novitiate, smaller thinking on the part of those in charge; Fr. Mas finds, without our having discussed it, something less practical and more mystical, too little softening of characters, maybe more piety – not to say devotion – but less spirit of faith, and feelings of sadness over the fact that, one after the other, the Sisters were successively considered as prodigies worthy of your complete confidence, then rejected as rubbish. You would scream if I told you who confessed these things to me.

As for me, (because I don't want to talk any more about the other question), I must admit that I got this impression especially during your last trip. Perhaps I have a twisted mind, but one of your conversations led me to draw this conclusion

which, I believe, is well-founded. If you can assure me that I was mistaken, let me to tell you that I will be very happy to believe it.

*Letter to Mother Marie-Eugénie of Jésus,
July 1, 1868
(Letters, vol. VII, p. 105-106)*

Questions of opinions and interpretations are always delicate in relationships. Fr. d=Alzon and Mother Marie-Eugénie de Jésus always had the gift of explaining themselves honestly on misunderstandings, grievances or obvious divergences concerning the spirit of the Assumption, its origins and its evolution.

April 5

The Power of resurrection

The traveler who contemplates, in passing, the half-destroyed monuments of man's vanity and who sits in the middle of ruined temples, amphitheatres, or previously populated palaces, that today are silent and desolate, fills them once again in his imagination with inhabitants and sounds. And when he has meditated for a moment on what is no longer there, he moves on; all that remains of his faded memories is sadness and the

feeling of man's emptiness. I want you to visit something similar but much more consoling. Note the ruins of humanity; contemplate the sublime, still smoking, ruins of avenging thunderbolts. Well! It will not be the spirit of man but God's spirit which does not raise them up in a dream world, but in reality. Come and see.

*Notes on the Spirit of God,
from T.D., vol. 48, p. 147-148.*

April 6

A small novitiate arranged for someone who is ill, but in the hands of God

Notice, my dear girl, that I do not ask more than that you make a novitiate at once. As soon as you are in Nîmes, we will begin if you wish. We will remove all its austerity; we will include only what concerns interior perfection. Do you want this? Personally, I have the conviction that you will be a perfect Sister, as soon as you no longer want to order people to make you practice obedience as you understand it. I add that you must put yourself entirely into the hands of God, whether you are feeling great or not, that God

knows well enough what he can draw out of someone who is ill.

I announced to the girls from Bulgaria their departure for Nîmes; they are thrilled and their satisfaction gives me the hope that they will do well. They will no longer be formed in one year at RochebelleY They have such open hearts, so much confidence, that it seems very difficult to me not to be able to make something from all this good will.

*Letter to Ms Eulalie de Régis,
August 21, 1866
(Letters, vol. III, p. 126-127)*

April 7

Saint John Baptist de La Salle, educator

The city of Rouen intends to erect a statue to the venerable La Salle, founder of the Christian Brother schools. A committee was formed in the former capital of Normandy to collect the necessary funds to realize this noble plan. This homage, rendered to the man who has possibly best merited it of all the generations of young Frenchmen, is of obvious interest to all Catholics;

and all should hasten to contribute by making a donation.

But today where teaching by Congregations is the object of violent attacks, it seemed good to invite all your parishioners to make a donation, and to recommend a very modest sum of five cents per person: it is a way of protesting against Revolutionary teaching. Who would refuse to give such a small sum to an effort which is so French and so Catholic?

*Letter to the Parish Priests of the Diocese of Nîmes,
April 25, 1873
(Letters, vol. X, p. 48)*

April 8

The Joy of a vocation

And if you have already in your heart replied: “Yes, it is” – then begin by singing this “going up” psalm: “I rejoiced when I heard them say. Let us go up to God's house today”: **Laetatus sum in his quae dicta sunt mihi: in domum Domini ibimus;* You must be thrilled through and through with a tremendous joy at the thought of God's house being your house too. Like Abraham you

are leaving your homeland and saying good-bye to your family. Never mind the heart-break - think of the joy. You have chosen God for your inheritance. You are not only drawn, but lifted up in the arms of love. Not only has God loved you from all eternity, but you yourself long to render love for love, to such a tender Father, to such a loving spouse. So you jump for joy, and you cry out in ecstasy: "I was glad when I heard them say. Let us go up to God's house today." *Laetatus sum in his quae dicta sunt mihi: in domum Domini ibimus.*

*Fifth Meditation,
from The Essential d'Alzon (ES p. 349)*

April 9

Growth in charity

See how charity takes shape, grows, develops and produces its fruit. It can be compared to some magnificent tree. God the Holy Spirit plants it where he will. He drops its seed into that fertile ground which is the heart of man. It lies there – then if the soil is well prepared, it begins to appear on the surface. But the hand of God does even

more. With due respect for human will and liberty, the love of God caresses the newly born plant like the rays of the sun caress the flowers in our garden. It begins to take shape, it begins to grow. God's influence becomes more effective, the more we listen to His voice; and it is thus, as Saint Paul writes to the Romans (Rom 5:5), that "the love of God is poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit who has been given to us." *Caritas Dei diffusa est in cordibus nostris per Spiritum sanctum qui datus est.*

*Thirteenth Meditation,
from The Essential d'Alzon (ES p. 412)*

April 10

Unity of the faith in the growth of the Church

Our Lord tells us that at the end of time there will be *Unum ovile et unus pastor*¹. This is the outcome for which we labour. One of the glories of Pius IX's Pontificate, which unfortunately is seldom mentioned, is that never in the Church's history, since earliest times, have there been so many foreign missions as today. Pope Pius IX has already established more than 170 new dioceses.

And while whole peoples who have never known the Church are hastening to gather into its fold, Catholics everywhere are converging on their common centre. See them gathering tightly round the Holy See. Had it been asked twenty five years ago which dogma of Faith was first on the list for proclamation, the answer would have been: that of Our Lady's Immaculate Conception. Today it is evident that the first item on the agenda for the coming Council is papal infallibility. Everyone believes it - everyone proclaims it - nobody nowadays would dare sustain the contrary. The most that could be said against defining it would be its importunity - that the time is not ripe. Surely it is up to the Holy Father himself to decide whether the time is ripe or not. At the Council of Nicea (A.D.325) which 300 bishops attended, only six of them refused to sign the Creed declaring God the Son to be consubstantial with God the Father. Today there will be two dozen or less among the 1200 Catholic bishops of the world who will refuse to subscribe to the Pope's infallibility.

*On the Spirit the Assumption,
from The Essential d'Alzon (ES p. 704)*

¹ Jn 10:16 "*but one flock and one shepherd.*"

April 11

Have the soul of a servant

It is not good enough to elaborate beautiful theories about how things ought to be. We must “get down to brass tacks”, and the “brass tacks” of community life are services requested and rendered. Living together as we do, we are constantly asking for help, and constantly being asked for help. Who likes to be disturbed? Who likes to be inconvenienced? Yet, what did Our Lord do other than accept perpetual inconvenience from Bethlehem to Calvary. And look at his patience in the Blessed Sacrament! What stupendous miracles did he not perform, and does he not continue to perform, to remind us that to be good, as he is good, entails rendering one service after another, no matter what the cost? So there is your model. Who has ever been half as good as Jesus Christ? – and who has rendered, and continues to render, half the service he does? When you have done half as much to help your fellow-men as He has to help you – then you can begin to complain. Meanwhile hang your head in shame. Coldness, selfishness, looking after “number one” and not wishing to be bothered – is there anything more diametrically opposed to what Our Saviour stands for?

April 12

The Spirit in our hearts

It is the Holy Spirit who must himself pray in us, *postulat in nobis gemitibus inenarrabilibus*¹. We do not give enough thought to the truth that we possess him: by Baptism, by Confirmation and by Ordination. We are his temples, his shrines (I Cor. 6:19) – so let us adore this God who lives inside each one of us. He is entirely at our disposal. He will make us more and more aware of his presence, as we get to love him more and more – as we open wider and wider our gates to welcome him in. Saint Augustine points out *Cum igitur ubique est non in omnibus habitat, etiam in quibus habitat non aequaliter habitat....quamvis in quibus habitat; habeant eum pro suae capacitatis diversitate, alli amplius, alii minus, quos sibi dilectissimum templum gratia suae bonitatis aedificat*².

¹ Rom 8: 26 *“The Spiritprays within us, using words no tongue can utter.”*

² Letter 187 of Saint Augustine, 17 and 19, Latin Patrology 33, 838-839 *“Although God is everywhere, he doesn't live in everybody – and in those in whom he does live, he doesn't live to an equal extent. He lives entirely in them all – yet those in whom he lives possess him according to their individual capacity: some more, some less, but all by his infinite goodness called to become his holy temples.”*

April 13

Hope

Hope is a virtue by which we have a firm trust, founded on the merits of Our Lord Jesus Christ, that we shall possess God for all eternity, provided we make full use of the graces he gives us in this life. We shall therefore place our whole confidence in God alone, never in any created thing. Evangelical poverty will be the external proof of the practice of our hope, from which we shall draw the true spirit of humility, with its distrust and contempt of self. Hope will give us the spirit of prayer, leading us to ask for the grace necessary to observe the law of God and His counsels, convinced as we are that whatever is not of God and is not related to God is not worthy of

us. Hope practiced like this will inspire in us the deepest recognition of the gifts of God. We shall always remember the words of the apostle who recommends that we give thanks for everything that happens to us: *In omnibus gratias agentes*¹.

The Directory, II, 4 "Hope"

¹ Eph 5: 20. "In all things give thanks."

April 14

A supernatural, audacious and selfless love

What shall I say about our love for the Church? The Church is something so wonderful, that the pens of even our most inspired authors seem hopelessly inadequate to express its greatness, its richness, its power, its beauty and its glory. Listen to them telling us that the Church is the dwelling place of God among men (Rev 21:3) – the pillar and the unshakeable foundation of eternal truth (I Cor 3:10) – the Mystical Body of Christ which brings him to completion (Eph 4:12; Col 1:18). The Church is his perfect bride, holy and spotless (Eph 5:27; Rev 19:7). For her sake the Son of God came down from heaven and united himself to

humanity. Hers are the tents to be blessed and multiplied (Nb 24:5). She is the beloved city. She is the army with which he will rout his enemies (Ex 17:9). Beautiful words written about, and applied to, the Church – but her most touching title is that of Bride: the object of his predilection, the recipient of the Divine Bridegroom's most jealous love. So we love the Church because Jesus Christ loved her. And our love for the Church must have these three characteristics: it must be supernatural – it must be daring– and it must be unselfish.

*Instruction to the Chapter of 1868,
from The Essential d'Alzon (ES p. 135-136)*

April 15

Apostolic priorities for the Assumption

Preaching, teaching, spiritual direction, and works of charity: let these be our principal activities. Combine them in such a way as to achieve the final results we have set for ourselves. We must march as an army, owing its strength to its unity of command – an army which would surely be defeated were each of its soldiers to

fight as he fancied. May the beauty of God's Kingdom enrapture you! Why was the world created, if not for the Kingdom of God? Why did God the Son become Man, if not to restore the ruins of this Kingdom which had been devastated by the power of Satan? A mystery, no doubt – a mystery we will never fathom. But a mystery full of divine excitement for those who have learnt to despise passing things – for those whose ambitions tend towards what is infinite, what is perfect, what will last for ever.

*Second Letter to the Master of Novices,
from The Essential d'Alzon (ES p. 158-159)*

April 16

A global apostolic ambition¹

I haven't yet mentioned our foreign missions. Australia will have to be put to side for the time being, because certain contractual obligations which were made have not yet been kept. But we are doing great work in Bulgaria. We have launched an Association of Employers and Apprentices and opened a school for two hundred boys. Both have had lasting success. Our Oblate

Sisters have most effectively backed us up by opening a hospital, a dispensary, a boarding school and several primary schools. This is only a beginning. We have secured a valuable bridgehead against the Greek and Russian schism. We will be accused of fool-hardy ambition. How puny we are compared to the giant we are attacking. The Church has three great enemies today: the Revolution, the Prussian Eagle and the Russian Bear. Of these three Russia is not the least redoubtable. Yet, what an immense field of endeavour it is for us! As Our Lord said to his timorous disciples, so I dare say to you: *Messis multa*². These disciples became Apostles and conquered the world. Decide, my brothers, whether you want to conquer Russia and bring its vast harvest into the granary of your Father. It makes me tremble to speak to you thus -- yet something tells me the Assumption can do it, and with God's help this harvest will be gathered in.

*Instruction for the Chapter of 1873,
from The Essential d'Alzon (ES p. 185-186)*

¹ The apostolic report addressed here by Fr. d'Alzon is the one of 1873. Since that time the Assumption has continued to explore new apostolic fields, depending on needs, interests, and our abilities.

² Mt 9:37 or LK 10:2 "*The harvest is great*".

April 16 is Pope Benedict XVI's birthday, born in 1927. Let us pray for the Church and the Holy Father.

April 17

The work of vocations, the alumniate movement

We will welcome in our alumnates, from earliest youth, all those youngsters whom our efforts and the charity of the faithful will allow us. How numerous these good young boys would be if our available funds kept pace with the present number of vocations! Counting on Divine Providence, we have already begun.... and see how God has blessed us. Our initial success is a clear indication that he wishes us to continue. So continue we will.... and we will welcome whoever knocks on our door and seeks admission, however old he is and wherever he comes from. We will welcome those who, before coming to us, knew how it felt to enjoy life. Some will have enjoyed it to their cost – some will have experienced storms – some (alas') shipwreck.... but we will welcome them all into the House of Probation together with those angelic little brothers who chose not to sully their baptismal robes in the slime of sinfulness so

as not to have to wash them in a fount of penitent tears.

*Instruction for the Chapter of 1873,
from The Essential d'Alzon (ES p. 187)*

The term aluminate is a neologism formed from Latin (*aleo*, to feed, and *alumnus* infant) to designate a small seminary at the Assumption, in the style of the apostolic schools of religious communities, with its own characteristics (situated in the country, formation in Greek and Latin, a family spirit, combination of manual work and intellectual work, an early initiation into religious life).

April 18

Quality rather than quantity

God alone probes the depth of the human heart. But there are times ---for example when the general welfare of the Congregation is at stake --- when charity itself obliges us to pass judgment on our brothers. And there can be no doubt as to our primary obligation of promoting an ever more intense and effective fervour for our own sake, for that of our brothers, and for that of the souls entrusted to our care. The preservation and growth of fervour depends above all on those whom we

place in charge. So before admitting anybody to the Chapter we must bear in mind that it doesn't matter how numerous are, as long as these men themselves are living models of what a religious ought to be.

*Second Circular,
The Essential d'Alzon (ES p. 198-199)*

April 19

The Third Orders of the Assumption

Let the Third Orders of Saint Dominic and Saint Francis.... let the Company of Jesus itself, and every Order and pious association ever founded.... pitch themselves into the fray, giving new life and new purpose to every one of their thousands of members.... and let us warmly applaud whatever they do. But why should we be left out? Have we nothing to contribute? Have we no understanding of what God requires of us? What do we see around us today? A host of decent and well meaning citizens..... Do you not agree that a Third Order (or call it what you may) would be the answer? Assemble around you a group of intelligent laypeople. Think of what you could

accomplish with their cooperation: propagating Christian ideas, preparing Catholic universities, organizing Catholic working class movements, protesting worldly ideas, fostering vocations I have been surveying the landscape from various standpoints. How are we to disseminate Christian ideas and attitudes? – How are we to bring about Christian social conditions? – How are we to encourage religious vocations? To all three queries it seems to me that Third Orders offer an attractive answer. We already have a Third Order of women. Why not one for men? It would be equally advantageous. Its membership could consist of both priests and pious laymen – and it would bring greater fervour and greater austerity into their lives.

*Third Circular,
from The Essential d'Alzon (ES p. 204, 205, 206)*

¹ This circular letter was written in 1874 on the eve of the organization of Catholic Universities in France whose way had been prepared by the Laboulaye law on the freedom of higher education.

On Tuesday April 19, 2005 Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger was elected pope by the papal conclave; he took the name of Benedict XVI.

April 20

The lay apostolate

The world can be neither a major seminary nor a large convent; but by staying within their families with all the relations created by society, do Christians have nothing they can do? Will the heavenly flame not reach them? If the time of martyrs has passed, are Christians today not their heirs? If it is no longer necessary to confess the truth from the roof-tops, does there remain nothing for the apostolate of the laity, to use the words that have come from the Vatican? And is not courage indispensable for all those who want, in the place given them by Providence, to become equally and energetically children of God and the Church? For me, I need to say this: nothing appears more beautiful, more magnificent to me than the life of the Christian, with his quiet and strong virtues, protesting against the damaging influences that invade us, illuminating the principles of his conduct with the splendour of faith, and showing, by his actions even more than by his words, the power of devotion and sacrifice, as they were practiced eighteen hundred years ago and preached on the summit of Calvary. And do not reproach us for presenting to our children examples of perfection that are too lofty. On the

one hand, there are the heights that perfection inhabits, and on the other, the weaknesses; I would even say the natural cowardice of our children guarantees that the greatest number at least will never reach the same heights; and, after all, it is good to teach these young consciences that their true models are those who come closer to the eternal model of the humanity of Jesus Christ.

*A Speech on the occasion of the distribution of awards,
August 16, 1858*

April 21

An open mind and a narrow mind

The open mind seeks to see things in themselves; the narrow mind sees everything in relation to itself. Yet I have known people who always said that it was necessary to see things in depth, and who actually saw everything crooked; but these were false minds. The open mind devotes itself to a cause, the narrow mind is devoted to itself whatever the cause; the open mind endeavours to hover on the heights, while the narrow mind digs holes for moles and is quite

happy to find shelter in a hole. Because the main goal of the narrow mind is not to commit itself, that's what it calls prudence. Prudence is, in fact, a virtue that helps in the governance of things and people for the general good. The prudence of the narrow mind never considers anything but its own affairs, its own person. The open mind is really quite useless without a strong and generous character; although such an open mind sees what needs to be done, it does nothing. The narrow mind with an energetic character does more harm than good, and at most makes a lot of noise about nothing. Such a one's character matches his mind; you can expect all kinds of stupidities, justified for the most ludicrous reasons, when they are not just plain silly.

*Memories of an Elder
in L=Assomption of Nîmes,
1875, n° 14, p. 117*

April 22

The cradle of faith

It is up to us never to lose heart. If they suppress our educational establishments, if they

prevent us from teaching in the open, then let us go and teach underground, in the cellars and catacombs. *Verbum Dei non est alligatum*¹. I remember visiting, just over a year ago, the crypt where Saint Peter used to baptize. There isn't much room down there, yet it is the birthplace of Roman faith. It's very dark down there, yet see what light issued from such obscurity! Light issued from the very depth of darkness, truth from all of these tombs – from these narrow passageways cluttered with the remains of early Christians, especially those under the reign of the emperor Claudius. It is from here, of all places, that Christian feet set out to carry the Good News to the ends of the Earth.

*Nineteenth Meditation,
from The Essential d'Alzon (ES p. 480)*

¹ II Tim 2:9 “*The Word of God cannot be held captive.*”

April 23

***A new Diocesan Catechism.
(censure with mercy rather than flatter in error)***

A few observations, as we consider the possibility of publishing a new manual of religious instruction, bring to mind a beautiful passage from St. Augustine. It occurs at the beginning of the second book of the treatise on the Trinity. Attacked by a crowd of critics who find it far easier to blame than to do something, he writes: **I have no fear, he says, of exposing my thought, but I would much prefer it to be examined by the good than be chewed over by the perverse. Charity, in its beauty and its modesty, accepts with understanding the look of the dove, and as for the teeth of the dogs, the prudence of humility avoids them, or the strength of the truth will break them. I much prefer to be blamed by anyone than praised by a man who is mistaken or by a flatterer. A friend of the truth does not dread being censured; whether by a friend or by an enemy: if an enemy insults him he supports him; if a friend is mistaken he illuminates it, if he is in the truth, he listens to him. The praiser who errs is confirmed in his error. The flatterer is carried away by it. Therefore the just will correct me in his mercy and will pick me up again; as for the oil*

of the sinner, it will never embalm my head+. No more than David and St. Augustine, does the Bishop of Nîmes yearn for the unctuous praise of certain people.

The Assumption of Nîmes, 1877, n° 54, p. 244.

April 24

The Feast of the conversion of Saint Augustine

For about two weeks I have become quite diligent. Every morning, from 5:30, I walk with a book in hand. I have read the Bible, Tertullian, the *Confessions* of Saint Augustine. The beautiful book of the *Confessions*! What a beautiful soul this man had! Yet, he was weak; he made his mistakes; but how he showed his regret! And then, his friendship for his friends! He speaks of it in a charming way. I spend time translating Tertullian; later, I translate some Dante: I have already nearly read the whole text of the *Inferno* with the help of a translation. Let me say, finally, that I have some really great plans for studying for an entire month or so. I am not going to say anything to you about politics. There is nothing drier than politics!

Today I will say nothing about it. My letter, this time, will only note one fact: it is that I am tired of everything that I see and that I want to refresh my heart in opening it up a little to you. Take what I have told you as you wish, but when you only see foolishness there Bwhich I don't believe you will - so much is made of it today that it is permitted to say so. Farewell.

*Letter to Luglien de Jouenne d=Esgrigny,
August 31, 1830
(Letters, vol. A, p. 127-128)*

April 25

Saint Mark, evangelist

The thesis appears to me to be this: has God revealed any truths outside of the Scriptures? Could he have done this? Why not! Before the Scriptures, before Jesus Christ? Yes. Since Jesus Christ? Evidently yes. The time between the Ascension and the first work, or rather between the Ascension and the complete body of the New Testament. Will you say that it was not necessary because the apostles were infallible? Ah! The apostles were infallible while teaching! Therefore

men can be infallible, and others who were not apostles, Saint Mark and Saint Luke, for example. The question is decided then. What text states that Saint Luke and Saint Mark were infallible other than tradition? I am becoming a Protestant.

*The Protestant Controversy (around 1854),
from T.D., vol. 47, p. 8 (D00988)*

April 25 is the national holiday of Italy. Let us pray for and with the Assumptionist communities in Florence and Rome, remembering also our Oblate Sisters.

April 26

Our Lady of Good Counsel¹

An old friend gave me this advice (old friends always give good advice): you will notice, he told me, that the conduct which is, above all, most clever is that of Christian simplicity. It is not because of cleverness that we must strive for greater simplicity, but because it is simplicity that God wants to reward. Saint Francis de Sales said: **One wants very little, and as one grows old, one wants them even less**. Someone told Cardinal Bellarmine who was very busy: **You have a lot to*

do+. >No,” he answered, “I only have one thing to do: attend to my salvation; the rest worries me very little.=

*Retreat to the Religious at Auteuil,
August 1860, E00077*

¹ This feast normally prescribed for April 25 originated at the Shrine of Genazzano (40 km from Rome) in the second half of the XV century. An Augustinian tertiary widow, Petruccia, placed her goods at disposal for the enlargement and restoration of an old church. An image of the Virgin, honoured in Scutari in Albania, appeared to her on April 25, 1467. The title of Our Lady of Good Counsel was introduced to the litany of Our Lady by Pope Leo XIII.

April 26 is the national holiday of Tanzania. Let us pray for the communities of the Assumption Family in that country: Religious Sisters, Assumptionists, Oblates and Orantes.

April 27

*Saint Turibius Alfonso of Mogrovejo,
a missionary bishop*

Then there appeared these great religious whose strenuous labours had no other goal than to raise the standards of the Indians and make them capable of social and Christian life. I say the

religious specially, because if you read the beautiful life of St. Turibius who was to Lima what St. Charles was to Milan, you will see that he needed to wage all kinds of battles to repulse the encroachment of the viceroys. It is hard to believe the venality of the magistrates, the laxity of the clergy, the ignorance of the Spaniards, the oppression of the Indians. Public worship was reduced to nothing, instruction abandoned. How can one teach people who only know how to engage in business? Under the action of a man of God, carried out for a quarter of century, civil abuses were eradicated, the priests educated, the Spaniards made more moral. The Indians returned from their forests and their caves and were able to settle back in their villages; religious instruction raised them up and gave them a certain human dignity while baptism made them Christian.

*Impressions of a journey,
published in Le Pèlerin,
April 5, 1879, p. 220.*

Saint Turibius Alfonso of Mogrovejo (1538-1608), a Bishop of Spanish origin, Archbishop of Lima, was canonized in 1726.

April 27 is the national holiday of Togo. Let us pray for the Assumptionist community in Sokodé and for the people of Togo.

April 28

Saint Peter Chanel, a Marist priest, martyr

If a Bishop could proclaim recently that the tree of the French monarchy bathed its roots in the baptistery of Saint Rémi, it is still more truthful to say that the Church bathes its feet in the blood of her children, her priests, her bishops, and her sovereign pontiffs, immolated during the first three centuries of her existence in the name of the laws at that time. Are you unaware that the victims of these laws are the object of special worship for her; that the altar, on which she renews the divine sacrifice every day, is necessarily the tomb of some of her martyrs; and that a Catholic priest never goes up to celebrate the holy mysteries, where these venerated relics rest without kissing the altar, so as to strengthen his lips with this sacred contact, to make them worthier to preach the truth and to free them from all terror, when he should announce the judgement of God in spite of legal opposition?

*Letter to Minister Delangle,
April, 1861
(Letters, vol. III, p. 440)*

April 29

***Saint Catherine of Siena, Doctor of the Church*¹**

The bout of illness that I had gave me a little time to rest and some time for myself; I took advantage of it to think about things and to resolve to give myself totally to God. Mr. Chavin, in his *Life of Saint Catherine of Siena*, where he speaks about everything, even of Saint Catherine, did me some good. Why are you not like this admirable virgin? Alas! Why, for my part, do I not have her generosity and her ardent love for the blood of Jesus Christ? As for me, what I love in Christ, it seems to me, is the whole of Jesus Christ, God and man, and, as God-Man, priest, sanctifier, and victim. Finally, my dear child, there isn't one good sentiment that I don't want to send you either that you might enjoy it at the same time as I do or that you might help me develop it. A service that I ask of you in return is to preach to me often about calmness, recollection, and solitude. Be for me the voice in the desert that draws me there.

*Letter to Mother Marie-Eugénie de Jésus,
January 28, 1847
(Letters, vol. C, p. 193-194)*

¹ The anniversary of the foundation of the Religious of the Assumption (1839)

April 30

First communion at Collège de l'Assomption

Yesterday, Sunday, we celebrated First Communion at the Collège de l'Assomption. One characteristic of this feast struck us: it was the intimate part that family plays in the feast of the collège. There were two or three generations of pupils present. The older ones, having made their First Communion previously in this chapel, had come to accompany, at the sacred banquet, their younger brothers. Still older pupils saw their sons approaching this holy table where they had once upon a time received communion for the first time. The chivalrous love of the holy Roman Church, that distinguishes this house, was revealed in every detail. The ceremonies were carried out according to the rules of the Church, with great precision, in an orderly way and with gravity. Liturgical songs appear to be the only ones suitable. No other words than the words adopted by the Church; no other music than that of Saint Gregory. The recollection was unsurpassable. Gregorian chant is an aid to prayer; or better yet, it prays with us. The words of the Church, that the pupils of the collège must learn, are a lot more beautiful, more seriously devout and more touching than the French compositions

by our best authors. After the Communion Mass, we were driven, with all the parents, to the gymnasium, where there was a table set with about a hundred place settings. We must pity all those to whom these joys of the soul are unknown!

The Assumption of Nîmes, 1877, n° 59, p. 281.

April 30 (bis)

The Feast of the Ascension¹

Jesus Christ completed his work. He was born in poverty; he grew up in obscurity, worked and was obedient; he preached for three years; then the fury of his enemies, reaching its height, delivered him to Gentiles; he was flogged, crowned with thorns, and crucified. He died, and on the third day, just as he had predicted, he rose again. He lived on the earth for forty days, appearing at times to his disciples. He addressed his last recommendations to them; he founded the ecclesiastical hierarchy on Peter and the apostles. He blessed them all, and in their sight he went up to heaven, recommending that they not disperse

until they had been clothed with virtue from on high. In fact the apostles and about one hundred disciples with Mary and the holy women withdrew to the Cenacle.

Le Pèlerin,
June 1, 1878, p. 358.

¹ The feast of the Ascension is celebrated 40 days after Easter, both feasts being moveable. The Ascension is celebrated on Thursday in some countries and on the following Sunday in others. We have chosen arbitrarily to commemorate it here.

MONTH OF MAY

For a long time the month of May has been dedicated to Marian devotion. Many of us know by heart Lambillotte's age-old hymn made popular in places of worship and pilgrimage or during parish missions: "C'est le mois de Marie, c'est le mois le plus beau: à la Vierge bénie, disons un chant nouveau." ("It is the month of Mary, it is the month most fair; to the Blessed Virgin, let us sing a new song"). Neither Fr. d'Alzon nor the Assumption is behind the times: as to the former, he noted, already in 1846, that he could have never believed that he would love the Blessed Mother so much; as to the congregations of the Assumption Family, they proved to be pioneers in the organizations of pilgrimages to Marian centers. This liturgical primacy given to Mary during the month of May does not at all overshadow other celebrations:

(1) St. Joseph, (3) Sts. Philip and James, (12) St. John Stone (a nod to Assumptionists in the region of England), (25) Pope St. Gregory VII, and (26) St. Philip Neri. Let us join Pope John Paul II who, while on pilgrimage to Mexico in 1979, greeted Mary as Mother of Mercy, the one who approaches us, sinners, she who is our hope, she who never ceases to teach us how to make our way to Jesus.

May 1

***Feast of Joseph the Worker (Feast of Workers)
Work, the Prayer of One's Hands***

What did the Blessed Mother and St. Joseph do throughout their lives? How did Our Lord Himself spend the first thirty years of His life? St. Joseph worked to earn his family's daily bread; Mary looked after the household; from his earliest years Jesus himself helped both his mother and his foster-father. What wonderful company I keep if only I work in union with them, if I nourish myself with the thoughts which must have engrossed them, if I seek to enter into every one of their intentions, if I imitate their spirit of recollection and their silence, if I work the way they worked! There is no type of work in which Jesus, Mary, and Joseph cannot be my models. All three were familiar with toil that was difficult, lowly and not particularly appreciated by others. Joseph worked long and hard to feed the Son of God as I work to feed the followers of Jesus Christ. Mary took care of the most humble details of the material upkeep of the home, just as I must

care for the good of the Congregation to which I belong. Jesus himself, in taking on the most arduous tasks, teaches me that nothing should appear difficult to me if I want to be like him. When I am involved in manual work, do I habitually unite myself with the Holy Family?

Directory, III, 9 "Manual Work"

The Feast of St. Joseph the Worker, patron saint of workers (May 1), was promulgated only in May 1955 by Pope Pius XII. The 19th century was a time when unions, especially, worked hard to raise awareness of the plight of workers and to organize them. May 1 was chosen in 1884 as a holiday at the 4th Congress of Trade Unions of Chicago, together with the demand for an eight-hour work day.

May 2

May, the Month of Mary

When Jansenism put a halt everywhere to people making their way to shrines and declared that all those holy individuals who had been committed pilgrims were either insane or stupid, the Blessed Mother herself vouchsafed a place of pilgrimage in every church for an entire month; such is the origin of the month of Mary.

The institution of the month of Mary, brought about to counteract those who considered ill-advised pilgrimages and other demonstrations in honor of the Blessed Virgin Mary that they judged too devout, is one of those magnificent ironies that heaven reserves for its petty adversaries; these individuals feel it necessary to offer their advice to the Church while ignoring the Church's advice to them. But if the Christian people, derailed for a moment by the philosophers and wise men of the last century, hid in churches and found refuge in holy places, it merely served as fertile ground for pilgrimages to come. Indeed, for the past seven years, the principal highways have once again witnessed the arrival of pilgrims and, when May flowers bloom, there appear everywhere those who walk for God.

Le Pèlerin, 27 April, 1878, p. 272.

This devotion of the month of Mary began in Rome at the Roman College of the Jesuits and reached France on the eve of the Revolution. It was officially approved by the Holy See in 1815.

May 3

Saints Philip and James, apostles

I am not surprised by your letter. I have to admit that I was half expecting it, but I think that those things you consider repugnant will one day be the source of profound humiliation for you when, seeking to walk in the footsteps of Our Lord, you realize, after all, that in order to be united to humanity, he had to go quite a bit further from heaven to sinners than you will have had to go from your place to that of my poor children. Shall I tell you, my dear Marie, that I feel responsible for your discouragement? If only I had known how to preach to you more effectively by the example of my own apostolic life, you would have understood a bit better the beauty of this life for the sake of which Our Lord set out by choosing first of all fishermen and commoners just as we have begun with our wool-spinners and our mountain girls. All of this, I repeat, is quite simple in my eyes, and I thank you for having spoken to me with that admirable frankness of yours. Attached as I am to you, this causes me to suffer a little; I would be lying if I were to say the contrary. But you see, Marie, there is someone I love a thousand times more than you, that is, Our Lord.

*Letter to Marie Correnson,
August 23, 1866,
(Letters, vol. VI, p. 131)*

Marie Correnson (1842-1900), a young woman of the Nîmes bourgeoisie, was chosen by Fr. d'Alzon to become the co-foundress of the congregation of the Oblates of the Assumption. She was the oldest child of a family of ten. At the time of her religious profession, she received the name of Mother Emmanuel-Marie of the Compassion. In 1882, following difficulties with the men's branch of the congregation, the Augustinians of the Assumption, she established her independence as the head of the congregation, then called Oblates of the Assumption, the Nîmes branch, a situation which remained until Mother Chamska's arrival on the scene in 1926.

May 4

The Opening of a Month of Mary

The month of Mary¹ : what better practice could one recommend where everything has dried up or where faith has lost its savor than to present to the love and imitation of Christians a woman who is our model in the struggle against Satan and whose victory can be, if we so desire, the pledge of our own? Mary is our model in struggle, our model in the way of holiness. Mary, victorious

over Satan, is the pledge of the triumph of every Christian and of the triumphs of the Church. But for this to happen, two conditions are necessary: for Mary to be a useful model, we must strive to imitate her and we must want to be holy. For Mary to be the pledge of our triumphs, we must call upon her. Imitating Mary, trusting in her, that is the topic of this talk.

Mois de Marie, as found in T.D., vol. 44, p. 109.

¹ The month of Mary is not an exception in the liturgical cycle prior to Vatican II: there was the month of Joseph in March, the month of the Sacred Heart in June, the month of the Rosary in October. Furthermore, the Second Vatican Council did not pronounce itself on the matter of maintaining these forms of devotion; rather, it insisted on recalling the fundamental priority of the mysteries of salvation celebrated on the various feast-days of the Lord.

May 5

The Miracles at Lourdes

After everything that has been written about Lourdes, is it necessary to talk about it anymore? Why not? First of all, notice that it is the same water that cures paralytics, causes intestinal

tumors to disappear, radically heals cancers, eliminates the overflow of synovial secretions, gives the voice-box of a nightingale to those suffering from tuberculosis who throw up blood and suffer loss of voice, suppresses dropsy, and causes swollen glands to subside in an instant. How appropriate it was for the Virgin Mary, who saw so many people flocking to the spas of the Pyrenees on vacation, to have her own waters in order to encourage prayer! Besides, what Pyrenean spring heals so many illnesses in such a short time? Let's see: is it Cauterets, Eaux-Bonnes, Bagnères, Barèges, or Luchon? Obviously not! It is true that the waters of Lourdes do not heal everyone. And do the other waters cleanse everyone who plunges into them? Moreover, can they heal from a distance in such a way that a sick person who is incapable of being brought to the waters and who pays for the pilgrimage of another sick person is cured without leaving his room? That has just happened. Strange waters that with the application of wet cloths give healing sleep to sick persons who had already been healed once, but who fell again, dislocated all at once hip, knee-cap and ankle and, upon waking, had not the slightest trace of a problem which medical experts said would normally take eight months to heal. As of today, there are thirty-

two authenticated miracles, not to mention so many other extraordinary graces.

L'Assomption de Nîmes,
1877, n° 66, p. 325.

May 6

Portrait of a layman, a friend, an apostle:
Jules Monnier

One Lenten evening in 1837, Mr. Germer-Durand, a high school professor and a Christian, the likes of which many are needed, introduced to Fr. d'Alzon one of his friends who had been moved by the sermons of Fr. Reynaud, a priest of the Toulouse diocese, and a preacher at the cathedral. He was a young man whose eyes revealed his frankness, ardor, and a keen sensitivity. His mellow voice, which revealed a nervous impressionability, was quite charming. His broad forehead, framed by beautiful, long hair, bore the marks of hard work and his fragile build seemed to bend under the efforts of an energetic will and the bursts of an imagination set afire by the heart... Jules Monnier, like Mr. Durand a high school professor, was one of those

exquisite natures, lost in the University setting, displaced in that setting from his true path... He was endowed with a superior mind, but one always under control, flexible, free. He would not knock obstacles over, but he would rather go around them and leave them far enough behind him to prove that a crooked line is sometimes the shortest distance between two points. When I speak of a crooked line, God forbid that I say that all was not very correct with him; but if he ran into a mountain, he found it shorter to go to the right or left than to blow it up.

*L'Assomption de Nîmes,
1875, n° 4, p. 25-27.*

Jules Monnier (1815-1856), who held tenure at the University, came to teach at Assumption College in Nîmes and was a member of the masculine branch of the Third Order and of the Conferences of St. Vincent de Paul.

May 7

Love of Mary, Model of the Christian Life

In His gentle courtesy, Our Lord was not content to be our sole exemplar, either as God or

as man; He has given us another to imitate in the person of the Blessed Virgin, his mother, who is our mother as well, the most perfect of the Most High's creatures. Mary is for me both mother and model. My model: I must strive to imitate her as much as a religious in pursuit of holiness is capable of imitating the Queen of heaven and earth. My mother: I must place in her a tender and complete confidence. Even if I could not know more about the Blessed Mother's virtues than I read in the gospels, that would be enough and there would be no need for me to know more. First of all, I can marvel at the prudence of her question to the angel sent to greet her in the name of God. Her obedience and faith are no less obvious when she responds: "I am the handmaid of the Lord"¹. This faith is the source of all the wonderful things accomplished through her; this is what Elizabeth points out when she says to her, "Blessed is she who believed that the promises made to her by the Lord would be fulfilled."²

Directory, I, 5 "Desire for Holiness"

¹ Lk 1:38

² Lk 1:45

Fr. d'Alzon developed a deep devotion for the Blessed Mother. Nevertheless, he gave to his first congregation the official name Augustinians of the Assumption and thus

demonstrated his desire to place it first of all under the patronage of St. Augustine and secondly under that of the Assumption. This latter title, "Assumption," served in the beginning to refer to the college in Nîmes, taken over by Fr. d'Alzon in 1843. Later, as a result of his relations with the foundress of the Religious of the Assumption in Paris, the term "Assumption" was thereafter broadened to designate a spirit common to both congregations.

May 8

Mary, Model of Mothers¹

First of all, I will consider the mother of a family. Ladies, as I discuss this topic, I feel that I will have both a lot and not much to say. Which mother has not suffered, and quite a bit? And what can I teach you in this regard? How much tenderness and care are in her heart! How many responsibilities she bears! Her affections are a cross, her duties are demanding. She carries as a heavy burden the weight of all those who surround her: her husband whom she loves and who loves her, her children, her relatives; in the end, the whole weight of the household. Everything around this mother of a family calls forth her tenderness and care and her suffering. Then there is that circle which never ceases to

grow around her whether within her family or in the ranks of friends that, though more extended, bind her no less painfully. Yes, she must suffer, this woman who has united her destiny with that of her husband, the mother who watches over her child from the crib to the cruel hour of separation.

*Sermon on the Compassion of Mary
(March 1871), from The Essential d'Alzon (ES p. 1013)*

¹ The month of Mary also presents an opportunity in many countries to celebrate mothers of families on various days. The purpose of Fr. d'Alzon is to exalt the figure of Mary as mother and model of Christian family life where love becomes a gift even to the point of the free choice of accepting the portion of suffering inherent in every life.

May 9

Anniversary¹

Tomorrow will be the fifty-fifth anniversary of my baptism. That tells you that I am no spring chicken. How much longer must I stay in this world? God alone knows. If it be His will, I would very much like to leave behind a series of ideas that seem to me helpful in the development of Our Lord's Kingdom. Perhaps it's foolish pride that

prompts me to say this, but it's absolutely true that I see a great deal of good to be done. My daughter, I would like you to help me in accomplishing this good. We can take this up again at a later time. What I can say now is that, if the possibility of religious life is neither a matter of discouragement nor of enthusiasm for you, I wish that this possibility be for you one more thing that forges a bond between us in seriousness of purpose, a spirit of self-sacrifice, and the love of Our Lord and of His Church and that it grow in your soul. I promise to support you in every way that I can.

*Letter to Marie Correnson,
September 1, 1865
(Letters, vol. V, p. 402)*

¹ In his correspondence Fr. d'Alzon mentions more readily, but not exclusively, the anniversaries of his baptism (September 2) and his ordination (December 26) than that of his birth (August 30), as if to emphasize what he considered to be his truly human and spiritual identity. That is why it is possible justifiably to speak of his three "births." In families, birthdays and anniversaries are reference points that help to stress the bonds of affection which last throughout life. If we assign days to honor mothers and fathers of families, as we should, it would also be advisable to celebrate the wedding anniversary of parents each year so as to underline the depth of their choice in founding a home and in fostering a shared family spirit.

May 10

Responsible Motherhood and Fatherhood

The duties of parents begin even before a child is born. How many precautions a mother must take in order to assure a safe delivery! One cannot imagine the little knowledge that people who are thought to be educated have in this matter. In a conversation I had I remember being consulted by a well-placed woman who wanted to know if I would give her permission to have an abortion. I am not sure what astonished more: the question itself or the matter-of-fact way in which it was posed. A pregnant mother must avoid all fatigue or violent exercise that would induce the premature birth of her child. Simple, ordinary people have recourse to certain medicines; the upper classes go horse-back riding a child is conceived. A mother must avoid heavy work, dangerous situations, outings, pleasures and emotions which could harm the fruit of her womb. When is the fetus quickened (i.e. endowed with a soul)? There is nothing definitive on this subject. Dom de Bruyne contends that it is at the moment of conception. He states clearly that it is prudent to baptize every fetus; but is it certain that it has a soul? Let us leave this question to the experts in sacred embryology. Let us urge parents to fulfill

their duties as fathers and mothers in away worthy of Christians.

*Ecclesiastical Conference, December 1847,
as found in T.D., vol. 48, p. 251 (D01233)*

Let us recall that the controversial encyclical of Pope Paul VI in 1968, *Humanae Vitae*, did not aim first of all at the question of regulating births but at the essential issue of responsible parenthood. In this sense the advice given by Fr. d'Alzon is astonishingly modern.

May 11

Our Lady of Salvation¹

“Notre Dame de Salut”² – this is what my focus is at this point: storming Heaven with ceaseless prayer – refusing to be discouraged – refusing to take “No” for an answer. How can I describe this torrent of prayer which wells up from the bosom of the Church in times of persecution? What can I say except that it tilts the scales of Divine Justice. “*Multum valet deprecatio justi assidu.* The assiduous prayer of the just has an immense value” (James 5:16). Prayer is the wonderful product of the Communion of Saints. So let us

pray and get others to pray. Let everybody pray as hard as they possibly can. Our prayers, together with those of Christ our Saviour, will finish by forcing open the very gates of Paradise. Nothing is more evident than that the “soft life” of Christians constitutes a major obstacle to the action of divine mercy. How do you want the heart of God to be touched by prayers coming from souls plunged into a constant search for every kind of comfort, and, sometimes, even of forbidden pleasures? Yes, we must have the courage to live a more austere life. We must learn to cut out a whole lot of those petty comforts and sensual concessions which serve only to weaken our character, and produce men ready to compromise on every religious issue as long as it doesn't interfere with their personal pleasures.

*Thirtieth Meditation,
from The Essential d'Alzon (ES p. 566-567)*

¹ Our Lady of Salvation owes its origins to the association of prayer of the same name created on the January 24, 1872 in the chapel of Rue François Ier in Paris, under the auspices of a beautiful medieval statue of the Virgin with Child, found in 1835 at a dealer in second-hand goods by a student of Clichy. It would be given to the superior at the time, Fr. Charles Laurent. Transferred to Auteuil, disfigured during the time of the Commune in 1871, the restored statue found its place in the chapel of Rue François Ier, after the renovations of the site (1986).

² The Association of Our Lady of Salvation had, during the months that preceded the year 1878-1879, when Fr. d'Alzon wrote this meditation, collected, under the direction the Assumptionists, petitions numbering up to 1,600,000 signatures, as well as prayers for the nation that spread with a remarkable burst of energy in all the dioceses of France. The Association of Our Lady of Salvation gained a certain reputation for itself as a result this flood of public prayers that defeneded, after the dark years of the war of 1870, a certain number of measures of a social nature such as respect for Sunday, the obligation of maintaining Sunday as a holiday, or, again, the right of Catholics to influence Christian legislation.

May 12

Saint John Stone¹
(Patron of the English Region)

The Saints can hardly be described as “popular” nowadays – lots of people don't like them. The pleasure-seekers don't like them – they find their moral code far too severe. Nor do the Church's enemies – because they do such credit to the Church.

Nor, above all, do those “Free-Thinkers” who reject the supernatural. So the Saints meet with plenty of opposition. The Saints, nevertheless, are an undeniable fact. They prove such exceptions to

human mediocrity – they furnish the Church with such powerful influence – they manifest so clearly the existence of the supernatural that Christians cannot abandon them to the cynical hatred of those who have neither the courage nor the ability to follow in their foot-steps. The time has come to honour them more than ever. These “Lives of the Saints” provide an increasingly necessary and effective antidote to the helplessness and hopelessness which pervades contemporary literature.

*Introduction to the Collection “Lives of the Saints”,
from The Essential d’Alzon (ES p. 1052)*

¹ Augustinian martyr (1583) and monk of Canterbury, who refused to recognize the spiritual supremacy of the King, canonized in 1970 along with the Forty Martyrs of England and of Wales. Today is a good time to pray for the Augustinians of the Assumption in England. In London, at Bethnal Green, the Assumptionist community took up residence in 2005 in completely renovated facilities – the work of the architect, Jonathan Freegard.

May 13

*Homage to a symbol of faith,
Father Peyramale*

The death of Msgr. Peyramale¹ is an immense loss for the Church and for Catholic France. He was a good and faithful servant and especially courageous. What a rare example and all the more wonderful! He always put his hand to the plough and never looked back; one night he fought three wolves and put them to flight. All his life he fought the three great wolves of modern society: the Revolution, naturalism*, and greed. It was difficult to love the Church more than he did. If he had been mercenary, he could have accepted the stones of Massabielle that the municipal council of Lourdes offered him; he had them ceded to his bishop with the same joy with which he gave me his mountain staff not long ago. Did I suspect, when I accepted it, that he no longer needed it and that the pilgrimage of his life was nearly over? His heart overflowed as well as his intelligence in this figure, so handsome and venerable. He could have been a bishop; he preferred to die a parish priest. My God, give us many pastors endowed with this apostolic character! We include the letter of Mr. Henri Lasserre about his death. It was only right that the author who told of the apparitions of Mary

should tell us as well of the last moments of the great witness of the wonders of Lourdes.

L'Assomption de Nîmes, 1877, n° 67, p. 333.

¹ Msgr. Marie-Dominique Peyramale (1811-1877) was Bernadette Soubirous' pastor at the time of the apparitions in Lourdes in 1858.

* a philosophical position which upholds that there is nothing which exists outside of nature and excludes anything supernatural.

Many Christians remember that May 13 is also the feast day of Our Lady of Fatima (1917) and the anniversary of the attempt on the life of Pope John Paul II in St. Peter's Square, Rome, in 1981. It is also the feast day of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, formerly the patroness of the North American Province of the Assumptionists, whose principal apostolic activity, Assumption College, is situated in Worcester, Massachusetts (USA). Finally, it should be added, on May 13, 2005, Fr. Richard Lamoureux, A.A. (also of Worcester) was reelected as Superior General of the Augustinians of the Assumption.

May 14

Saint Matthias, apostle

Jesus Christ ascended into heaven; he told the apostles to stay in Jerusalem until they were clothed with power from on high. After the Ascension of the Lord, which they had just witnessed, they took refuge in the Cenacle. There Peter spoke up and proposed that the mysterious void created within the Twelve by Judas be filled. Matthias was chosen to replace him. The apostles, with the brothers of Jesus, with Mary, and with the holy women were praying together; all of a sudden, once the fifty days after Easter had elapsed, *cum complerentur dies Pentecostes*, a violent wind was heard. In the room where all of them were gathered, the Spirit of God revealed itself exteriorly in the form of tongues of fire that came to rest on the heads of the disciples. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit¹.

Le Pèlerin, May 31, 1879, p. 342.

¹ This commentary on a homily given by Fr. d'Alzon in *Le Pèlerin* starts with a simple paraphrase of the Pentecostal story according to *Acts 2*, preceded by the election of Matthias to replace Judas, *Acts 1: 15-26*. Fr. d'Alzon writes "Mathias" in stead of Matthias.

May 15

The Rosary

The rosary reminds me of the principal mysteries of the life of Jesus Christ and of his divine mother. If I recite it attentively and with a spirit of recollection, I can find in it the subject of excellent meditations. But I must follow the order of the mysteries and know how to apply them in a manner most useful to my soul, in such a way that the rosary becomes for me a sort of review of the religious virtues during which I examine how I practice them, in what ways I do not and that I then ask for the grace to acquire those I do not yet have. It is with Mary, my mother, that I converse about these virtues, of whom she is, for me, the model, as well as of the perfections of her Son. The rosary should help me to penetrate the life of Jesus and Mary more intimately. How have I fulfilled this sacred exercise? Isn't it in a routine way, without attention and with all sorts of distractions encountered along the way? Has the rosary been a real exercise of devotion for me? Or, rather, hasn't it been a kind of purely mechanical operation? What respect did I show for the Blessed Virgin whom I was invoking, for the grandeur of the mysteries that I was to reflect

upon, a serious meditation of which could have done me such good?

Directory, III, 15, "The Rosary"

The rosary is a private form of prayer consisting of the reciting of 50 Hail Marys, with, between each decade, a Glory be to the Father and an Our Father and the recall of the Gospel mysteries of the life of Christ and Mary. The rosary was originally comprised of three sets of mysteries. In his apostolic letter of October 16, 2002, Pope John Paul II proclaimed a year of the Rosary and added five "luminous" mysteries to the traditional joyful, sorrowful, and glorious ones.

May 16

Creating Christian Families

Permit me to urge you to pray for the Council a lot and to urge others to do so. At this moment the preparatory commission must correct the drafts of the Constitution that will be presented to the Council regarding infallibility and primacy. That will begin tomorrow or Wednesday. I also want to ask you for prayers for Assumption. God seems to be blessing it, but how much we must work in the order of faith and in that of charity! Since charity

seems more suited to you, I cannot tell you how much I congratulate myself for having encouraged you in your works. Why do we not see that the salvation of society is there? Only let me add: after having “created” Christians we must work at creating Christian families. I know that the effects of the Revolution will make this second task more difficult than the first, but that is not a reason to give up. It is important to know the goal even if it will not be attained at the first attempt.

*Letter to Mrs. Varin d’Ainville,
May 8, 1870
(Letters, vol. VIII, p. 357)*

Mrs. Varin d’Ainville (d. 1882), wife of the former deputy Jean-Baptiste-Félix (1806-1857), had Fr. d’Alzon as a spiritual director. The couple had three children: Amédée, Cécile, and Isaure; the last became a Religious of the Assumption under the name of Sr. Jeanne-Emmanuel (1838-1880). Mrs. Varin was a great benefactress of Assumption and organized many social and charitable works in the region of Alès.

May 17

Feast of Pentecost

May all those who received the divine Spirit withdraw within themselves. They, however, did not receive it directly as did the apostles. They received it by imposition of hands by the heirs of the apostles. They received it after baptism, in order to have life and life to the full. This life flows in them, and this life is like a new soul given to them, the life of the children of God. They are the temples of the Holy Spirit, called to be very holy themselves, if they so desire. O, baptized man, you are a child of God. But that is not enough: the Spirit designates you as his soldier to fight his battles. God, who without you can vanquish his enemies and pulverize them, desires to have need of you. He wants you to fight for him with the weapons with which he clothes you, with the strength he gives you. Go, advance successfully and reign once the visit is won. The Holy Spirit is within you, what do you fear? Aren't you sure of victory as long as you listen to him and obey him? Let us go higher. The Holy Spirit gives life not only to each Christian, he acts throughout the whole Church. What the whole soul is for the body, the Holy Spirit is for the Church of Jesus Christ, declares St. Augustine;

thus it gives it life, enlightens it, communicates to it his almighty power.

Le Pèlerin, May 31, 1879, p. 342
(Homily for Pentecost)

Pentecost is celebrated 50 days after Easter as its name indicates. Its annual mobility is linked to the date for Easter and so is variable in the yearly calendar. Therefore the choice of May 17 here is fortuitous.

May 18

Holding on to the freedom of the Church, beyond diplomacy

The Congress of Vienna had been on the verge of granting to Austria the Italian delegations. England alone, by its opposition, prevented such a glaring usurpation. England rendered several other services to the Pope, for which she asked that the Irish clergy be given a pension by the state and that the King of England have the right to recommend names for the bishoprics. As damaging as was the treaty for religion, the Pope, to manifest to a Protestant power his gratitude for having been rescued from the pretensions of His

Apostolic Majesty and the concessions of His very Christian Majesty, was on the verge of signing. Then the English bishops sent one of their confreres to declare that they would never accept such a Concordat, for in submitting themselves to it they would kill the faith in Ireland and that they preferred to live off the bread of their poor compatriots than off the gold that England was throwing to them as the price of their freedom. The Pope, who at first did not understand well, negotiated; the bishops held firm, the Concordat was not signed, freedom was saved, and today this heroic Church is advancing, doubtlessly in the midst of painful struggles, but also in the midst of glorious victories, toward a most brilliant future.

*Letter to Rev. Fabre,
August 24, 1834
(Letters, vol. XIV, p. 50)*

Emmanuel d'Alzon had known this Rev. Césaire-Frédéric Fabre (1803-1877) as spiritual director at the major seminary of Montpellier in the years 1832-1833.

May 19

To embrace the diocesan, local Church

Very well! The same God, whose thoughts are impenetrable, before striking the Church of France with the terrible blow which would shake it to its foundations, had merciful designs upon our country. It was part of his marvelous designs that the Church of Nîmes, after having seen its last bishop proscribed as a criminal, after having been united for a time to a neighboring church, rose, as it were, from its ashes, and enlarged by the remains of several neighboring dioceses, became of all the episcopal sees of France the most difficult to occupy. It was in order to fill it that God saw to it that the bishop we now mourn was born not only in a province where, from the very beginning, faith was maintained in its primitive purity but also on the frontiers of a Protestant country, so that from his very cradle the double spectacle of majestic firmness of the truth and of the perpetual fluctuations of error fortified in his soul his attachment to the Church and led him to feel above all in his heart that touching compassion that forever inspired him in his relations with our separated brethren.

*Funeral oration for Bishop de Chaffoy,
October 6, 1837
(T.D., 1-5, p. 7-25)*

Bishop de Chaffoy (1752-1837) was the first bishop of Nîmes of the 19th century after that see had been reestablished in the Concordat of 1817. Fr. d'Alzon attended him in his last moments and was chosen to deliver the public eulogy at his funeral, according to prevailing custom. This brilliant discourse drew lots of attention and was even so controversial that he felt obliged to have it printed so as not to give rise to any polemical interpretations that would distort its spirit.

May 20

The flag of the Christian, the Cross

I have definitely made up my mind and each day it is confirmed as I read the second psalm, upon which I urge you to meditate. I am more and more convinced that both the people and the kings are at fault; therefore, let them chasten each other. It is clear to me that what the priest must do is to work with whatever strength he has to establish Christ's kingdom, without getting lost in useless arguments. His king is Jesus of Nazareth; his tribune, Calvary; his flag, the Cross. Attach no

color to this flag. The cross to which the God-Man was bound, the one that appeared to Constantine, was neither red nor white, and yet, the world was saved by the former and conquered by the latter. The most intimate thought of my soul is that the world needs to be penetrated by a Christian idea; otherwise it will fall apart. And the world will not receive this idea but from men who will be taken up with it before all else in order to proclaim it in every form that it might assume. They say the world is evil. No doubt, passion turns it away from what is good. But I believe most of all that the world is ignorant. Therefore, we need to teach it and to do so in words it can understand.

*Letter to Alphonse de Vignamont,
March 18, 1835
(Letters, vol. XIV, p. 64)*

Alphonse de Vignamont, native of Pézenas, was a childhood friend of Emmanuel d'Alzon. It is striking to note that this reflection on the primacy of the Christian Cross without label, dating from 1835, continued to inspire Fr. d'Alzon, to the point that in 1879-1880 he pressured the religious of Paris when it was a question of finding a new title for a review to succeed the *Review of Christian Education*. Thus was born in 1880 the *Croix-Revue (Cross Review)*, three years before the daily *La Croix (The Cross)* appeared.

May 21

The tenderness of a Father for his daughters

Do you know that in an hour or two, I will be in the pulpit? I've been asked to preach for the poor. How can one manage to resist such an invitation? But be reassured, the little fatigue that this may cause me I will offer up for you, that you may grow in numbers. If you only knew all that I say about you! How I boast of you! How I play the owl speaking of the charm of its little ones! 'My little ones are such darlings.' I am trying to whet the appetite of many young women to seek to become an Oblate. Will we succeed? But how much we must also work hard at it! And how much this year must be a year of progress, a year of holiness, for those who will remain! That is why I am perhaps doing much better than it appeared at first in delaying my trip forty-eight hours. I am giving you this time to begin the work of your conversion. I want you to sanctify yourselves using all means, but especially regularity, obedience, charity, and humility.

*Letter to the Oblates of the Assumption,
August 28, 1868*

(Letters, vol. VII, p. 154-155)

[Part of this passage is repeated on February 29]

Fr. d'Alzon always had but one word of command for the members of the two congregations that he founded, the need for a permanent conversion in regards to the evangelical choice that is the foundation of their Christian existence: become saints. The question of means is but secondary. The same call to Gospel holiness resounds in the conciliar texts of Vatican II, without distinction of one's state of life, for all Christians animated by their baptismal faith.

May 22

Mutual affection as the lever of perfection

I do not know if you have, as much as you could have, the Christian tenderness of two sisters, in whom the friendship of the soul is stronger even than the bonds of blood. St. Theresa speaks somewhere of this friendship and wishes she could be its object, because it is useful to the one who is its object, and is a virtue in the soul possessing it. Do you wish, from now on, to love one another in this way? You answer yes, assuredly, and that is not one of those embarrassing and troubling questions for ones dear to me. Very well! If your answer is affirmative, then you must promise to mutually support one another, to no longer pay attention to the little problems that created a little coolness

between you, at the time of Juliette's departure for Vichy. That's not all, or rather it's really nothing; it's necessary, that in a Holy Communion that you will make for one another, that you ask our Lord for the strength to accomplish the mutual tasks that weigh upon persons resolved to spur each other to perfection. It will not always be easy. Each of you will want now and then to gain the upper hand; one will be too excited, the other too somber; one will be discouraged when the other will be full of life. It's none the less true that the Holy Spirit said: "The brother who is helped by his brother is like a fortified city" (Pr. 18:19).

*Letter to Juliette Combié and to Mrs. Doumet,
September 19, 1858
(Letters, vol. II, p. 527-528)*

There were four Combié siblings. Other than the two mentioned, there were Maurice and Sr. M. Catherine.

May 23

Obedience of Mary

Jesus is both her God and her son. As a good son he must provide for his mother. In this his last

testament we see the proof of his tenderness for John, the beloved disciple – he entrusts his mother to him! O Jesus, teach me to take your mother's interests to heart. O Mary, teach me to obey Our Blessed Lord as you did when he mapped out the remainder of your life by saying to Saint John: "*Ecce Mater tua, Here is your mother*".... and from that day John took you into his heart and into his home. But Jesus had begun by telling his mother: "*Here is your son*" – and the Church looks upon Saint John as having represented all of humanity on this occasion. "Sons of Adam, here is your mother. You are putting me, your saviour, to death. Having delivered myself up to you, and for you, I am offering you in return the most loving heart that ever beat – the most loving heart of my own dear mother." And Mary accepts this deal. She accepts as her children the very executioners of her son. The Roman soldiers were mere instruments, acting under orders. Our Lord's real executioners were the sinners like you and me. O Mary, what an immense effort of loving obedience it took you to accept the likes of us as your children! With what motherly affection you adopted us! May I, from this day forward, accept as a brother or a sister whomsoever Jesus sends my way. And if I experience repugnance towards any of them, let me remember how whole-

heartedly you submitted to Jesus' dying wish – by adopting those who had just killed him.

*Instruction on Compassion,
from The Essential d'Alzon (ES p.1012)*

One can admire the accuracy of this theological reading of the Passion of Christ, to the detriment of those more or less arbitrary historical interpretations that inevitably end up falsifying the realities of the mystery of the Redemption by laying the responsibility for Christ's death on the 'instruments.'

May 24

Mary and the Church

Indeed, other motives apart, there does exist between these two Christian truths a complementary relationship whereby one definition would inevitably pave the way for the other. Jesus Christ always placed Mary his Mother and the Church his Spouse on an almost equal footing. As Saint Augustine puts it, both are mothers and both are virgins. “*Ecclesia quoque et virgo et mater est.* The Church too,” he says – “is a virgin mother.” If Mary is the purest of virgins, so is the Church. The former gave birth to Truth –

the latter to the deposit of Truth. Is it not eminently fitting that the Pope who crowned Mary's head with the brightest of her diadems, should be the same Pope to proclaim in her person the virginal triumph of the Church? The Doctor of Hippo shows us the bishops eager to keep watch over the virginity of the spouse of Christ: "*Quomodo virgo nos est, cujus integritate consulimur*. How could she not be a virgin," he cries, "when we are charged with maintaining her integrity?" But where are we to look for this ecclesial virginity in all its splendour? Not, I fear, in the Church taught, the mass of the faithful. Can we say with absolute assurance that it is in the episcopacy, when we have seen and still see so many heretical bishops? It is contained, as in a reservoir, within the mind and heart of our Sovereign Pontiff – from whence it flows like a river onto those bishops truly in union with Peter. And what a great Council this will be! By proclaiming the infallibility of the Pope, it will have proclaimed here on earth the virginity of the Church

*Love of Mary,
from The Essential d'Alzon (ES p. 1002-1003).
Also, Letter to Bishop Dupanloup, March 29, 1870
(Letters, vol. VIII, p. 285)*

It was Pope Paul VI who, at the end of Vatican II, presented Mary as 'mother of the Church', through a specific gift of Christ to mankind.

May 24 is the anniversary of the founding of the Oblates of the Assumption, at Le Vigan (Rochebelle) in 1865.

May 25

Saint Gregory VII, pope

We celebrate today the feast of Saint Gregory VII, the pope who perhaps suffered the most for the Church. But what does suffering matter, as long as the beauty of the crown is enhanced? Your trials attach me to your Institute, for they can be a chastisement that will purify you and a test that will sanctify you. Pretend you are dead, recollect yourselves, strengthen yourselves in the religious spirit. God has his ways. But you need to take care of what you must do. Certain arrangements might be made that would allow us to assume a bit more responsibility for you, if that were to be of any good. We could look into that. It's clear that you are the object of a great deal of antipathy on the part of a few people. On the first nice day, I will

go to see you, even though I have three First Communion I must do one after the other.

*Letter to Mother Marie-Véronique
of the Heart of Jesus Lioger,
May 25, 1879
(Letters, vol. XIII, p. 121)*

Fr. d'Alzon liked to celebrate in Saint Gregory VII the model of popes as defenders of the Church and its rights in face of the pretensions of modern States and the vindications of the rights of man.

Mother Lioger (1825-1883), foundress in 1857 of the Religious Victims of the Sacred Heart, met with the hostility of the ecclesiastical authorities of Grenoble and Lyons. Their motherhouse was moved to Villeneuve-lès-Avignon (Gard). Fr. d'Alzon, named ecclesiastical superior of the congregation, had to intervene in order to support them.

May 26

Saint Philip Neri, founder of the Oratory

In reading the book on the spirit of Saint Philip Neri, I am struck by the absolute tendency of the Oratorians in finding good only what their founder had done. It seems to me that there are a few precautions to be taken in this regard; for, after all,

there would be nothing left for you to do but to become Oratorians, if this were the only advice to be followed. I submit these observations to you, for perhaps it would be necessary to have determined one's conditions beforehand, in order not to be pushed in a direction that is not one's own. When all is said and done, I do not believe that this was the true spirit of St. Philip, who had a special affection for the Capuchins and the Dominicans; he accepted, therefore, and encouraged a spirit other than that of the Oratory. I would like to know if his disciples are as broadminded.

*Letter to Mother Marie-Eugénie of Jésus,
March 5, 1857
(Letters, vol. II, p. 209)*

At the time there was question of securing an Oratorian chaplain for the community of the Religious of the Assumption in London. Thus the preoccupation and the warning of Fr. d'Alzon as to the true spirit, not so much of the founder of the Oratory, recognized as open and friendly toward other foundations, but rather toward that of certain of his disciples of the 19th century who might have proven to be narrow-minded and sectarian.

On May 26, 2002, in Plovdiv, Bulgaria, John Paul II declared as martyrs the three Bulgarian Assumptionists executed in 1952.

May 27

Mary and the Eucharist

The century which has witnessed the foundation of our religious family is a century in revolt. We are divinizing Man and denying God his rights. The Church has counteracted this deplorable tendency by making it the century of Mary and the century of the Blessed Sacrament. With the same end in view I have taken for motto¹: “*Adveniat Regnum Tuum. Thy Kingdom Come*”! To proclaim the rights of God and the Kingship of Christ made manifest in the self-abasement of the Holy Eucharist – to enhance Devotion to the Blessed Sacrament – to encourage the practice of the Forty Hours and outdoor processions – in other words to develop every possible aspect and reminder of Jesus' rights and Jesus' triumph through his Eucharist – such has become my mission. Jesus alone can enable me to understand this mission and give me the strength to accomplish it. His love draws me to the tabernacle. He wants to be united to me every day. Through me he wants to bear fruit for eternal life.

*Meditation on the Eucharist,
from The Essential d'Alzon (ES p. 952)*

¹ We know that Fr. d'Alzon took this motto, found in the Our Father, from the Constitutions of the Sisters of Marie-Thérèse and thereafter made it his own. He likewise proposed it as a motto for the Religious of the Assumption in July 1843, and gave a commentary on it in his letter of August 15, 1843 to Mother Marie-Eugénie of Jesus (*Letters*, vol. II, p. 86). It is easy enough to follow the thought of Fr. d'Alzon here in the connection that he establishes between Christ, Mary, the Church, and the Eucharist. Mary is the very model of this obedience to the rights of God and of Jesus Christ. She is also the highest figure in the Church, she who is born of the Eucharist. The Eucharist makes the Church just as the Church makes the Eucharist. Quite naturally, in exalting the mission of Mary and in developing the cult of the Eucharist, the Church deepens its link of belonging to Christ and strengthens the rights of God.

The year 2005 was proclaimed by Pope John Paul II as the year of the Eucharist.

May 28

Feast of the Holy Trinity

For we who believe in God, in Jesus Christ, in the Holy Spirit, we thank the Savior of humankind for assuring that the truth be taught to us, for communicating his grace, and for having raised us, through hope, above the exterior world, above ourselves. Therefore, oh wonderful Trinity, we

believe in the unity of your nature, in the distinction of your persons. We bow before the Father, Creator of all things. We accept in faith and obedience the teachings of the Son. We immerse ourselves as much as we are able in the torrents of the Holy Spirit's love. Oh Trinity, in you is power, wisdom, love. From your fullness give us everything that our wretchedness is capable of receiving. Give us the strength to confess you before all. Give us the joy of possessing you in adoration, light, and in the greatest union throughout eternity.

Le Pèlerin, June 1879, n° 127, p. 360
(Homily for Trinity Sunday)

According to the present liturgical calendar, the feast of the Holy Trinity is celebrated on the Sunday following the feast of Pentecost. The place and role of the Holy Trinity in the spirituality of Fr. d'Alzon is brought to light in a monograph by Fr. George Tavad, *The Weight of God: The Spiritual Doctrine of Emmanuel d'Alzon, Rome, 1980*. Nevertheless, the thought of the founder of Assumption, at least in his earliest years, is distinctly Christological and Christocentric in its favorite themes and expressions: the passion for the Kingdom, the mystical incarnation, or even, Eucharistic adoration, as Fr. Athanase Sage studied and demonstrated it so magisterially.

May 29

***Presentation of the Congregation
of the Assumptionists (1855)***

This little Association has existed for nearly ten years. It has about 25 to 30 members. It runs two schools, one in Nîmes where the congregation began, the other in Paris, as well as a house for the education of very young and poor Protestants, whom the parents entrust to us while authorizing us to make Catholics of them.

The work is supported by devoted lay people who have organized themselves into a Third Order directed by the religious. Teaching in schools, works of charity, publication of good books, teaching poor children is the goal of this Third Order. It is also its purpose, through a rather austere life, to protest against the loose ways of the world.

The religious aim especially at spreading the reign of Jesus Christ in souls, either by the education of the upper classes, or by having the children confided to them involved in all sorts of good works, or by inculcating in them a profound sense of their duty, not only as simple Christians, but also as members of the great society of the Church.

*Note given to Pope Pius IX around May 30, 1855
(Letters, vol. I, p. 548)*

On May 30, 1855, Fr. d'Alzon had the privilege of a private audience with Pope Pius IX. He presented to him his Congregation, Order, and Third-Order, its spirit, its aim, and the works already begun, as he wrote the day after to Msgr. Doney (*Letters*, vol. I, p. 550-554). By this time the first draft of the Constitutions had been written. Their approval was simply deferred.

May 30

Saint Joan of Arc (patronage of a heroine)

A crown was offered by the Assumption on May 30 to the heroic virgin whose virtues and valor saved France. It is on May 30 that the heretics burned her to death, four and a half centuries ago. On the crown are the simple words: *The Assumption House, to Joan of Arc*. For a long time we had been looking in one of the dioceses nearest to Paris for a property that offered the most favorable conditions for the establishment of the novitiate. At the time it was located in overly cramped quarters in the space reserved for it in the residence of the Assumptionist Fathers in Paris. Numerous and fervent prayers have been said to

address this situation. They have been heard. It is now in Sèvres, in the diocese of Versailles, that the land and the house were found; the bishop had manifested a desire of having a house of the Assumptionists there. This house, which offers several means of rapid and easy communication Paris, has quite a history. It is there that was located the fort or bastion that Joan of Arc entered when she came to rescue Paris from the English. That is why we decided that we would inaugurate this new house on the day of the centenary of Voltaire, which is also the anniversary of the death of Joan of Arc.

The Nîmes Assumption, 1878, p. 88, 80.

Joan of Arc was only beatified in 1909 and only canonized in 1920. She gave her name to a religious congregation of women founded by the Assumptionist, Marie-Clément Staub.

May 31

Visitation of the Virgin Mary

1. Notice the good you can do in the simplest encounters. The greeting of Mary addressed to her

cousin sanctifies John in the womb of Elizabeth and prepares him to one day be the greatest of the children of men. And it is this way with the simplest gestures of a religious if they are edifying.

2. Mary's perfections and privileges are explained to us by Elizabeth: *Et beata quae credidisti*¹. The spirit of faith will enable us to work wonders, will form Jesus Christ in us, and will make apostles of us. When we are ready, our faith will allow God to accomplish all of his promises in us: *quoniam perficientur ea quae dicta sunt tibi a Domino*².

*Fourth Letter to the Master of Novices,
from The Essential d'Alzon (ES p. 169)*

¹ *Blessed are you who believed*: Luke 1:45 (beginning of the verse).

² *Blessed is she who believed that the Lord's promises to her would be fulfilled*: Luke 1:45 (the whole verse).

The Order of the Visitation, founded by Francis de Sales and Jeanne-Françoise de Chantal, held a place of honor in the religious families of the Assumption. Mother Marie-Eugénie de Jesus was sent by Fr. Combalot in 1838 to the monastery of La Côte-Saint-André for her formation. She had the opportunity to read their Constitutions. One of the first R.A. communities in Paris was established in their neighborhood near Luxembourg, on Vaugirard Street. Fr. d'Alzon frequented their monastery in Tarascon and sent them a few vocations. On the other hand, Bishop Cart did not allow them to come to Nîmes, in spite of the efforts of Sr. Marie-

Aimée Féval. At the bishop's death, Fr. d'Alzon favored the arrival in Nîmes of a first R.A. community and there was no longer talk of the Visitation at Nîmes.

MONTH OF JUNE

The entire body of the faithful, anointed as they are by the Holy One, cannot err in matters of belief. They manifest this special property by means of the whole peoples' supernatural discernment in matters of faith when "from the Bishops down to the last of the lay faithful" they show universal agreement in matters of faith and morals. That discernment in matters of faith is aroused and sustained by the Spirit of truth. It is exercised under the guidance of the sacred teaching authority, in faithful and respectful obedience to which the people of God accepts that which is not just the word of men but truly the word of God. Through it, the people of God adheres unwaveringly to the faith given once and for all to the saints, penetrates it more deeply with right thinking, and applies it more fully in its life.

It is not only through the sacraments and the ministries of the Church that the Holy Spirit sanctifies and leads the people of God and enriches it with virtues, but, "allotting his gifts to everyone according as He wills, He distributes special graces among the faithful of every rank.

Vatican II, Lumen Gentium, 12-13

June 1

Invoking the Holy Spirit

May the Holy Spirit grant me the words that say what I want to be for you! I truly hope that you will believe this. Take your time in writing to me. It is enough for me to know that you are at peace. Before Mass we should recite the *Veni Creator* and right at the end of the Litany of the Blessed Virgin ask of the Holy Spirit and through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin what it is that we must do for the glory of God.

I ask you to be united with us. We are concerned about the upcoming school year which will be fine, but I do foresee some problems that will be quite new. We are going to make a novena to the guardian angels of our students. Do you want to join us in this prayer? I cannot tell you what prayers we will recite; you may not have a copy of them. What I can tell you is that in the morning before Mass we recite a *Veni Creator* after the Litany of the Blessed Virgin to invoke the light of the Holy Spirit and seek the intercession of Mary in a special way.

*Letter to Mother Marie-Eugénie de Jésus
and Mrs. de Narbonne-Lara,
September 20 and 22, 1851
(Letters, vol. 1, p. 88-89)*

The Holy Spirit was not a second-class citizen in the preaching, spirituality and written work of Fr. d'Alzon so often the case in the theology of the XIXth century. Invoked and entreated frequently, the Holy Spirit inspired the activity and the thinking which underlay and sustained d'Alzon's daily Christian life.

June 2

Pentecost Season

The apostles spent ten days in the Upper Room in the company of the Blessed Virgin and the holy women who comprised the cortege of the mother of the Savior. Suddenly a loud noise from heaven was heard; there arose a violent wind; different languages were spoken by various people gathered in Jerusalem for the Passover¹. Universal astonishment fell over the people. The preaching of the Gospel began with Peter; the Church was founded. Without going into this great mystery in depth, let us look at several main points concerning what happened on that great day.

The Holy Spirit sanctified the apostles; they were new men. Holiness had its saints under the Old Law, some admirable examples to be imitated: Abraham, Moses, Elijah and so many others. Nevertheless the new commandment, *mandatum novum*, had to become somehow more popular. The man of the Old Law was waiting for the Messiah; the man of the New Law waited for heaven whose doors the Messiah opened. For most of God's children, the practice of the virtues touches upon something most intimate, most humble, most intelligent, most energizing. The precepts of the Savior were not to be forgotten and the apostles presented them to us actively in every aspect of their lives. The holiness of the apostles became the seed for the holiness of the whole Church. They were seized by the Holy Spirit and their virtues inspired the hearts of the newly baptized who received this same Spirit.

Le Pèlerin, June 8, 1878, p. 370.

¹ The narrative of Pentecost in Acts 2:1-36.

June 3

Saint Charles Lwanga and companions¹

It would be a deplorable and dangerous tendency to imagine that the Saints “have had their day” – that henceforth there will be fewer and fewer of them – that the Blood which sowed the seeds of sanctity on Calvary has become diluted and lost its healthful properties – and that consequently it would be futile to expect Saints from the up-and-coming generation...

Since every era has produced its Saints – its own special kind of Saints: suited to the times – suited to the falsehood which had to be exposed and disproved – suited to the human misery which had to be relieved – suited to the ideals which had to be restored ... since this has always been so, I entertain no doubt that the Church, in these troubled times, has its Saints in the making. So it was after the Reformation – so it will be after the Revolution. The Reformation is not yet dead, but our saints will outlive it. The Revolution too will decline and fizzle out. So make way for the Saints – they are coming – they may be here already. The Church, ever the same, has its ups and downs. It may well be afflicted today, but it will give birth to saints tomorrow – of this you can rest assured.

¹ Feast of the 22 young Catholic martyrs of Uganda, burnt between 1885 and 1887 and canonized by Pope Paul VI in 1964 (the Anglican Communion commemorates another 23 of their own martyred at the same time, although the number of both churches certainly far exceeds those officially recognized). The novitiate in Butembo is named after Saint Charles Lwanga and that of Arusha after St. Kizito. Fr. d'Alzon, who died in 1880, could not have known of the heroic exploits of these martyrs of the XIXth century. However, he enthusiastically followed, beginning with his experience at Vatican I, the evangelizing movement that was unfolding in black Africa. As the diocesan director for the Propagation of the Faith, he encouraged taking up collections and read the missionary chronicles published in its *Annals*.

June 4

*The bond of family
finds its source in a common, original love*

The first benefit of family is the bond of blood¹. This tie establishes authority, unity and equality. As a result of it, a father derives the astonishing power that he exercises; as a result of it, a mother feels an unrivalled love being formed

in the depths of her womb toward the child she will present to the world; as a result of it, a son is compelled to love those who transmitted part of their being to him. Look at the many children who surround their father and mother. Carried in the same womb, the same blood circulates in their veins, and the life that flowed through the same channels places in their heart identical heartbeats. The life that was transmitted to their parents is shared in some respects as a new child is born; but these diverse streams sense that, going back to their source, they are reunited in one common source. If you want another image, it is like the branches of a beautiful tree emerging from the same trunk. What brings all these brothers and sisters together is the union of father and mother, who are joined in their mutual love. All these family members are reunited by virtue of the fact that they sense, under the same authority, an equality of nature that constitutes the strongest reason for the equality of their rights.

Sermon on truth (T.D., vol. 42, p. 202-203)

¹ Emmanuel d'Alzon was fortunate to have benefited from a very strong and stable family life. In 1869, he lost his last direct family tie when his second sister Marie died. However, he continued to visit Lavagnac where his nephew, Jean, continued the old family traditions filled with faith and charity.

June 5

*The Eucharist,
mystery of unity and communion*

Jesus teaches us the knowledge of man's union with God – the mediation between God and us. Jesus Christ, one and the same God with God the Father, took unto himself a human nature, and in doing so united Humanity with Divinity in his one Person. But this union is achieved still more marvellously in the Holy Eucharist. When you receive Holy Communion, you and Our Blessed Lord become fused into one – consequently you bring about a “oneness” between yourself and God the Father. Isn't it a wonderful mystery, this Divine Union Our Lord urges us to contract with him! – and where but in the Blessed Sacrament and in Holy Communion can the reality of this contract be brought home to us? It also teaches us how all Christians become linked together in God – because just as each individual by receiving Communion unites himself so closely to Christ as to turn into one with him, so the many individuals who thus receive Our Lord cease to be separate and become members of one and the same body. The Eucharist is not like the food we eat – it doesn't turn into us. On the contrary, this divine nourishment turns us spiritually into Him (Saint

Augustine). It is Jesus Christ who absorbs us – so is it not true that by nourishing our souls with his Body, and thus being absorbed into Him, we acquire a unity with Him that is not only mysterious but wonderfully real? And this wonderful unity will be consummated still more wonderfully in the life hereafter when our entire being becomes totally absorbed into God.

*Octave of the Most Blessed Sacrament,
from The Essential d'Alzon (ES p. 968-969)*

June 6

Article on the Feast of Corpus Christi: 'repositories'¹

At various intervals religion places feasts destined, it would seem, to refresh the human spirit exhausted by work and to re-ignite in one's heart the flame that has nearly been extinguished by one's sufferings, the sad companions of our human condition. It seems that in our exile religion wished to lighten the weight of trials by giving us a glimpse of the rewards of our true homeland... In order to reach this goal, by what ingenious means does it not try to surprise us? For

those who don't always grasp the depths of these mysteries, for those who are incapable of being moved by the sublime vision of this community of which we have all become members, religion still has something up her sleeve; she has her pageantry and her feast days for those who have to have their senses stimulated before their hearts are touched. And when is this pageantry ever more evident than on the feast of Corpus Christi, the day on which all Christians who adore Jesus the Savior under the appearance of ordinary bread double their efforts to enhance this solemnity? How touching it is on that day to see the extravagance of the poor peasant decorating the façade of his humble cottage to honor the passage of his God, to acknowledge all the gifts he has received from Him! How one loves to come and pray at these tiny altars, decorated not luxuriously but with the simplicity of its villagers! The hangings are not very rich, the decorations don't have much value, but these hangings like the decorations, often just taken from their homes, become priceless when one considers that they were used to provide a resting place where the Son of Man found a spot to rest his head!

*Article published in Le Correspondant, June 1829,
according to T.D. vol. VII, p. 203, 204
(cf. Letters, vol. A, p. 27)*

¹ *repositoires*: refers to the small altars on which the Blessed Sacrament was placed during processions.

June 7

Article on Corpus Christi: processions

Should we speak of these solemn processions advancing down the streets as if in triumph? At times, the procession starts with young children emblazoned with the symbols of their patron saints; little angels with golden and sky blue wings present a spectacle filled with grace. It is as if borrowing the bodies of the ones they are in charge of protecting, these heavenly princes come down on earth to make the procession less unworthy of the one who is Master of all. Following the young virgins dressed in white, can you see the elders robed in gray, staff in hand? They are pious pilgrims; they have made many trips, crossed many seas, and now, in their last days, they are happy to see once again the feasts that were the delight of their infancy. It is truly something majestic to behold all the clergy vested in their priestly vestments; it is a pleasure to see these old priests who have carried the burden of work gather round this divine bread that their

words so often brought down from heaven, that their hands distributed to so many infirm, and in which they found their strength for the day of battle. There is also something very moving in the choir of young Levites whose thurible bears incense in the presence of the Victim as a symbol of a fervent prayer or in the flowers they toss before the unblemished Lamb, offering Him the pure and delicate flowers of their virginity.

*Article published in the Correspondant, June 1829,
according to T.D., vol. VII, p. 204, 205
(cf. Letters, vol. A, p. 27)*

The solemnity of Corpus Christi readily took place outdoors in this festive atmosphere.

June 8

Unity and communion in the Holy Trinity

In the name of the Father who created us, of the Son who ransomed us, of the Holy Spirit who sanctified us. Amen. The Holy Trinity desires deeply to take care of fallen humanity with various kindnesses; it made man in its image and likeness¹. This same Trinity gives to each creature

the power to exist and in that way each person resembles the Father, the principle of divine being. This same Trinity gives him the faculty of thinking and in that way each person resembles the Son, the eternal intelligence of the Father. And it gives him the faculty of willing and loving and in that way each person resembles the divine Spirit who proceeds from the Father and the Son.

But if creation is more specifically attributed to the Father, to the incarnate Son is especially ascribed redemption by which we are made sons of the Father and we receive the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit comes in us and communicates his love which unites to the Father and the Son in the unity of the Spirit.

Le Pèlerin, June 15, 1878, p. 387.

¹ According to Gen 1:26. Father d'Alzon outlines the traditional and specific functions within the Holy Trinity: to the Father, the work of creation, to the Son, that of redemption, and to the Spirit that of sanctification. But his presentation is in a sense more mystical since he insists more on the mystery of communion that is the very life of God or in God. The Spirit's role is fully brought out as the generator of divine life.

June 9

Directives for the Congregation

I have several observations to make if the consalter named for our case asks to see you: 1) The name that we want to take is that of Augustinians of the Assumption and not Augustinians of France. 2) If we do not emphasize austerity, it is because, as I already mentioned to you, we wish to receive religious with poor health; the others can go to the Dominicans or the Carmelites. 3) We are not seeking to join the Hermits of St. Augustine or the Canons Regular because it seems to me that the Canons have a rule that is too soft and the Hermits live by constitutions that could possibly hinder us in the activities that we seek to do. 4) Above all, we hold to the practice of poverty. We see it as indispensable for these times and consider it a protest against the mores of the day. 5) We hold to the recitation of the Divine Office and prefer having fewer houses so as to recite it more regularly. 6) We strongly advocate works of charity permitting direct interaction with the faithful and to forestall as much as possible their demoralization. 7) Above all else, we advocate developing in hearts and minds a love for the Church of Rome.

*Letter to Fr. François Picard,
January 7, 1857
(Letters, vol. II, p. 181-182)*

The goal of this letter was to present the principal characteristics under which the Assumption wanted to be known in the Roman milieu with the perspective of obtaining the decree of praise as a first stage to being recognized. Fr. Picard was finishing his theology studies at the time in Rome.

June 10

Eucharistic Adoration

So what are we to render God for having loved us so much? The answer is: we must adore him. We must give him all we have and all we are: our thoughts and feelings, our mind and heart, our body and soul. How few of us adore him to this extent! How many of us wrangle and bargain with God over the very gifts he bestowed to enable our love for him to be total and undivided! To adore Jesus hidden in the Blessed Sacrament we need the three Theological Virtues: Faith, Hope and Charity. Diminished, restricted, reduced to naught, in fact annihilated – Faith reveals him nevertheless to be God: the Almighty and Everlasting God,

whose Power, Wisdom and Goodness stretch beyond time and space. Hope reveals him as everything we could possibly desire. On him alone can we, and must we, always depend – for who has ever loved us, and can ever love us, as much as this Vast, uncreated Love? And what about Charity? Can Hope and Charity ever be distinguished in Him who is the infinite expression of both? How is it possible not to love this God of ours? Obedient to the voice of one of his creatures, he comes down onto the altar time and time again. There he hides himself under the sacred species – and there he remains until he has accomplished such a union between Himself and his loved ones as defies every effort of our imagination.

*Octave of the Most Blessed Sacrament,
from The Essential d'Alzon (ES p.981-982)*

The Eucharist calls into action the three theological virtues: it puts faith to the test, it is a guarantee of hope, and it enkindles charity. Eucharistic adoration, linked to the sacramental celebration, became one of the declared goals of the mission of the Religious of the Assumption. From 1860 on, some of their foundations were established specifically with that in mind. Fr. d'Alzon developed his reflections on Eucharistic devotion more specifically with a view to the foundation of the Adorers between 1855 and 1865, notably on the occasion of a series of instructions that he gave them.

June 11

*Eucharistic devotion,
ferment of Christian unity*

Here is a thought. In the East the iconoclast heresy gave rise to the cult of images. Reaction to the Protestant heresy gave birth to Eucharistic devotion. But the East has been very neglectful of Our Lord: the schismatic East with its sacrileges and the Catholic East by the few honors it renders to the Eucharist. The East should be revitalized by making it participate in what's happening in the West. Unity will return when we can say: *Unum corpus multi sumus omnes, qui de uno pane participamus*¹. The more we can partake of the Body of Jesus Christ, the more unity will become a reality. I believe that it is essential to develop a love of Our Lord in the Eucharist and if Perpetual Adoration were to be established in your chapel when the Blessed Sacrament is present, I am certain that you would be the beneficiaries of many graces. I am not saying that the Blessed Sacrament must be exposed. What I am saying is that some of your more serious children should always be in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament. Think it over. I believe this is the essential. When one enjoys being united to Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrament, one will also

want to belong to the Church that lets one participate in this activity the most.

*Letter to Fr. Victorin Galabert,
October 4, 1864
(Letters, vol. V, p. 157)*

¹ *I Cor 10:17*: “We, many though we are, are one body for we all partake of the one loaf.” Let us simply note that Fr. Galabert, present on the spot, knew how to highlight the liturgical patrimony proper to the Orient.

June 12

A brother for life, Eugène Germer-Durand¹

Now, my dear friend, do you understand how I need your friendship, in the full sense of the word? In your education and mine, there is what I would call a level of instinctive ideas that enables you as a simple Christian to understand by intuition what I want to do, much more than others with all of their human reasoning. You also understand why I have been able to accomplish a number of good works without much enthusiasm and why the enterprise to which I am devoted for life is able to my whole being. I, too, could

discuss one by one the works that I have undertaken and, perhaps, be justified in doing so. But I would rather admit to one fact that is true, and that is that I have not always shown the required interest that was expected of me....In short, whether one is willing to accept it or not, I will try. I will succeed, God willing; I will fail, God willing. It doesn't matter to me! The idea is in my head and in my heart; I must bring it to fruition in spite of all the human obstacles, which don't bother me at all.

*Letter to Eugène Germer-Durand,
May 31, 1845
(Letters, vol. B, p. 254, 255)*

¹ Eugène Germer-Durand (1812-1880), distinguished University professor, who transferred to the Collège de l'Assomption, husband and father of a family, was more than an initial collaborator of Fr. d'Alzon. Confidant and friend, member of the Third-Order, he committed himself with faith to all of the major causes and activities of the Assumption.

Independence Day in the Philippines is June 12. Let us unite in prayer with the Assumption Family in this country and especially with the Assumptionist community that arrived in 2006.

June 13

Association of the Sacred Heart¹

My dear friend, I want to take care of it; I want to take care of you. For God did not fashion our friendship in vain. Poor young man, I'll never lose sight of you. I'll try to keep you close to me. When I ask Our Lord for a place in His heart, I'll do the same for you. It is there that I will see you often. The Association that we've begun, that of the Sacred Heart, is wonderful. The members get together twice a day in the house of divine love. I don't belong to it, but if you want to belong, I will too and twice a day our two hearts will be able to meet. It is stronger than I. I am compelled to keep saying that I love you. Well, yes, I love you, but promise me that you'll love God, that you'll open yourself to Him in all your difficulties and I'll forget everything.

*Letter to Lugien de Jouenne d'Esgrigny,
March 25, 1832
(Letters, vol. A, p. 294)*

¹ Already in May 1833, at the major seminary of Montpellier, Emmanuel d'Alzon had established a holy alliance to promote greater spiritual fervor among the seminarians by means of a consecration to the cross which

he himself had composed (*from The Essential d'Alzon, ES p. 750-754*).

June 14

God of love, God-Love

*Deus caritas est*¹. “God is Love” (I Jn 4:16). Love is part of our human “make-up,” one of our faculties. It is more than just a part of God. He actually is Love. God has a will. This will relates to certain objects. The result is Love. You see, love is a force which unites us to something (or someone) in which (in whom) we find happiness. Saint Thomas Aquinas calls it a “unifying force” *Amor est vis unitiva*². Creatures have to love something other than themselves, because no creature is by nature self-sufficient. God, on the contrary, must necessarily love Himself. What would be the epitome of disorder in us is right order in God. Infinite Goodness cannot help recognising and loving itself, because its intellect is unlimited and its will supreme.

Then again, with us love is never unaccompanied by some form of emotion –we cannot attain God without passing through the channel of our senses. God's love operates calmly,

above the stratosphere; it is towards this serene, stratospheric love and less on our feelings that we must strive. The more we know God, the more perfect will be our love. Now nothing is more perfect than faith. We must therefore get rid of our personal ideas and make ours by faith the divine ideas.

*Octave of the Blessed Sacrament,
from The Essential d'Alzon (ES p. 864)*

¹ I Jn 4:8. This expression of John's gospel was beautifully taken up in the first encyclical of Pope Benedict XVI from Christmas 2005.

² This is a typical expression of Scholastic thought, love as a path of or strength for unity. This elevation of divine love is emphasized by Fr. d'Alzon who complained, supporting himself by quoting Bossuet, that people were not studying theology enough and that the clergy was settling for preaching moralistic platitudes. For him, preaching had to be nourished by theology so as to develop piety in oneself and in others.

June 15

Corpus Christi
(Feast of the Body and Blood of Christ
or Feast of the Blessed Sacrament)

My friend, during the octave of the Blessed Sacrament (Corpus Christi), I invite you to spend a little more time than usual at the feet of Our Lord. Implore this good Master to fill you with holy desires. Your spiritual life has waned; you need to implore Him to give it back to you by His converse with you. *Hic est panis* –yes, and He himself is the one who declares it. *Hic est panis de coelo descendens, ut si quis ex ipso manducaverit, non moriatur*¹. How so? First, because we attach ourselves to Him through faith and therein lies a principle of life. How can the soul live other than by truth? And how can the soul which is finite and obtuse grasp eternal truth except by faith? Here is the miracle. The One who is life eternal in God, who is life and light for the one who comes into this world², is also bread working within us and unknown to us. At the same time, we give our assent through faith to truth. Just as our eyes upon opening adjust to the light from without and thus we enter into contact with living beings outside of us, so our being incorporates, in eating, an external principle of life.

*Letter to Brother François Picard,
June 16, 1851
(Letters, vol. I, p. 46)*

¹ Jn 6:50: “*This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that a man may eat it and not die.*”

² Jn 1:9. We can easily understand, as we read this correspondence, that the first religious were amazed by Fr. d’Alzon’s ability to think and how to communicate ideas known for their solid originality, their breath of faith and their extraordinary vibrancy.

June 16

In favor of a Catholic press

Before leaving Le Vigan, I would like you to write up the program for a Catholic newspaper¹ that should appear on January 1. You are to explain: 1) that we are Catholic before all else; 2) that we are not a political party; 3) that we are, nevertheless, a political party in the sense that, as Catholics, we want our place in the public forum and are prepared to extend a hand to all honest individuals whatever the party and to respect their opinions as long as they respect our principles. Concerning political structures, we believe that terrible upheavals are occurring in Europe and that

democracy will triumph in the distant future. Since the aristocracy has disappeared, we would like the bourgeoisie of some large centers to help us understand toward what the bourgeoisie is leaning; we must above all address ourselves to the people. Someone just interrupted me. Set your mind on preaching Catholic ideas that need to penetrate society. Without leaving home, you would have an audience that doesn't always come to listen to sermons and, bit by bit, given the style of the first three pages of your letter, you would have them eating out of your hand. So I recommend this idea to you.

*Letter to Fr. Emmanuel Bailly,
December 5, 1870
(Letters, vol. VIII, p. 533-534)*

¹ The daily newspaper *La Croix* appeared for the first time on June 16, 1883, the feast of the Sacred Heart that year. *Le Pèlerin* preceded it (1873), as did the *Vie des Saints* (1878) and the *Croix-Revue* (1880). Fr. d'Alzon was interrupted as he wrote this letter and did not reread it; that's why some of what he says in this letter is a bit unclear.

June 17

Visit to the Blessed Sacrament

Tomorrow I will see your father, if I can, since I'll be spending several hours in Beaucaire and we will talk about you; but first I would like to share a word with you. I must admit that your life, as you describe it, strikes me as very interesting, and no matter what you say, you won't experience better times. Take advantage of it. Your rule of life strikes me as perfect, except for one thing that needs to be eliminated, or at least, minimized as much as possible, and two others to be added. I would like to see less time spent on entertainment. As for the additions: 1) each day read a chapter of the *Imitation (of Christ)* seriously and devoutly; 2) when you pass by a church and have the time, take a minute or two to adore the Blessed Sacrament¹. You are generous, Numa, and Our Lord wants us to love Him and to prove it by these little visits.

*Letter to Numa Baragnon,
February 8, 1854
(Letters, vol. I, p. 384)*

¹ The visit to the Blessed Sacrament, as a spiritual exercise, is linked to the development of the Eucharistic devotion that since the XIth century in the West tended to offer paraliturgical moments for the veneration of the Sacred Species

(outside of the celebration of the Eucharist itself). The reforms of Vatican II insisted strongly on maintaining and strengthening the links between the celebration of the sacraments and the devotions that might flow from them in such a way as to articulate the latter in relation to the dogma of the Eucharist and to give them their rightful place. In October 2004 the Eucharistic Year was inaugurated (Instruction *Mane Nobiscum Domine*).

June 18

Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament

1) From the day you receive this letter until the news of the misfortune that we are all dreading reaches you¹, each evening Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament shall take place in your church and shall be preceded by the singing the *Parce Domine*, the *Miserere*, and the prayer *Pro infirmis in agone constitutis*. 2) This same prayer, with the Secret and the Post-communion prayers, shall be recited each day at Mass by the priests of your parish, whom you are to notify of these directives; 3) If the population of your parish is numerous enough to allow it, you are authorized to expose the Blessed Sacrament for three days, using the Forty Hours format. Please notify the communities whom you consider capable of

participation without inconvenience of this permission.

*Letter to the priests of the diocese of Nîmes,
August 6, 1855
(Letters, vol. I, p. 574)*

¹ Bishop Cart, bishop of Nîmes, seriously ill, was on his deathbed. He died on August 12, 1855. This directive is very instructive because it illustrates the widespread use, on the local level of parishes, of all the para-liturgies linked to the devotion of the Blessed Sacrament. The Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament was also called Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. Fr. René Paris, an Assumptionist, composed the famous *R.P.* to this end.

June 19

Daily Companion

Do you have a crucifix and what's your attitude toward it? First of all, let me invite you to obtain one like that of the Sisters. There is a certain advantage to that. Small crucifixes inspire little devotion (at least for me); large crucifixes are clumsy. If your habit allows you to wear one, be without it as little as possible and arrange it so that you have access to it whenever you wish. Put it on

your table when you write; on your knees when you work (so as to look at it from time to time and kiss it); and in your hands when you go to sleep. To be sure, nothing is more precious than frequent communion and adoration of the Blessed Sacrament; but one cannot always have Our Lord substantially present in one's heart; one cannot constantly be at His feet; but one can always carry His image on his person and this image will speak volumes to you.

*Letter to the Adorers of the Blessed Sacrament,
June 21, 1857
(Letters, vol. II, p. 267)*

After the creation of the Association of the Adorers, Father d'Alzon wrote them a series of collective letters to feed the fervor of their initial undertaking. He shared the inner recesses of his soul with them and this passage is one of the most explicit examples of that depth. It bears witness to a mystical grace recently granted to him by the Lord during his illness at Lamalou, deeply troubled by a financial crisis that was jeopardizing the Collège in Nîmes. This beautiful letter on the crucifix, reproduced many times, magnificent in its simplicity, has undoubtedly consoled many a sick person and revived hope in the midst of trial.

June 20

***The true homeland of the Christian:
happiness and truth in the light of God***

Well, truth is the homeland of the Christian. Through the truth the Christian has a father who is God. Through the truth the Christian has a brother who is Jesus Christ as well as brothers and sisters who consist of all men and women. Through the truth the Christian has a field ready to be cultivated by his intelligence. Through the truth he possesses glory, laws, freedom. And if all of this doesn't form a homeland, I don't know what a homeland is. Yet it is even something more: it is the place where one rests, the place where one is happy. And the place where we are happy is not on this earth, but on high. But what kind of rest is to be found on high? Is it not clear vision? Happiness, then, flows from the truth, light from God Himself, in whom it has been given to see the light made for the human eye: *in lumine tuo videbimus lumen*¹.

Sermon on truth (T.D., vol. 42, p. 208)

¹ 'By your light we see the light', according to Psalm 36:10b. This passage helps us to grasp clearly the familiar method with which Fr. d'Alzon tried to reach his audience. The deepest mysteries of faith did not frighten him, since he

knew how to present them concretely, by analogy of faith, making use of the relationships that united these truths intimately among themselves. Abstract words take on a human tone through the use of images. Fr. d'Alzon was always preoccupied in deepening the many implications of the truths of the faith by clothing them in the language of the world: the relationships of father and brother, the field to be cultivated, the homeland of rest and happiness. The horizon remains with God from whom all light springs.

June 21

The Crucifix

If, when you get up in the morning, you kiss your crucifix with love and promise to carry it throughout the day by retracing the steps of the divine Crucified One; if during your meditation (unless you do it in a church) you hold the cross in your hands and you agree to be immolated on the altar of Jesus' sacrifice; if, to awaken your fervor, you touch your crucifix from time to time; if you squeeze it more firmly during times of anxiety, stress, struggle, or temptation; if, when you set out to perform a good deed, you adore the Crucified Christ remembering that it is once again Jesus Christ in the poor that you are helping; if, at the moment of practicing some form of mortification,

you kiss the divine wounds that are the sources of life of the Church and the sources of our purification; if, at night, you go to His feet to engage in an examination of conscience of your day, of your pride in the face of his humbling Himself, of your vanities in the face of His humiliations, of your cowardice in the face of His agonies, of your laziness in the presence of the profuse sweat flowing from this divine body, of your egotism in the face of His infinite love, of your bouts of impatience, your grudges, your lack of charity in face of His patient waiting and His unfailing tenderness, - ah! my children, I find it very difficult to believe that your crucifix would not become your friend, your confidant.

*Letter to the Adorers of the Blessed Sacrament,
June 21, 1857
(Letters, vol. II, p. 267)*

The best commentary on this text is that of Fr. d'Alzon himself in his letter dated June 20, 1857 to Marie-Eugénie of Jesus; there he reveals the fruit of his experience.

June 22

At night, before retiring

I'll admit to you with the greatest simplicity that the best moment for me to reflect is especially at night, when I am about to retire. It doesn't take much effort to think of the good Master whose image is held in one's hands. You tell Him that you love Him; you ask forgiveness for your foolishness and are suddenly struck by this forgiveness that comes down from the cross. With remorse, you think of the harm that sin has caused Him, the time wasted, the blessings received. You thank Him for his acts of generosity, make fervent promises. You blush for being in a fine bed knowing that he died on the gallows. You are anxious to love Him and to make up for lost time. In offering His Son you adore God the Father; you invoke the Holy Spirit that He sent to us; you pray for the Church born on Calvary; you blush for being such bad Christians; then you summon courage as you think of the love and the power of God, and, if you haven't yet fallen asleep, you find that time passes quickly in such company.

*Letter to the Adorers of the Blessed Sacrament,
June 21, 1857
(Letters, vol. II, p. 268)*

Father d'Alzon speaks from experience using this marvelous blend of simplicity and humility in a form of surrender in faith and a spirit of spiritual childhood. Amid the most severe trials, which tested his ego, he knew how to remain in this supernatural atmosphere proper to souls of faith. Knowledge of the mystery of the cross not only helped him live through the trials of health and the crisis of the Collège, but also to sustain the hope of the sick around him and to strengthen the hearts of numerous people who sought his direction.

June 23

The Ministry of Perpetual Adoration

Please believe me when I say that I'll be quite happy to express the sympathy that you are requesting. But, once your chapel has been blessed, I'll have to see if I can come right away to celebrate Mass at this cherished tomb. That is something I cannot promise at this time in spite of my desire to offer this religious homage in memory of Mr. Varin. No, I didn't want to upset you, but rather tell you everything that I have been thinking; and since I am thinking out loud with you, my thoughts do not go beyond my words... Therefore, in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament¹ try to recover your peace and ask Our

Lord to lead you, quickly or slowly, according to His better judgment. Nevertheless, try to take into some account our fragility. The ministry of perpetual adoration which has begun in Alès is a very good thing. Try to find associates sufficiently motivated so that this ministry not fail.

*Letter to Mrs. Varin d'Ainvelle,
March 4, 1859
(Letters, vol. III, p. 37-38)*

¹ The ministry of perpetual adoration (day and night) is one form of the development of Eucharistic devotion outside of the liturgical celebration of the Mass. It began in Rome as nocturnal adoration in 1810 and was introduced in Paris by 1814 by the future Bishop de la Bouillerie, then in 1848 at the shrine of Notre-Dame des Victoires. In 1885, perpetual adoration was introduced at Montmartre and has continued without interruption.

June 24

Birth of Saint John the Baptist, the Forerunner

It is the very nature of Jesus' generosity that in granting us the possibility of continuing his work, of extending it, of expanding it, that he puts us in a position to return something of what we have

received from him. I must admit that the title of savior that Christians must carry in their turn, if they have the fullness of the spirit of Jesus, touches me deeply, since the highest degree of this spirit is to assure that not only they be saved but that they might assist in the salvation of others. In this way they receive light and warmth much like one torch being lit by another, that is, truth and love, and moreover that they assist in communicating them. Like John the Baptist, *they are not the light*¹, but they are lamps all the stronger and more brilliant by virtue of their greater participation in the redemptive action of the Savior.

*Letter to Mother Marie-Eugénie de Jésus,
January 21, 1850
(Letters, vol. C, p. 542)*

¹ According to Jn 1:8. The mystery of Redemption, well understood by Fr. d'Alzon, lies at the heart of Christian faith and constitutes the flip side of the Incarnation. But Fr. d'Alzon is not content to repeat or paraphrase the dogma; he attempts to draw out all the possible implications for his audience. Through the mystical Incarnation, the Christian is driven to give birth to Christian life; through the Redemption, he is called to be concerned about the salvation of his neighbors. The Church becomes the spiritual and incarnate movement of this collaboration or this solidarity in the apostolic missionary work. John the Baptist offers us a striking illustration, he who was not the voice but the

spokesperson, he who was not the light, but the torch or the lamp preparing or preceding this light.

June 25

When grief strikes: the death of a friend

I write to you with a very heavy heart: my old friend Du Lac died while I was at Arras. He will be buried shortly. Since he lived at Bon Fontaine for twenty years and since people do not care for hotel draperies, his body was transferred without fanfare to Saint Thomas Aquinas. I was able to accompany the corpse with Veillot; the funeral ceremony takes place today. Mr. d'Esgrigny would like the body to be transferred to Picardy to the family plot. Alas! To leave from here or from there for the final judgment, what does it matter to this dust that was our body? A whole world that I knew is beginning to disappear. There were four of us: Gouraud, d'Esgrigny, Du Lac, and myself. Du Lac is gone. His death wounded poor Gouraud, who was cured by a homeopath after some time. He came to his deathbed driven by friendship. The Veillots were to be admired, but the collapse has finally begun.

*Letter to Marie Correnson,
August 9, 1872
(Letters, vol. IX, p. 410)*

Jean-Melchior, count of Montvert Du Lac and d'Aure (1806-1872) was a close and longtime friend of Emmanuel d'Alzon, whom he came to know during his university days in Paris. He became a seminarian and even briefly tried monastic life with the Benedictines of Solesmes. His ecclesiastic vocation was thwarted by family problems. He ultimately found his calling in journalism at *l'Univers*, alongside Louis Veuillot with whom he shared an ultramontane enthusiasm. A man of simple taste, he lived discreetly as a celibate with a certain austerity of principles. Fr. d'Alzon delighted in contacting him on all the issues that were stirring in the capital, notably those that emanated from the nuncio's residence. This unexpected death plunged him into sadness, moving him to sense the end of his century.

June 26

***God, source of all knowledge
and all search for truth inscribed in man***

I beg you, my brothers, to join me in casting a quick glance at the works of the human spirit. Why do we rummage through the annals of history, trying to return to the origins of people or

to study the work of social formations? Why do you see people bent down to the earth looking at plants and classifying them by species, studying the behavior of animals and attempting to understand the laws of nature, excavating the sides of mountains to reveal the timeline of the universe? Why do others, leaving the world of bodies, enter into the world of knowledge and, withdrawing into themselves, try to meditate on the phenomena of the moral world? Why are there so many systems? Why so many religions? What is the source of this hidden energy that compels the human spirit toward the unknown?

Why? Because one wants to know truth. Truth is the ultimate goal, and through whatever form it has presented itself to him over time, in the physical world or in the spiritual world, truth is pursued everywhere with unbelievable avidity. Yes, truth is food for the human spirit. He wants it and seeks it with all his strength. But will it be found in history, in the physical world, in the intellectual world? And when I speak of truth in history or in nature, notice, please, that I am not referring to that truth that consists in discovering certain isolated facts, but rather to the truth that dominates them all. But, although it subsists there, man will not see it and the proof of this is that he has never seen it. And so, where will he find this

truth, the object of his desires? He'll find it in the one who said: '*I am the truth. Ego sum veritas*'¹.

Sermon on the Word of God
(*T.D.*, vol. 42, p. 222-223)

¹ Jn 14:6.

June 26 is the national holiday of Madagascar. Let us pray for this country and for all the communities of the Assumption Family present on this island.

June 27

Like the apostles, trust in what we must be

Your experiences will be of little use to you. With the world not about to change overnight, surprises will be with you until the end of time. Nevertheless, I am far from being discouraged. Our Lord who *knew what was in the human heart*¹ died for us. We are not ready to suffer the indignities that he underwent; and since we deserve what happens to us, what we are worth in our own eyes lies really in what we should or what we would want to become, rather than in what we are in reality. However, I must tell you

that the 9 religious who will be with us next year in Nîmes are very enthusiastic and eager. The contagion has even infected your husband. I envisage the year about to begin with moral results already achieved and I am filled with a confidence shared by all those around me. With regard to opposition, it is unavoidable and will undoubtedly be quite strong. That's the way it must be. We will be humble; we will be small; we will be joyful like *the apostles who were flogged... And so they left the presence of the Sanhedrin glad to have had the honor of suffering humiliation for the sake of the name*².

*Letter to Mrs. Cécile Germer-Durand,
August 25, 1866
(Letters, vol. VI, p. 134-135)*

¹ Jn 2:25.

² Ac 5:41.

Mrs. Cécile Germer-Durand (1818-1886) was the wife of the professor of the Collège in whom Fr. d'Alzon had full confidence but of whom he did not always share his cautious apprehensions or his somber moods. Once she became a widow, she chose religious life with the Oblates and spent some time in Eastern Europe. One of their sons, Joseph, became an Assumptionist.

June 28

***Saint Irenaeus of Lyons:
Tradition and Scripture***

The apostles would go and teach in two ways, by preaching and by writing, C letters which have been preserved with great care. Let us note that they were written for particular situations. They were letters preserved in the Church thanks to a special grace of the Holy Spirit in such a way that if the Holy Spirit did not exist, the letters would have gotten lost or falsified. The Church frequently had to pronounce itself on these letters. But note that the Church would show no less respect for Tradition than for these letters. Why? Because Tradition preceded the letters. Jesus Christ never wrote anything. Several peoples, according to Saint Irenaeus, were Christians and never possessed the Sacred Scripture. Saint Augustine affirms that the man who has faith, hope, and charity has no need of the sacred letters. Therefore, when you say to me, show me such and such a dogma in Holy Scripture, I will answer that it matters little that I show it to you in Sacred Scripture or not, as long as I show it based on an authority greater than Sacred Scripture, because it is by Tradition that I come to know Sacred Scripture.

*Notes for an instruction (around 1841),
according to T.D., vol. 50, p. 303 (DO1575)*

In Fr. d'Alzon's mind, the study of Sacred Scripture could not be separated from the study of the Fathers of the Church. He often referred to the Fathers to truly understand the Word of God. Throughout his life Fr. d'Alzon constantly sought out whatever was being said or written on the Fathers. He bought the Migne collection as it appeared volume by volume. He wrote that *one had to take precautions against dangerous new trends by possessing a firm grasp of the interpretations that the bishops of the early Church gave to the writings of the Apostles.*

June 29

Saints Peter and Paul, Apostles

After the Ascension, the Lord chose a vicar from among His apostles who received a mandate to govern the Church and exercise primacy of jurisdiction that the bishops of Rome, the successors of St. Peter, would maintain forever and ever.

Let us examine the character of the man chosen by God to fill such a lofty office. Simon, son of John and brother of Andrew, was a simple fisherman from the village of Bethsaida, on the

shore of Lake Genesareth. The Gospels paint the character of Simon Peter as rash and presumptuous, but devoted, loving, and self-forgetful. Everything in him tended toward activity rather than contemplation; the cast of his genius seems to have served as a prototype for the Latin genius. The whole of his character brings together the good qualities of the French character and one could almost describe him with this familiar expression: with him, the heart primes the head... Let us be, like Peter, ready to give ourselves generously, humble in our good works, firm in the affirmation of our faith, and the Lord will shower us with His gifts.

Le Pèlerin, June 29, 1878, p. 418.

June 30

Saint Paul

Every day I spend an hour and a half meditating either on the Gospel of Saint John or the Epistles of Saint Paul. Let me say first of all that it takes a lot of effort on my part. I have to force myself to be able to concentrate. I get tired

even prior to being able to grasp the initial ideas; but once I am well into my subject, when I sense that I am discovering something, when I am grasping a little more of the truth, I cannot describe for you what immense joy floods all the faculties of my soul. At that moment, how one loves God! It is no longer as a friend, or a king, or a father; it is as God. It is impossible to experience toward Him what one feels toward anyone else. Again this evening, I was meditating these words of Saint Paul: *Nobis autem revelavit Deus per Spiritum suum; Spiritus enim omnia scrutatur, etiam profunda Dei*¹.

*Letter to Henri Gouraud,
November 8, 1830
(Letters, V, A, p. 158)*

¹ I Cor 2:10: “*These are the very things that God has revealed to us through the Spirit, for the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God*”.

Let us pray for the Democratic Republic of the Congo whose national holiday is celebrated today.

MONTH OF JULY

*In the northern hemisphere, the month of July is traditionally the time for an extended holiday, well suited to relaxation and leisure reading. Why not take advantage of the period to delve into some of Fr. d'Alzon's writings once again? We would need a guide to help us find our way through the thousands of pages in the 52-volume set of writings collected for the cause of his beatification, now completely computerized in the d'Alzon data-base. An intelligent and substantial selection has been provided to the Assumption by Fr. Sage in the volume entitled *Ecrits spirituels* (1956), 1503 pages long, with notes and an index (translated into English under the title, *The Essential d'Alzon*). There are other possibilities as well, most notably the remarkable edition of the *Letters of Fr. d'Alzon*, in 17 volumes, an anthology of which has been published in four*

languages (Fr. Emmanuel d'Alzon: In His Own Words) provides a generous introduction. A number of other texts, in excellent translations, are likewise available, without making any mention of the many studies that have been dedicated to the thought of the founder of the Assumption. Have a great summer!

July 1

How beautiful are your works, O Lord!

I am reading Plato, in the original, as well as La Bruyère, and I take walks with my three dogs, when I'm not off hunting. The countryside is so beautiful when it rains, and since it's raining right now, it is ravishing. You have a clear preference for autumn, given how easy it is to dream when leaves are falling from the trees. But I wonder if dreams wouldn't come in droves if, while you walked among bushes full of nightingales, a gentle breeze were to make the petals of a white rose, covered with a few drops of rain, fall on your hair. Or if in a clump of box hedge, you were to discover a nest with a mother on the eggs. Or if you were to read a meditation of Lamartine, with the accompaniment of a dozen small birds singing their hearts out. No need to insist, the countryside in springtime is all we want it to be: it accommodates itself to every feeling of the soul, it helps spread them beyond. Instead of falling leaves, there are falling flowers, which is at least as thought-provoking.

*Letter to Henri Gouraud,
May 13, 1830
(Letters, vol. A, p. 56)*

As of May 1830, Emmanuel d'Alzon left Paris with his family because of political events stirring in the capital. He lived as if on retreat at Lavagnac, until his entrance into the Major Seminary of Montpellier in March 1832.

July 2

Courage, faith and mercy

Pray to God, let us all pray to Him. What could we not obtain with prayer? Say what you like, you are approaching the point where God will make you reap what you have sown. A trial is one of those necessities that Our Lord wishes to mark with his own seal. Students who leave and who enter are both useful in their own way. Do not worry, have faith. The time is coming. A bit of courage. Do what you can to maintain academic standards. The best way to have people say that we are strong is to send away the students who are weak. With regard to the Oblates, show some mercy. You will see that they will learn. You will provide them with the courage that they

need. Also, we'll pray to the Blessed Virgin, who will help us by providing the sisters with their own little Pentecost. My best to all and to our Brothers.

*Letter to Fr. Vincent de Paul Bailly,
October 9, 1866
(Letters, vol. VI, p. 156)*

In 1866, the young Fr. Vincent de Paul made his first attempt as Director of the Collège of the Assumption at Nîmes. He brought to the position the enthusiasm of his youth and the awkwardness of his inexperience. As best he could, Fr. d'Alzon provided him with advice and paternal affection, until it became clear that Fr. Vincent de Paul's place was not within the four walls of a collège, but in the open air involved in the struggles of public life!

July 3

The leisure of an aristocrat in the countryside

I forgot to finish telling you how I spend my day. I study from noon to five in the evening. Since it is fairly warm these days, when all I can do is to read, I go down to the garden and I walk, either along the rows of old chestnut trees or among the boxwood hedges, which are very thick

even if too much in the French style. Sometimes, after the evening meal, I walk along the Hérault, which is very close to the chateau, and I amuse myself by reciting the Meditations of Lamartine. Unfortunately, those listening are not always in a position to understand. At other times I go alone with the boatman, who I make sit at the end of the boat while I row. When I've gone far enough up-river, at a certain point, I stop working, and since the current is imperceptible, I let myself drift slowly in the middle of a fairly large pool... Since my dogs always keep me company, the outing never ends without my having them take a swim.

*Letter to Henri Gouraud,
May 23, 1830
(Letters, vol. A, p. 64)*

In addition to swimming and reading, while at Lavagnac, Emmanuel d'Alzon also did some hunting, horse-back riding, fencing and group games. The family often welcomed guests to the chateau, and Emmanuel d'Alzon also liked to explore the wilds on the lookout for picturesque spots. His sisters, Augustine (1813-1860) and Marie-Françoise (1819-1869), joined him. At the Collège of the Assumption in Nîmes, sports were likewise encouraged, in the spirit of an old saying that Father d'Alzon valued: *mens sana in corpore sano*. He himself wrote that he preferred education in a group and in a public, stimulating arena rather than that given "in a hothouse," an allusion to the education of his early youth.

July 4

How great are your works, O Lord!

Yesterday, I enjoyed one of the most beautiful sights that I have ever seen. No doubt you're aware that La Gournerie has been here for a few days. We went to visit the oak tree of Tasso, located high upon the Janiculum. The sun was setting behind us, casting its golden rays on the dome of Saint Peter's, which seemed to be entirely separated from the rest of the city. Facing us was the city of Rome, fully brilliant with the last light of day. Further away, the Sabine Hills and the mountains of Albano, beginning to disappear among the clouds. It was absolutely beautiful. It is only after scenes like these that one can begin to understand what Rome is. You see it in all of the majesty of its ruins and its newer monuments; you understand what separates the remains of Nero's palaces from the vaults of the Vatican. That's all poetry, I hope, but I don't know why I would hesitate to be poetic with you. I spare you everything that I could add regarding the cupolas and the orange groves, the fountains and the palaces, this old Tiber whose waters are still yellow, these pine trees resembling umbrellas on the horizon. Please, plant some pine trees in our fields.

*Letter to Henri d'Alzon,
June 5, 1834
(Letters, vol. A, p. 580)*

Emmanuel d'Alzon, who was a seminarian in Rome from November 1833 to June 1835, knew how to combine the useful and the pleasurable. The city enchanted him with all of its wealth, artistic, archeological, liturgical and simply natural. Spiritual and religious reflections are never far from the descriptions in his correspondence.

Let us pray for the United States that celebrates Independence Day today.

July 5

Humor and imagination up his sleeve

I'm informing the novitiate that my mood is still rather somber. Besides, although the evil seems to be less violent in the area, still it always wins over its own. While there is a kind of fever present in certain places, there are those who denounce me in a neighboring village as if I had contracted smallpox. To put it simply, things are not going well, and the novices should be very happy that they won't be exposed to the pox. Finally, I have an idea. Inasmuch as the

Carthusians have their liqueur, as well as the Trappists, the Carmelites their “water”, the Dominicans their “kermes” (oak-based cough syrup), the Jacobins (another name for the Dominicans in France) their elixir (medieval monastic potion), couldn’t we have some medicine or other that would keep people from dying and that would provide the novitiate with a living? We could call it “essence of the Assumption” or any other name you would find agreeable. Father Cusse produced something or other like this once upon a time. What a shame he’s in Australia! In any case, I wanted to communicate this idea to you; I remain your very humble servant.

*Letter to Fr. Alexis Dumazer,
July 18, 1864
(Letters, vol. V, p. 95-96)*

Father d’Alzon was a bit of a character and knew how to use humor, when appropriate. He did not like coarseness, but his humor had a certain edge. As a man of a certain class, he knew that you attracted more flies with honey than with vinegar. It would have been nice to know the concoction that Fr. Cusse had invented. Since his health was not strong, this beverage must have had some medicinal character! ‘The essence of the Assumption’ has (yet) to make its appearance!

July 6

Concern for people at the Assumption

[I write to you] first of all to tell you that if they want to give me 30 orphans to begin with, I will take them, as long as they also give 300 francs for up to 15 years, as Miss Franck mentioned. Without too much difficulty I think we could do something good and even make ends meet, if not do better yet. Here is why. Brother Charles worked with Mr. Roussel and knows how to deal with children. He made them work, made them help to build and to work the land. With that, it seems to me we could produce good results. Yesterday, I visited Montmau¹, and I saw that there is still land to be cleared, to the point that we could increase our revenues by a third. Well, little by little, these orphans who would not cost a great deal could help to work the land, and if, in time, they eat what they've grown, that would be a fine operation, without profit, but also without loss. Labor costs have become exorbitant in this region. Consequently, we would lose nothing by taking workers from elsewhere... Secondly, it seems to me that you, Father Vincent de Paul, son of Mr. Bailly, founder of the Conferences, should be aware of what you need to do in the face of all the horrors committed by the

revolutionaries. Forget those in charge. Aren't you convinced that we can take care of the people? Look. I would like to tell you, as the Abbot of Saint Paul-Tre Fontane told Saint Philip Neri: "You have an America to convert."

*Letter to Fr. Vincent de Paul Bailly,
May 27, 1871
(Letters, vol. IX, p. 74)*

¹ Montmau, farm-land near Lavagnac, belonged at that time to Fr. d'Alzon.

July 7

***Finding God at work at the heart
of society and the family***

I am so convinced of what you have said that, after having assured the success of the collège that I've founded in Nîmes, I am withdrawing these days to get involved with an association of approximately one hundred young people, to whom I would like to communicate some true principles. I might try to dig a bit more deeply than you, which is to say, I would like to find beneath the principles of the family, of society and

even of God's commandments, the action of God Himself. Mr. de Butenval has already insisted on original sin, a fact that casts very sad but also very fruitful light on human nature and on Jesus Christ, who restores it. Do not forget what Pius IX said to Bishop Mermillod: "The Church sets down the principles, and leaves their implementation to others." Too often we have confused eternal principles with human, and therefore necessarily limited, applications. When a society has exhausted its applications by overuse or by deviating dangerously from the principles, it is necessary to return to the true source in order to rediscover the divine element that gives life to people.

*Letter to Frédéric Le Play,
October 4, 1872
(Letters, vol. IX, p. 438)*

Frédéric Le Play (1806-1882) was a well-known engineer and economist from Normandy. He was a professor and State councilor. Analysts place this 19th century social observer and theoretician among conservative scholars. His son Albert was a student in the Assumption's schools.

July 8

*Following the rhythm of the seasons and
capricious changes in weather at Lavagnac:
God and the devil!*

I am distracted. The Hérault is in the plain, with its blood-red waters. A torrential downpour is falling on the trees and roofs, and even a bit inside the house. But that is a detail. Yes, it is raining, cats and dogs. You've done well to prefer the Assumption to the zouaves (papal soldiers)! See if you haven't fired more bullets at the devil and at the Revolution from our strongholds than at Garibaldi and Bismarck, and at Mentana and Patay. Besides, I have you with me. But we need to be detached from all of this. The rain is coming down twice as hard, soothing, serious, without any wind. A peaceful deluge. Confidently the Hérault, which had fallen, is on the rise; that's for sure. The victim is always ready, but what will happen? Yes, I was very tired while in Nîmes, and add to that a number of retreats and my neuralgia which now acting up only at night. What a downpour! Fortunately, Lavagnac is set high up, but the Delponts? In the cellar, contrary to what happened at Cana, the wine will be changed to water. Not a happy situation. That's what happens. Hail in springtime, with hailstones the

size of a hand; that's how Mr. Bauchet puts it, and he's seen them. During summer, there is phylloxera; in autumn, floods. And may God be blessed! But this time, the devil won't be roasted; it's raining too much.

*Letter to Fr. Vincent de Paul Bailly,
October 16, 1874
(Letters, vol. X, p. 324-325)*

Variations in the weather always make the front page and are frequently a way for getting into a conversation. Father d'Alzon, well aware of the impetuosity of his disciple, takes the opportunity to send a few salvos his way, gentle or peaceful, but changeable like the weather!

July 9

***Keeping watch before God,
like a lamp in the night***

Raising my eyes, I noticed light. It was coming from the chapel window. Separate from the chateau, to the right of the front, this chapel opens on to the garden by a small hill that I fixed up last winter. The window above the door was visible through the plantain trees. I took a few steps, leaned against one of these trees, and gazed at the

window for a long time: “My God, soon I shall sleep, and, You, what shall you do? While I sleep, you wait for me. If only I went to see you when I stay up late... If only I came often to tell you that I love you... I do love you, my God, at least I think I do, but I love you as if I didn’t really love you. And yet, for me, you will spend this night, alone, waiting for me, with this lamp whose brightness reminds me that you are my guest. And I, in a few minutes, will give you no further thought; how many nights, You didn’t come to mind at all! Why do you still come? Why do you take pleasure in the children of men? Am I in some part the cause of your delight? My God, I would like to spend one night alone with you.”

*Letter to Luglien de Jouenne d’Escrigny,
October 2, 1831
(Letters, vol. A, p. 221)*

Text taken from a diary of Emmanuel d’Alzon, at Lavagnac, the summer of 1831.

July 10

*Pious thoughts and prayers
during a Mass in the greenhouse*

My nephew had invited a few people to the noon meal. Suddenly, after a long dry season, rain fell in buckets. When he tries to get it to rain, I get him to procure a jackrabbit and say to his friends, "Come and eat it with me." I'm guilty of sins of envy. The chapel (of the château of Lavagnac) is being repaired, and I'm celebrating Mass in a chapel the likes of which I could not wish you better. It is a greenhouse, where I'm absolutely content, midst the orange trees and the camellias, though the latter are almost all past their prime. I'm thinking of you and our daughters, and I'm praying for you all. I was reading yesterday and again this morning from the Second Letter of Saint Paul to the Corinthians. It includes many chapters that are applicable to missionaries and therefore to the Oblates. Remind me, during some holiday, to explain this to our daughters; they would find this beneficial.

*Letter to Marie Correnson,
November 8, 1877
(Letters, vol. XII, p. 231)*

The chapel of the chateau at Lavagnac, still in existence, is a separate building, on the left side of the main facade, as you look at the building from the terraces. The greenhouse mentioned here, used temporarily as a chapel, is one of two forward structures that frame the platform, which served as an entrance court for carriages and horses in the 19th century, and for automobiles today when one arrives by the park path, from the entrance. In fact, Lavagnac is situated on a mound or small hill overlooking the plain of the Hérault River.

July 11

Benedict, abbot, patron of Europe

I visited the chapel where Scholastica came to spend the afternoon with her brother, Benedict, who, as evening came, wanted to return to the monastery. Scholastica pleaded with him to spend the night with her. Benedict refused for fear of giving the impression of having invented an excuse for violating the rule. But Scholastica, her head in her hands, prayed with such an abundance of tears that suddenly the sky became overcast, and rain and thunder began with such fury that it was impossible for Benedict to leave. Scholastica turned to him and said: “Now leave if you can and see how God has on the spot granted to me

what you refused with so much harshness.” The following day they took leave of one another to return to their respective monasteries, and shortly thereafter Benedict, praying in his mountain refuge, saw the soul of his sister rising to heaven in the form of a dove... Imitate Scholastica, so that a man of God stay a long while with us, or at least visit us often.

*Homily of Fr. d'Alzon,
published in Le Pèlerin, February 9, 1878, p. 83.*

Emmanuel d'Alzon visited the convent of Monte Cassino and its surroundings in January of 1834 (San Germano). We know that these historic sites were severely damaged during the Second World War, in May 1944, when the Anglo-Polish troops were forced to dislodge the German resistance (at the center of the Gustav line). The site was reconstructed according to the original design and inaugurated by Pope Paul VI in 1964.

July 12

Monte-Porzio (outings in the countryside and Roman mythology)

Monte-Porzio is one of the hills at the periphery of the flatlands of the Roman

countryside, on the southeast side. It leans against the mountain where Tusculum was located, with modern-day Frascati on its left and Tivoli (or Tibur, if you prefer) on its right. On the horizon, with Tibur on one end and Tusculum on the other, in the background near the sea are the Apennines and Mount Soracte, forward guard of the Sabine mountains. In this setting, there is the immense plain of Rome, and in the middle of this plain, the Eternal City lying in its dry and silent fields. It is a beautiful scene, especially if you fill every uneven stretch of terrain with reminders of a grandiose past. First of all, it was on this plain that there took place all of Aeneas' adventures, described in the six last book of Virgil's poem. Then, there were the more historical traditions. Lake Regillus, still there since the wars of the ancient Romans; the Sacred Mount, Nero's tomb, the field tilled by Cincinnatus, the countryside of Regulus, the arches of Claudius, and innumerable remains of villas, triumphal arches, baths, and columbaria, so many reminders, with rare and magnificent pine trees, of the immensity of this deserted theatre of so many victories, of so many pleasures, and of so much suffering.

*Letter to Clément Rodier,
October 10, 1834
(Letters, vol. A, p. 706-707)*

Clément Rodier was one of Fr. d'Alzon's first cousins.

July 13

*Summer, time for vacation, for rest,
for visits, for change*

I am pleased that you were so happy with Fr. Vincent de Paul [Bailly]'s arrival. Fr. Vincent [Chaine]'s arrival here has helped to me a lot. I am leaving him here in Nîmes, which will allow me to take some time to rest at Le Vigan. Mrs. Varin wrote to tell me she would like to invite Fr. Pernet for vacation. If Servas can do him some good, I will allow him to go, unless he decides that it would be better than it was last year to visit Le Vigan. As for you, we eagerly await your arrival. Fr. Laurent preferred Saint-Paul-Saint Louis to Sainte Perpetua. That seems natural to me. He can stay at François I^{er} for the whole period of Lent. If Bishop Manning wants us to come, I think that to begin with we could give him a lay brother and Fr. Raphael, who has considerably changed for the good. It would be up to him to find some English novices, but I haven't got a red cent, and experience teaches us

that it is foolish to find something if we don't know where the resources will come from. Tell Fr. Laurent that I will answer his letter soon.

*Letter to Fr. François Picard,
July 3, 1865
(Letters, vol. V, p. 352)*

The date is the summer of 1865, which saw a certain reorganization of Assumptionist communities, with a stronger structuring of the novitiate at Le Vigan. Servas is a small commune near Alès, the residence of the Varin d'Ainvelle family. Fr. Laurent was beginning a new period of his apostolic life, leaving teaching for preaching. Saint-Paul-Saint-Louis is a church in Paris, Saint Perpetua, the parish of the Collège de l'Assomption in Nîmes.

July 14

A Climb up to Notre-Dame de Rochefort in the Gard Valley

In 1849, during the school holidays, Fr. d'Alzon organized a pilgrimage to Notre-Dame-de-Rochefort. He put himself in charge of the group. At 3 in the afternoon, the group recited the prayers for pilgrims in the chapel of the Assumption and set out, light-footed and full of

ardor. *Father d'Alzon didn't walk; he ran. Before arriving at the inn at Lafoux, where we were going to eat and sleep for a few hours, we were literally exhausted by the torrid pace. As a result, supper did not settle well for some; two of them ended up "leaving it on the ground". Father forced a student to take his bed, while he made do with the rug next to the bed, an old sofa pillow and a blanket. At 3:30 AM, without breakfast, we crossed the Gardon River and climbed toward Rochefort. It was clear that Father was in pain. He was dragging his feet and kept silent during the meditation. We saw him sit down on a pile of rocks. The moon was shining, and by its light we examined the feet of the pilgrim. He was walking in new shoes that were too tight and had wounded his feet. Mr. Ferry cut the upper parts of the shoes into strips like sandals. Finally, we arrived at the foot of the holy mountain. Father d'Alzon insisted on going barefoot. We were all opposed to the idea, and we succeeded in stopping him, but it wasn't easy. He celebrated Mass with touching devotion, after having asked us to unite our prayers to his as he fulfilled a vow he had made to come to this shrine of the Mother of God. We thought it had to do with his fledgling religious Congregation. After the noon meal, Father and four companions set out for the Charterhouse of Valbonne. They returned to Nîmes on a dusty and*

*endless road, sunburned and limping, but happy
to have made a pilgrimage that they would always
remember.*

*Story of a pilgrimage to Rochefort by Fr. d'Alzon,
as told in Galeran, Sketches, p. 127-130*

The shrine of Notre-Dame de Grâce at Rochefort-du-Gard was a major spiritual center in the diocese of Nîmes, particularly dear to Fr. d'Alzon's heart, as was the Carthusian monastery of Valbonne. He often brought students, teachers and religious from the Collège de l'Assomption to these sites for retreats and spiritual exercises. In his day, the shrine at Rochefort was in the care of the Marist Fathers. It was there that the young Pernet affirmed his vocation. At the shrine, Father d'Alzon entrusted his young Congregation to Mary, in its early stages in 1849. The site reflects the peace and the beauty of the Mediterranean countryside, alongside the grape-growing plain that unites the slopes of the Provence region to the Languedoc. Today, a community related to the Foyers de Charité offers room and board to pilgrims and provides the support of its prayer and service, in a serene setting, housed in impressive 17th buildings. For additional information, the reader can consult pages 540-542 of volume XVII of the *Letters* of Fr. d'Alzon.

Let us pray for France that celebrates its national holiday today, in memory of the taking of the Bastille on July 14, 1789.

July 15

Rest, recreation and fun

If such is the case, you will need some rest, but how shall you get it? In any case, I have concluded that you should not hesitate in the least to take a few hikes, even to waste some time, as is proper to a person who needs to recoup energies that have been depleted. That's original advice with which to start off a letter of spiritual direction: rest as best you can. Our Lord gave the same advice to his disciples¹... I am of the same mind as Fr. Hippolyte [Saugrain]; Saint Francis de Sales had the same idea. The young sisters need to have some fun. I am in favor of charades. The Assumption is not a Trappist monastery. Each Order has its customs. No doubt, there might be a down side to such "license", but isn't that always the case? It is up to Superiors to be attentive. If you want to consult Mr. Darboy, you may, but before God I assume responsibility for my opinion, as long as the Superiors are there to foresee any abuses and cut them short.

*Letter to Mother Marie-Eugénie de Jésus,
January 2, 1859
(Letters, vol. III, p. 7-8)*

¹ See Matthew 6:31.

Bishop de la Bouillerie, who was at official Church advisor/superior of the Religious sisters of the Assumption in Paris at that time, obliged the sisters to renounce all entertainment and diversion, to which Fr. d'Alzon refers in this letter; the bishop didn't find them fitting for treligious. Fr. d'Alzon was more flexible and broad-minded in this regard.

July 16

*Vocation ministry,
the future of the Congregation*

Pray God that he might send us five or six young priests, very fervent and capable, and at the same time very humble. We need to take great care of our alumniate project; it's the future of the Congregation. In the not too distant future, they will have to be providing fifteen to twenty young men for the novitiate each year. Believe that that will happen if we invest all of our energies. In October, the novitiate will begin with a full complement of young people, remarkable for their ability as for their piety. Now, along with piety, we are insisting a great deal on ability; as a result, we need to be very demanding at the time of

examinations. We will realize our plan for a solid and expeditious program of studies, if we insist on reports every three months from those responsible for the alumniates and from the masters of novices, on written essays every eight days, and on oral examinations and finals at the end of the year. In any case, we will do all we can.

*Letter to Fr. Vincent de Paul Bailly,
November 6, 1874
(Letters, vol. X, p. 332)*

Caring for vocations of every kind was the major and constant apostolic preoccupation of Fr. d'Alzon. At the twilight of his life, he mentioned this explicitly himself. Whenever he was accused of spending too much time preaching or in a multitude of activities that dispersed his energies, he insisted that his goal was always and everywhere to awaken vocations.

July 17

In the frenzy of Constantinople¹

Well, I've had supper, I've seen two people, and I've talked about properties to buy. Dear brother, property here is going for insane prices. Rather than make a purchase, I'd prefer that

someone give me a gift. Don't you agree that that would be best? If you find someone in France who would like to make a contribution, give him my best wishes from Turkey; tell him a gift would please me greatly and I would be most thankful. Can The Turks doubt how pleased I would be, if they didn't treat me as a Turk in Maure? Once you've responded to this letter, send nothing more to Constantinople, but rather to Rome, unless between now and a second exchange of letters I change my mind and decide to stay another eight days. There's a good chance of that. In that case, I would leave the 18th, rather than the 10th. You know that I have given up on the idea of Jerusalem. Father Galabert is always the same. I loan him my umbrella; he breaks off the handle. I loan him a book; it comes back to me in shambles. He brings me letters; I wonder if he hasn't used them to wrap something beforehand. But overall he remains full of zeal and good will, ready for anything and completely devoted. He's gallivanting right now in Bulgaria, in search of an honest man. If he finds one, I'll burn a candle for him.

*Letter to Fr. Hippolyte Saugrain,
March 17, 1863
(Letters, vol. IV, p. 225-226)*

¹ Constantinople was the only long trip that Fr. d'Alzon took all his life (Winter 1863), not counting his stays in Rome. He did so to define more precisely with Fr. Galabert the elements of the Assumptionist missionary foundation in Eastern Europe. Hippolyte Saugrain was General Treasurer; that explains the mischievous references of Fr. d'Alzon.

July 18

Bull fights and bull runs

We cannot allow ourselves to be drawn into the debate between the partisans and the opponents of what aficionados today are calling an art and not simply a sport. It goes without saying that living in Nîmes, Fr. d'Alzon could not ignore their existence, any more than he could ignore the existence of 'pétanque' (a kind of bocce played in southern France). In his day, Bishop Plantier wrote a famous pastoral letter against the re-establishment of bull-fighting. We limit ourselves here to a reminder of the oft-repeated, clear testimony in Fr. d'Alzon's correspondence regarding this subject:

"In some places, we still hold bull-fights or bull-runs. In a village by the name of Marsillargues, where the population is Protestant,

such a fight was held a few Sundays ago.”
(*Letters, vol. A, p. 145, October 19, 1830*).

On May 13, 1863, he wrote in similar terms to Fr. Vincent de Paul Bailly : “There was a major spectacle in the Arena on Sunday, during which seven bulls, who manifested their desire to live by fleeing their attackers, were killed. A butcher could not have done a better job.” (Letters, vol. IV, p. 294).

And again on September 3, 1866, in a letter to Fr. Picard, he noted among others things :

“Nîmes is saddened by three disasters. The night before last, four train employees were killed on the Beaucaire route. Yesterday, a toreador was killed instantly by a bull. Today, an inmate of the central prison killed a guard and one of his fellow-inmates, and then slit his own throat. So long for now, dear brother, don’t imitate such deeds.” (Letters, vol. VI, p. 141).

Fr. d’Alzon’s reactions leave no room for doubt with regard to his own feelings.

Nîmes still organizes bull-fights and bull-runs, in particular during the Pentecost holiday period. Everyone is aware of the fact that a successor of Bishop Plantier, Bishop Jean Cadilhac, was a fan and knew a great deal about them.

July 19

A day in the life of a clam at Lavagnac

I know someone who must be wondering : I'd like to know how Father spends his time. This is what he does. He enters his room before seven, gets dressed, prays to the good Lord until eight. He celebrates Mass, prays in thanksgiving, drinks a very, very small cup of chocolate, goes for a walk, returns, reads, hangs out, works. At 11, he has lunch, and (horror of horrors) does not refuse a cigar offered to him by his nephew; he takes another walk, more or less rapidly, rests a bit in his room, prays the Office, the rosary, etc., etc., has supper at 6:30, takes a cup of coffee, talks; around 9 o'clock, a solemn moment, he is given a cup of orange tea to calm his nerves, shaken by the emotions of the day, he says his prayers, and tries to sleep the sleep of the just. What do you think about this life of a clam? Also, my teeth are causing me some pain, but I think they are becoming more reasonable and congratulate them for that. But today I'd like to do great things. I would like to be alone like a solitary sparrow on its roof. How interesting, the life of a solitary sparrow!

*Letter to Marie Correnson,
April 14, 1871
(Letters, vol. IX, p. 36)*

The letter is dated April 1871. Exhausted, Fr. d'Alzon was resting for a few days at Lavagnac (10-16 April), before resuming once again his whirlwind activities. His plan was to review the text of his Conferences given to the Religious sisters of the Assumption (assembled in Nîmes during the winter of 1870-1871), in order to adapt them for the novices at Le Vigan. In August 1871, he learned about the shrine of Notre Dame des Châteaux and founded the first alumniat on that site.

July 20

Espérou, Notre-Dame de Bonheur (Our Lady of Happiness)

Near one of the highest peaks of the Cévennes mountain range there was once a very famous foundation but now forgotten: Notre-Dame-de-Bonheur, near Espérou. This church, abandoned now for a long time, preserved the memory of a major grace that had been granted. Why not establish nearby, close to a population still considerable but deprived of religious services because of their isolation, a chapel that could be

useful at least in summer to a few hundred lumberjacks and shepherds, and in the winter to a few villages lost in the woods or isolated by the snow? It would be a popular pilgrimage destination, precisely because of its difficult access, even in the good season. What would a pilgrimage be without obstacles to overcome? Such difficulties intensify one's devotion. Fatigue and the length of the route are all part of the sacrificial dimension of a pilgrimage. In this regard, no site is better suited than that of Notre-Dame-de-l'Espérou. We propose the following: that individuals of faith sign on to certain pious commitments, made conditionally, to request a temporal favor, but which would be the concrete and visible guarantee of spiritual favors, and which others would come to ask at the new shrine of Mary.

*Letter to Catholics of the diocese of Nîmes,
May 21, 1865
(Letters, vol. V, p. 312-313)*

Notre-Dame de Bonheur was the name of an old collegiate chapel, built in the mountains in 1436; "Bonheur" was the name of the stream that ran through the plateau. A chapel was built in 1868, on the property bought by Fr. d'Alzon in 1865. Before the summer of 1874, there was an attempt to found an alumniate; a community of Oblates stayed until 1879.

July 21

Acting as a personnel recruiter

I am always happy to write to you, when Fr. d'Alzon asks me to do so¹. I will try to be a faithful secretary, but my bad memory sometimes plays tricks on me. A gardener for your new monastery has been proposed to Fr. d'Alzon. He is in his fifties; his wife is a cook with a position of her own. He worked for a long while for Mr. de Surville, and Fr. d'Alzon thinks he is well suited to care for your garden, and his wife could answer the door for you during the day. It would be useful to have a male guardian for our sisters at night. The salary question would pose no difficulty. However, I feel obliged to communicate certain fears founded on experience: men who are paid little ordinarily work little. In this case, one hopes that the saying will not prove true. If you authorize Fr. d'Alzon to do so, we could arrange with the man to lodge him temporarily in the shack built by the contractors who would not refuse. The wife of your future gardener would remain in her present position until you need her as receptionist.

*Letter to Mère Marie-Eugénie de Jésus,
April 2, 1859 (Letters, vol. III, p. 52)*

Fr. Hippolyte Saugrain wrote this letter, in part, for Fr. d'Alzon. Work was being done at the time to set up the new priory of the Religious sisters of the Assumption in Nîmes, on the road to Bouillargues.

July 22

Saint Mary Magdalene

It seems to me that you have always been like Mary Magdalene, pouring her silent perfume on the feet of Our Lord¹. Magdalene said nothing, but the sweet aroma from her vase filled the whole house. The regrets that you have left here might be heartbreaking, but also consoling at the same time. How do you manage to avoid becoming proud at being loved so much? We're in the middle of Holy Week, and I have a real desire to be converted. Take advantage of the time to rest that you will probably be given again these days and pray a little for me.

*Letter to Sister Françoise-Eugénie de Malbosc,
April 10, 1865
(Letters, vol.V, p. 282)*

¹ Gospel scene in Jn 12:3.

Sister Françoise-Eugénie de Malbosc, Superior of the community at Nîmes, left southern France for Auteuil in March of 1865, following upon her nomination as Councilor at the General Chapter of 1864.

Fr. d'Alzon always had a great devotion to Mary Magdalene. When he left Lavagnac for Nîmes in November of 1835 and was able to move into his place at Arc-du-Gras Street, he brought with him a large portrait of Magdalene in tears over her sins. It was the only decoration in his apartment, along with a skull on the mantle in his room and on his table a large crucifix given to him by Bishop de Chaffoy and two large mirrors given by Mrs. d'Alzon (Notes et Documents, vol. II, p. 80). Fr. d'Alzon had a particular liking for the composition of the poet Reboul, entitled "*Madeleine*," which appeared in his *Tableaux évangéliques*.

July 23

Bocce at the Assumption

"Pétanque" (a form of bocce, sometimes called "bowls" in English) was very popular in the South. The game is played before a gallery of spectators by two teams made up of shooters and pointers. After the evening meal and the Miserere, Fr. d'Alzon, followed by his small band, headed for the battle-ground. He was a shooter,

but the kind that caused the balls he struck to explode. According to the experts, he had an advantage because he played with his left hand. Fr. Hippolyte [Saugrain] was a terrible shooter. Victor Cardenne was the premier pointer. Fr. Tissot played in the same role, with his own system. From Lyon, he pointed the balls scientifically, and for that reason usually failed each time. Fr. Brun was clever; before pointing the ball, he raised it in the air, always confident of his throw. You'd have thought that he was absolutely sure of himself, so much so that when he missed a shot, he always found excuses: either it had rained, or the ground was too dry, or the court had somehow changed since the last match. He was a player with potential, for many of his former students assured me that he eventually became very proficient. The spectators followed the game in silence, with hearts beating rapidly. Their body movements imitated those of the ball as it rolled to the right or the left, and eventually came to a stop. Once the ball did stop, bodies straightened up and tongues began to wag, according to the circumstances, in approval, mockery, congratulations or gibes. Assumption, founded in Nîmes, had its own bocce court on the other side of the viaduct.

Brief narrative, as told in Galeran, Sketches, p. 210-212 .

July 24

A controversial play: Le Fils du Giboyer

It is reported that the *Fils du Giboyer* (*The Hunter's Son*) will appear on stage in Nîmes. This is imprudent on the part of the theater's management and will cause some disturbance, for which we should by all means deny all responsibility. The author himself has declared that his play should be more appropriately called *Les Cléricaux*. To say "clerical" is to say member or friend of the clergy. In that sense, all Catholics of Nîmes are "clericals," and they should all feel affected. People tell me that many want to go to the theatre to boo the performance. Allow me to beg them, not to abdicate entirely their right to literary justice which comes with the price of the ticket, but to avoid letting themselves get involved in demonstrations, the significance of which could easily be distorted. There would be a better way of protesting against this insult: cut off the livelihood of the insulters or at least their means of expression. A petition addressed to the Mayor of Nîmes and the Municipal Council, asking for the elimination from the next city budget of subsidies to the theater, would certainly draw an abundance of supporters. Just as I've signed many such petitions in favor of cleaning up my

neighborhood, I would willingly sign this kind of petition. Many people who believe that scandal is a sad way to achieve success would share the same sentiment.

*Letter to Numa Baragnon,
December 31, 1862
(Letters, vol. IV, p. 153-154)*

This work by Émile Augier, targeting Louis Veuillot and the ultramontane party, was clearly satirizing clerical opposition, especially strong with regard to the Italian policy of the emperor Napoleon III.

July 24 is the anniversary of the death of Mère Correnson.

July 25

Saint James, Apostle (Self-criticism and Re-adjustment)

I spend too little time speaking with the teachers. It's truer than one might think. In any case, I've made it known that I will see them more. However, since I do not have the gift of bi-location, if I do spend recreation time with the teachers like in the past, it's because I spend it with the religious. Make it possible for me to be

in two refectories at the same time and at two places of recreation, and the problem will be promptly resolved. You will recall that last year every evening recreation period was real torture for me. Let us conclude that instead of all of the “should’s” of your virtuous advisers, we “should” be a little more patient. Pray for that for me; it is essential. *Patientia autem opus perfectum habet*¹. A great motto: before giving a piece of advice, examine it to see if it is doable. Apart from that, the advice you give me is excellent, and I admire it. Adieu.

*Letter to Victorin Galabert,
January 2, 1859
(Letters, vol. III, p. 9)*

Poor Father Galabert, with every good intention, had communicated to Fr. d’Alzon a few remarks concerning the college at Nîmes. The latter responded rather sharply as to what he himself considered to be self-evident truths (“vérités de la Palisse”). The reference to the Letter of James suits his purpose as it does ours, for in this case the Founder of the Assumption reveals himself to be like the apostle, “sun of thunder”, though it is true that he softens the remark by adding at the end a complimentary remark, with nonetheless an element of irony (not to be found in the apostle!).

¹ James 1:4: “*Let perseverance be perfect, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.*” The reader will make the necessary adjustment: the epistle is by James

the Lesser, though on July 25 we celebrate the feast of his namesake, James the Greater, son of Zebedee and John's brother.

July 26

Saints Joachim and Anne

My dear daughter, you wanted a few words for the Assumption; you will have them for the Nativity. I hope it all comes down to the same thing. It might even be better. You are not at the end of your course, at which time you will no doubt have to contemplate the Blessed Virgin ascending into heaven and to grab hold of a fold of her mantle in order to follow her. But you can always consider yourself like a very small girl, a new-born in religious life and in need of growing up. I think that confessors for religious sisters should have a great devotion to Saint Joachim, who raised the most perfect of creatures. But those unfortunate directors have a little bit more to do than the husband of Saint Anne, given the fact that the Blessed Virgin was so perfect, and sisters much less so, at least some of them. The time has come, I think, given his great capacities, to pray to him in heaven for the poor seekers after perfection

and for those who have the responsibility of fashioning them. In short, be born again with the Blessed Virgin. If you have not made a novena to her before this feast, make one after; ask her to become a good little girl, like the infant that Mary will give to Amédée.

*Letter to Sister Jeanne-Emmanuel Varin d'Ainvelle,
September 2, 1880
(Letters, vol. XIII, p. 389)*

The cult of Saint Anne was held in high esteem by Father Combalot, who had the idea of founding the Religious sisters of the Assumption. In memory of this, Marie-Eugénie de Jésus wanted to make a pilgrimage to Saint Anne at Auray, in 1864. Amédée and Mary, future parents, were the brother and sister-in-law of the religious to whom this letter is addressed.

July 27

Concern for the health of his confrères

After taking a circuitous route, your letter was finally given to me last night. I can assure you that it gave me a good deal of pleasure, since I was going to suggest to you that I go to Nîmes to care for you to the extent that I am able, for I can't

say that I am especially able to do a great deal. The best thing for you to do is to take good care of yourself, and for that follow Hippolyte's advice. Go spend a few days at Le Vigan. There you will be cared for by Mr. and Mrs. Durand, and the air of the Cévennes mountains will remind you of your own in the Franche-Comté region. You will return to us as strong as a bull, for I am convinced that once you have survived the trial of the heat, you will be able to support our climate thereafter without a problem. You were asking my advice on how to sanctify your suffering. My dear, this is what I can say on all of that: 1) That we are only a bit of dust that the breath of God has animated, and that the breath of God can dissolve and disperse; do what we may, we are nothing other than this... 2) Since God knows what we need most, if He wants us to be sick, we should bless His will and accept it in all humility and gratitude; 3) Above all, God loves trust; therefore, we must practice this filial trust as much as possible, and God will surely reward us.

*Letter to Brother Étienne Pernet,
September 24, 1849
(Letters, vol. C, p. 492-493)*

July 28

Care for the sick, in body and soul

Your position as a nurse demands of you the most patient, the most humble, and the most compassionate charity. You need to acquire this most of all and to promise yourself to remain faithful to it at all times. Believe me, you can do an immense amount of good. Maintaining regularity in an infirmary, that is to say in a place where it can be least easily observed, making it valued by providing all of the attention and care to be found in the spirit of the rule; speaking a word of God at an opportune time, when the sick are resting or when they are discouraged; making these words acceptable because they have been spoken by patient lips and someone with a gentle heart; inviting people to be respectful of the smallest things, without harshness but with gentle firmness, is to assure the fervor of the house, in circumstances where it could be most lacking. I've just received a letter from your Mother, to which I must respond without delay. Consequently, I will leave you, entreating you to make every effort so that, when I come, I will find you a religious sister worthy of such a beautiful name.

*Letter to Sister Marie-Thérèse de Commarque,
May 9, 1851
(Letters, vol. I, p. 35-36)*

Sister Marie-Thérèse de Commarque (1811-1882), Religious sister of the Assumption, was a nurse her whole life in the different communities to which she was assigned. Fr. d'Alzon met her again in Nice in December 1874 and, even though she was ailing herself, she gave him the greatest care and attention, all the while gathering notes on the history of the origins of her Congregation.

July 29

At the beach, to bathe in the sea

A tooth ache has forced me to interrupt my retreat, and I am quickly taking the time to drop you a note, dear child. What effect does bathing in the sea have on you? Do you bathe quickly? Are you satisfied simply to breathe the air of the beach quickly? I've received word from Montpellier saying that the heat has been unbearable. Here, except for a few hours, the weather has been fantastic. I think it would be more agreeable to you than all the beaches of the world. You will respond no doubt by saying, yes, good for tooth-aches. Well, no, that's not the

case; I had it already in Nîmes; it's not my fault if it came with me here. Would you believe me if I told you that I am hungry and thirsty to see you, and though embarrassed to say it to you, come quickly or stay there. However, since I know how to love my friends for their sake, I will tell you: stay as long as you need to, but when you come back to me, you will be received with joy. Consider the following a sneeze. Is Augustine in Sète with you? If she is there, will she not accompany you to Le Vigan? I understand that Mrs. Correnson is asking for her, but she will have plenty of people here to accompany her to Nîmes, if necessary, or would she rather like to come for us? Does she have any desire to make a pilgrimage to Espérou? I'm letting you know that I plan to make a pilgrimage for your intention, and if I obtain healing for you, I will take what the train fare would have been in order to erect a statue to the Virgin on the summit of Aigoual.

*Letter to Marie Correnson,
August 11, 1869
(Letters, vol. VII, p. 376)*

July 30

Opening one's soul to God through and through

Your word, though short, brought me great joy, dear child. I have a great deal to tell you, and it will do fine to write them to you once you're back from Lourdes. Our Lord wants you more for himself each day. There are some very intimate spaces of your soul, which he wants to penetrate fully. You need to open up to Him, and once you've done so, open yourself even more because this divine Master's desire for your love and your personal sacrifice is insatiable; it is by these that you will witness to Him. If you ask me for a motto for the rest of your life, I would summarize it in two words: purity and love. Purity, because our Lord loves lilies above all, that is to say, souls dazzling by their innocence. You can and should become, by great effort, one of those virginal souls, whose goal is to flourish in the light of God. Love! Either I am mistaken, or there is in the depths of your soul a capacity for love, that you do not doubt and that will make it impossible for you to find joy and rest in a single creature. You do well to say, it is the infinite God alone that you need. Nothing else will do.

*Letter to Angéline Chaudordy,
July 15, 1873
(Letters, vol. X, p. 84)*

Valentine Chaudordy was a spiritual directee of Fr. d'Alzon. She was part of a bourgeois family of Nîmes and had two sisters, Angéline and Noémi, that Fr. d'Alzon likewise knew very well.

July 31

Ignatius of Loyola, founder of the Jesuits

Yesterday, for example, I left at 10 o'clock in the morning for Versailles; at noon, I returned. Why did I go? To attend a wedding, the marriage of Mr. Veillot, editor-in-chief of the *Univers*. I went with Du Lac and Mr. Wilson, and because I was in a hurry to return I came back with Father de Ravignan. It was the feast-day of Saint Ignatius. Mr. Veillot insisted on being married on that day. Father de Ravignan performed the ceremony and wanted to return fairly early, he said, to celebrate one last time the feast of their founder in their house in Paris, before its closing. It seems that they are keeping their future plans well hidden¹; however, Fr. de Ravignan and a few

others are no longer residing at the Rue des Postes. It seems that in Rome it is Cardinal Acton, an Englishman, who pushed them to withdraw, and Cardinal Lambruschini who foresaw the arrangement that we are aware of².

*Letter to Augustine d'Alzon,
August 1, 1845
(Letters, vol. B, p. 282-283)*

¹ In his letters, Fr. d'Alzon occasionally expresses a certain number of complaints regarding the Society of Jesus, even if fundamentally he admired the historical foundation of Saint Ignatius and his commitment to the defense of the Church's interests. In his own way he shared a certain number of tenacious prejudices regarding the Jesuits, freely attributing to them an exclusive partisan character, the cult of secrecy, a certain artificiality and an apparent incomprehension of the ideals of protests on behalf of Catholic liberty (Letters, vol. B, p. 185). These accusations are not entirely lacking in foundation, but were overly generalized.

² In 1845, the Jesuits were paying the price of a virulent campaign of the French government against religious Congregations who were making loud and strong claims among Catholics on the right for the freedom of secondary education. The July Monarchy succeeded in obtaining from the Holy See the provisional banishment of the most visible Jesuit communities from the country. Remember that in the 18th century, Western monarchies had expelled the Jesuits from their properties and obtained their suppression from the Papacy. Re-established under Pius VII, they were again expelled, in France especially, in 1845, in 1880, and like

many teaching Congregations and others beginning in 1901. The irony of history is such that in France, at the end of the 20th century, the Jesuits succeeded in obtaining legal recognition from the regime.

And so, with this feast of Saint Ignatius, the month of July comes to an end. In re-reading this month, the reader will have noted that, without sacrificing certain remembrances of the saints in the liturgical calendar (July 11, 22, 25, 26 and 31), we profited from the passing of ordinary time to evoke a certain number of themes that conger up the more relaxed rhythm of summer and vacation time: walks, the beauty of creation, rest in the countryside or by the sea, pastimes and recreation; or pilgrimages to local shrines fill out the litany of days and of the years. The thought of the Lord is very present to Fr. d'Alzon, even during the times of rest that he so appreciated at Lavagnac or at Le Vigan. His correspondents, men and women, did not find him to be without spiritual energy at this time of year, to the contrary! Three texts are presented in italics, in part or entirely (July 14, 18, 23) given their particular authors, in order to respect their special origin.

MONTH OF AUGUST

In the middle of August (15th), we are invited to praise the glory of Mary with all the pilgrims who frequent the major Marian shrines, uniting our prayers, in particular, to those of the crowds and the infirm at Lourdes. With faith and gratitude Fr. d'Alzon went five times to this Marian city of the Pyrenees, known as "the world capital of prayer," placing in Mary's care the whole Assumption Family that enjoys meeting there yearly for the solemnity of her feast. Together with Fr. d'Alzon, we join in honoring several saints this month: Alphonsus Liguori (01), John-Mary Vianney/the Curé d'Ars (04), Dominic (08), Bernard of Clairvaux (20), Rose of Lima, patroness of the Americas (23) and Louis of France (25), not to mention the apostle Bartholomew (24), as well as Augustine (28) and his mother, Monica (27). Pope John Paul II enriched the listing of saints for

August by adding a few more recent witnesses that our Founder could not have known: Bénilde Romançon, a French Christian Brother, and Maximilian Kolbe, a Franciscan deported to Auschwitz. These names call to mind and represent the innumerable ranks of saints, known and unknown.

August 1

*Alphonsus Liguori,
founder of the Redemptorists*

It seems to me that the annoyances you mention must be quite troubling. Nevertheless, don't get discouraged. God is there. Overcome all these miseries by your charity, humility, and peace. With regard to Aimery, I'm not worried: he may have a few faults in his mannerisms that will trip him up, but basically he's solid. In one way I am sorry to hear about the match suggested for one of your daughters. My sister, to whom I thought that I should say something in order to stop her negotiations concerning another young lady, not only cut short her plans, but insisted that I offer you Lavagnac if you thought that it was convenient to come in order to deal first-hand with this matter without risk. This is what Saint Alphonsus Liguori did as often as he could, in his sermons¹. It seems to me that nothing could make you happier in every respect; in a case you would have to urge them to live a more energetic Christian life. They need to be more tested if they are to carry such a load.

¹ Whatever advice St. Alphonsus may have given concerning the marriage of young women, Fr. d'Alzon held in great esteem Liguorian morality, more detailed and more human than the Jansenist legacy. In the first part of the 19th century its diffusion in France thwarted the rigors of Jansenist teachings which were still deeply ingrained in the clergy.

August 2

Advice and themes for reflection during vacation

Is it possible to twist the neck of the Revolution to restore life to Europe? That is the question. Can you examine it with me during the vacation-time? First, the reason there is no longer a Europe is that there is no longer any solidarity. Every one for himself, every one in his own house. That is the universal motto, which is nothing other than egoism taken to the highest degree. Do you want to fight this evil? Start by getting rid of the egoism in yourself. Fight it by not sparing your own personality, your petty calculations, your pleasures... Europe has certain parts that are colliding with each other; Europe is at war. In

order for Europe to live again that era of glorious combat of yesteryear, it needs unity. Here's something amazing: you really won't understand anything by a first reading. Why? Because Europe lost its life when it lost its unity and its unity disappeared on the day that it no longer wanted to retain different degrees of Catholic unity. With regard to this chapter, those first guilty are the Protestants; the second ones are the Jansenists and the Gallicanists; the third the philosophers in the mold of Louis XV, and the fourth, liberal Catholics. But this is quite heavy for you; let me stop and let you use your vacation to meditate on the problem so as to understand it. After that, be wise, obey your dad and mom, give good example to your younger brother, don't pull the hair of your sister, don't anger the servants and when you receive visitors, don't give them a hard time. This is very important advice for those who cannot understand anything mentioned above.

L'Assomption of Nîmes, 1877, n1 63, p. 310-311.

August 3

A Call to Inter-church Solidarity

We can apply to the Catholics of Geneva the words of the apostle Paul to the Corinthians: *'Consider, my brothers, those of you who have been called to faith. There are few who are wise according to the flesh, few are influential and few are from noble families'*¹. Indeed, for the most part, our brothers from Geneva are poor and uneducated. In this circumstance, God wants to use what is weak *to shame what is strong*². Their meager resources will prevent them from successfully completing the building which they urgently need, unless the Catholics of France and Europe come to their aid. When we used to visit the ramparts of this famous city overturned by their latest revolution, they were assigned the names of Protestant countries that furnished the sums needed for their construction. Why shouldn't Catholics, in their turn, raise funds to build a more peaceful fortress in which the only arms will be prayer and the word of truth?

*Letter to the clergy of the Nîmes diocese,
October 28, 1855
(Letters, vol. I, p. 612)*

¹ Approximate quote of I Co 1:26.

² I Co 1:27.

Fr. d'Alzon, a friend of the future Bishop Mermillod who was at the time pastor of Geneva, endeavored through the Association of Saint-Francis de Sales to collect funds in order to help the Catholics of the city to develop their places of worship. This is how the construction of the Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception church was started in 1850. Fr. d'Alzon went to Geneva in July 1858.

August 4

Saint John-Mary Vianney, patron of priests

I want to compare three contemporary men: John-Mary Vianney, Don Bosco, and Fr. d'Alzon. These three priests worked toward the same goal, but in a different way, in various fields of the Church of Jesus Christ. They never met one another here below or tried to; each one worked courageously, then died with their boots on at the time chosen by the Master, who has now gathered them together in eternity. The Curé of Ars, a model of humility, never left his modest parish; Don Bosco, a model of gentleness, spent his life in the midst of children; Fr. d'Alzon, always bold in doing good, dared to try everything, to take in

everything; he sent forth his soldierly sons to the East and the West. People flocked to Ars to crowd around the humble John Vianney; Don Bosco traveled through city and country to gather and save children; Emmanuel d'Alzon, with unbelievable strength and enterprise, extended his charity to schools, alumnates and foreign missions. These men left behind them deep, indelible marks, the striking features of what it takes to be a man, a priest, a saint.

*Summary according to Galeran,
Sketches of Fr. d'Alzon, p. 97-98*

It would seem that Fr. d'Alzon never went to Ars. But his esteem for the holy pastor is clearly attested when he writes the following to Juliette Combié on July 7, 1857: “I willingly grant you permission to write to the pastor of Ars” (*Letters, vol. II, p. 282*).

August 5

Adoration of the Trinity

Jesus Christ is my God, and He became man for the sole purpose of reconciling the world to its offended Creator and teaching me to worship *His*

*Father in spirit and truth*¹. What is my attitude toward God the Father, the Author and Source of all that is good and of every perfect gift? Have I any conception of the reverence, worship, gratitude, and honor that I should offer Him, in union with the adoration and glory given to Him by His Son? The eternal life of the angels and saints consists in knowing the one true God and Jesus Christ whom He sent to reveal Himself to mankind. How can I ever thank my Divine Savior for undertaking this merciful mission? Have I given any indication of my gratitude up to the present, and how shall I show it from now on? “God so loved the world that he gave His only begotten Son”²; when do I intend to give myself to God, entire, undivided, and without reserve, together with His Son, and with the love that Jesus enkindles in me through His Holy Spirit? The love that unites the Father and the Son is God Himself, and it is through this love that is the Holy Spirit, that I am able to love God, “because the love of God has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given us”³. God the Father has given me His Son, who in turn has given me both Himself and the Love between Him and His Father; He has made my heart a temple, a holy place, in which is enshrined the love who is God... When will I abandon myself to the torrent of love that the Holy Trinity pours into me?

¹ Jn 4:24.

² Jn 3:16.

³ Rm 5:5.

August 6

Transfiguration of the Lord¹

Why does the Savior choose three of His apostles and lead them apart to a high mountain? Why does He appear to them between Moses and Elijah, if not to show them the various stages of humanity? After Adam and natural law comes Moses with the written law, the Elijah with penitence and the prophetic mission, then Jesus Christ, the fullness of the law. And not only Jesus in the humility of His flesh but also in the splendor of His glory, so that the Christian, contemplating the marvelous effects taking place in the body of His Savior, can understand, even though imperfectly, something of what was happening in this soul that is a model for his own.

*Homily by Fr. d'Alzon, published in Le Pèlerin,
March 16, 1878, p. 176.*

¹ According to the story of the Transfiguration. Mt 17:1-9, Mk 9:2-10 and Lk 9:28-36.

From 1877 to 1880, Fr. d'Alzon collaborated with *Le Pèlerin* by writing a series of homilies or sermons for the magazine. He had his own idea of sacred eloquence, feeling that an instruction, if it were to be retained, had to be short but substantial. He reproached himself with having been too long-winded when he was young, an illness, alas, that is very frequent in certain regions where a homily is confused with gossip: *"I demand that our preaching become more and more a substantial and doctrinal nourishment. I am going to give a type of course on preaching according to the spirit of the Assumption for the religious of Nîmes... Why are so many country parishes corrupted? Because the devil's emissaries have penetrated them boldly and too many Catholics have been silent dogs unable to bark at the thief, as the very meek Saint Francis of Sales explains"* (*Le Pèlerin*, no. 157, January 3, 1880, p. 838).

August 7

The power of silence

Silence is one of the greatest resources of the religious. The Prophet said: *"Your strength will be in silence and hope"*¹, that is, in prayer. These two great means to holiness go hand in hand: without silence, there can be no recollection; without recollection, there can be no interior life. Indeed,

if I am always talking, how can I expect to hear the voice of the Lord my God within me? How can I hope to be united to Him? How can I prepare myself for this union, either by looking back over the past, which will result in my disavowing my sins and purifying my soul, or by making acts of loving adoration, which require a great peace and quietness of soul? For what reasons do I break silence? When I examine myself, I find: 1) my thoughtlessness; I don't want to concentrate; little by little I begin to have a distaste for serious thought; it tires me out, exhausts me, becomes burdensome. 2) my imagination, which is inclined to stray; my curiosity, which wants to know everything, my spirit of criticism, whose tribunal is always set up to judge all that is said and done around me, and my self-will, which contrives innumerable reasons for not doing as I am told. In addition, I am afraid to see myself as I really am, and wish to think about anything except my failures. When shall I make up my mind to speak less with creatures and listen more attentively to what God has to say?

Directory II, 3

¹ Is 30:15. The Jerusalem Bible has the following version: *'Your salvation lay in conversion and tranquility, your strength, in complete trust'*. Concerning silence, Fr. d'Alzon wrote in September, 1860: *"There is certainly a silence that*

comes from the mute demon; I hate that one, because it inspires many useless sentences and words. But how I love the silence that comes from the attention given to listening to God in one's heart and the desire to have Him reign there!" (Letter to Sr. Mary-Margaret MacNamara, Letters, vol. III, p. 297-298).

August 8

Saint Dominic, founder of the Dominicans

Do not let certain criticisms hold you back. Is not the true Christian spirit a closed book for many people? Accept with humility the reproaches and jokes that some will direct at you. That will do you a lot of good by teaching you to be on the side of the cross and against the ideas of the world. Imbue yourself with the spirit of Saint Dominic; in great part, it is the spirit of the Assumption¹. Our Lord, who is the same for all, reveals Himself to His servants according to the different virtues that He asks of them, and differentiates, so to speak, faith and His counsels, so that each one can find what agrees with the depths of his nature. That is one of the wonderful things concerning the actions of God on souls.

*Letter to Mrs. Emile Doumet,
August 2, 1858
(Letters, vol. II, p. 485-486)*

¹ While Fr. d'Alzon situated the *raison d'être* of the Assumption “*between the Jesuits and the Dominicans*”, for him the spirit of the Assumption was closer to the spirit of Saint Dominic, who linked apostolic zeal with the fraternal, common life.

August 9

Faith-love

Looking for God with love in our hearts will help us to know him, bring us close to him, make us one with him. Let us come to know God better and better every day. With the eyes of our Faith we can begin to penetrate the Divine Nature – but we must pass through Our Lord Jesus Christ, because only through him will we find access to the Godhead. Jesus Christ provides us with a description of God. We need Faith in order to penetrate further, and Faith necessarily entails obscurity. As we journey onwards, we must expect to encounter weariness, pain, anguish of mind, doubt, incertitude Faith leads us on through the dark – we cannot see the way. No

wonder! Who has ever seen God? “Nobody,” replies Saint John. *Deum nemo vidit umquam* (“Nobody has ever seen God” Jn 1:18). We have to appeal to Our Blessed Lord, through whom God communicates with us. *Locutus est nobis in Filio* (“In these days he has spoken to us through his Son” Heb 1:2). It is this lack of direct contact with God which makes it so difficult for us to talk about him. Saint Augustine tells us : “God is so beyond human description, that as soon as I attempt to say anything about him, I say the wrong thing.” Yet the triumph of Divine Wisdom has been to give us some inkling into what God is. We begin to perceive Him in the light of Faith. *Haec est enim vita aeterna: ut cognoscant te, solum Deum verum, et quem misisti Jesum Christum* (“For this is eternal life : that they should know Thee, the One, True God – and know Jesus Christ, the One Thou hast sent” -- Our Lord's own prayer to God the Father after the Last Supper Jn 17:3). To get to know God – to get to know Him through Jesus Christ the Mediator – such must be our aim so that having got to know Him, we may enjoy him.

*To the Religious of the Assumption, August 1860,
from The Essential d’Alzon (ES p. 1152-1153)*

August 10

***Between the past and the future,
God acts in the present***

Look around you – do you not perceive how the shadows darken, how the storm-clouds pile up, how the storm threatens to break? And amid these impending calamities, there stands the Church, solid as a rock, while the rest of the world is about to crumble! It is similar to what Saint Augustine saw from the tranquillity of Hippo, while Caesar's Rome fell to pieces under the barbarian onslaught. His book, the *City of God*, is like a second revelation for us. The more we study it, the clearer we see, by way of analogy, into the future. How terribly sad and discouraging it is to contemplate the havoc wrought by fire and sword at the hands of Attila and Genseric (Gunseric)! Yet it was the mighty hand of God, sweeping away the debris of a corrupt civilisation in order to lay the foundation of something new. The bishops of Gaul were not deceived – let us imitate their foresight. They welcomed and transformed this new-fangled feudal barbarism – let us, in turn, welcome and transform the barbarism of modern democracy. Many of these old Gallo-Roman bishops must have looked back with nostalgia on the glories of a vanished past. They nevertheless rebuilt France,

like a lost swarm of bees producing a new hive. Why not do the same? So let us indulge neither in useless regrets for what is gone nor in deceptive hopes for what is to come. Let us just carry on with the good work God gives us to do.

*Closing Address to the General Chapter of 1868,
from The Essential d'Alzon (ES p. 142-143)*

August 11

Form only one body

And now, dear Fathers and Brothers, our work is done. Let us thank the Lord for having inspired us with a common vision and determination of purpose, which we all intend to develop and pursue with both mind and heart. Let us retain that fond affection towards one another as true religious must – an affection based on mutual respect, and on the need to stick together through thick and thin. Let us form but one body in the sincerity of our aims – loyal to one another, frank towards one another. Let our indissoluble bond be Our Lord Jesus Christ himself. Saint Paul tells us: *Unum corpus multi sumus omnes qui de uno pane participamus* (“We are one body though we are

many, by sharing the same bread” I Cor 10:17). Let the altar be our center, because we find Jesus Christ there; let it be likewise the throne of our Sovereign King. In the Blessed Sacrament we find Jesus Christ, the object of our supreme love, giving himself to us – and teaching us how to give ourselves to him by serving the Church he loves so well. So let us continue on our way – full of confidence, full of joy. Having laboured hard to extend God's Kingdom here on Earth, may we be found worthy to participate for ever in the glory of his Kingdom above. Amen.

*Closing Address to the General Chapter of 1868,
from The Essential d'Alzon (ES p. 145-146)*

August 12

***Through the prayers of all, work towards getting
a Pastor according to the heart of God***

Very dear Brothers of ours, the spirit of Jesus Christ is always alive in His Church, but in some way this spirit must be roused through the incessant supplications of Christians. That is why, as soon as a bishop has passed away, public prayers are prescribed to obtain a new bishop

according to the heart of God. We have to sway divine justice on behalf of the pastor who has just left us; we need to implore the supreme Pastor not to leave us orphans but to send us a prelate worthy of the one whose casket has just been closed. Let us lift up our hands toward heaven in order to obtain a bishop inflamed with the charity of Jesus Christ, filled with love for the interests of the Church, resolutely united to the immutable chair of Peter, skilled in the sacred sciences, able to inspire others with its zeal: in short, a model leader in all aspects for his people, *forma gregis ex animo*¹.

*Pastoral Letter published in 'L'Univers',
August 31, 1855
(Letters, vol. I, p. 584)*

¹ This quote is not biblical and seems to be borrowed from a liturgical text (“truly an example for the flock”).

August 13

The coming of the Kingdom in me

Regnum Dei intra vos est (“The kingdom of God is within you,” Lk 17:21), the Apostle tells

us. There is no need to search for it elsewhere. What is the Kingdom of God? It is the intimate relationship you and I must establish with God, considering who God is and who we are. God is infinitely perfect – God is unchangeable. So God's attitude towards us cannot change – but our attitude towards Him must. Day by day we must fight our faults – try to rid ourselves of our sinful habits – endeavour to become less unworthy of God's ineffable communications because day by day he showers his blessings upon those who sincerely and generously try to do their best to establish his reign over their hearts. And as we cleanse our souls by wiping out what stains we perceive, Jesus Christ, that “true light which enlightens every man coming into this world” (Jn 1:9) draws nearer to us, and gives us a deeper insight into God's perfections and what we owe him as well as greater energy to accomplish the duties of which we are now more aware.

*First Letter to the Master of Novices,
from The Essential d'Alzon (ES p. 150-151)*

August 14

Of Humility

Humility will rid us of our self-seeking. Good works done for personal gratification, and not simply to please God, expose us to the danger of hearing these terrifying words: "*Ecce in sacrificiis vestris invenitur voluntas vestra. In your sacrifices is found your personal will*"¹. If we are humble, we will obey, no matter how difficult the sacrifices demanded of us, for self-distrust will make us understand our need to be led; and being conscious of our own weakness, we shall place all the more confidence in God. Humility will give rise to a great openness of heart with regard to our Superiors and will enable us to discuss with them our faults, our temptations, our difficulties, our needs, in fact, all of our spiritual ailments. It will lead us to accept all assignments, even the most lowly and despised. It will give us reverence for time-honored traditions of the Community, even when their meaning escapes us. And it will lead us to control our tongue.

Directory, II, 2

¹ Is. 58:3. The exact text is: *Ecce in die jejunii vestra invenitur voluntas vestra: "Lo, on your fast day you carry out your own pursuits."*

August 15

*Assumption of the Virgin Mary
(Mary shares the glory of Christ because she
embraced the Way of the Cross)*

The mystery that unifies the life of Mary is the Immaculate Conception; the mystery that consumes her in glory is the Assumption. Between the two and in order to unify them, I identify her painful Compassion. Why? Because the birth of Jesus Christ and the rest of His life are linked to human salvation taking place through the cross, and Mary was the purest of creatures in order to cooperate perfectly with Jesus Christ in the mystery of the Redemption through her Compassion. Her glory in heaven is so great because of this very cooperation. By this we are taught that we must purify ourselves more and more each day in order to be less unworthy of suffering. The more we have suffered, the greater will be our glory.

*Letter to Mother Marie Correnson,
August 19, 1868
(Letters, vol. VII, p. 140-141)*

In founding his congregations, Fr. d'Alzon had no intention of their being a Marian Assumption in the sense that the Marists or the Oblates claim a specific Marian identity since

he insisted rather on an Augustinian foundation. In the Augustinian tradition Mary enjoys the important, even extraordinary, place she plays in the faith of all Christians. Nevertheless, Fr. d'Alzon had a premonition that one day the Church would define the Assumption of Mary on a par with the Immaculate Conception (cf. *Letters. vol. VI, p. 214, and vol. VII, p. 380 and vol. XII, p. 175*). It was Pope Pius XII who proclaimed the dogma of the Assumption on November 1, 1950

Obviously the feast of the Assumption is also the feast of the entire congregation, which enjoys gathering together during pilgrimages it organizes in shrines throughout the world, in Europe as well as in Latin America.

August 16

The Gospel, a school of Christian life

Take the Gospel and read it, re-read it, meditate it, apply to yourself what you can imitate of the life of the Divine Savior. His time in Mary's womb and then at Nazareth, do these not convey to you the need to withdraw from the world if you want to be in communion with God? Doesn't His birth in a poor stable warn you of the contempt that you must have of worldly goods and a comfortable life? Don't you see the spirit of poverty preached in a lively manner that does

battle with our sluggishness? Already on the eighth day of His life on earth He undergoes circumcision, which can serve as a model for the circumcision of our hearts, for the sacrifices and the pruning that we must have the courage to undergo if we want to imitate the Savior. His hidden life in Nazareth can serve as a model for everyone. He lives in obscurity; He works; and there is found perfection. For most of us the hidden life, the life of work, is surest way of acquiring Christian virtue. But what doesn't Jesus do in the role of sanctifying Mary and Joseph? A wonderful model of the action of sanctification that persons who want to become perfect must exercise in the midst of families, even the most humble ones.

*Instruction for the Tertiaries of the Assumption,
B.P., 1930, p. 14.*

During his pilgrimage to Nazareth in 1964, Pope Paul VI developed this same theme of the school of life that the hidden life of Christ in the hills of Galilee illustrates.

August 17

Soaring toward God, source of all good

Since God is life, since God is light, then He must be the supreme Good. It is to this supreme Good that we aspire. Why did our Saviour come down to this world? Was it not to teach us to look for everlasting happiness in the possession of limitless goodness? And where can this limitless goodness be found except in God and God alone? How precious and beneficial to us is this light of Jesus Christ. It teaches us to seek single-heartedly the pearl of great price for which the merchant of the parable sold all that he owned in order to buy it¹. What a limitless gain! What incomparable beauty! What a source of inexhaustible joy! It is towards you, Lord, that I now wish to hurl myself, freed of every earthly good. Give me wings to fly - up above the vain deceptions of this world. Let me find my rest in you, and you alone. Yes, I leave it to you to decide what will make me truly happy. You are the fulfilment of all happiness. You will raise my mind and my heart to their true level by transporting them, now and forever, into the Kingdom above.

*Sixth Meditation,
from The Essential d'Alzon (ES p. 363)*

¹ Cf. Mt 13:45-46.

August 18

Shattering false ideas

It's terrible to receive false, evil, unjust ideas. So it is that a young man will hear it said that all religions are good. He allows to take root in himself that principle which the Protestants in the time of Luther propagated: *Illius est religio cujus est regio: One must follow the religion of one's country*. But in this case, one would have to be a Catholic or a free-thinker in France; Protestant in Germany; Muslim in Turkey; Brahman in India; pagan in the center of Africa or the Americas. Or he may hear it said: *"The Catholic Church should be persecuted because it persecutes other religions!"* You can see the risk of certain false ideas: they spread and win over minds. Well! Here is a fundamental aspect of your education: discovering true ideas, correct ideas. But how will we present them to you? Saint Augustine will once again provide us with an answer: *"This trinity, then, of the mind is not therefore the image of God, because the mind remembers itself, and*

understands and loves itself; but because it can also remember, understand, and love Him by whom it was made.”¹. Let us be totally clear about this: you were made in the image of God; you were able to know Him; but original sin came and shattered something in you and its first effect was ignorance.

*Saturday Instructions,
B.P., 1932, p. 80-81*

¹ De Trinitate, XIV, 12 (15) (taken from Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, vol. III, ed. Schaff)

August 19

***The gift of faith
and the comprehension of faith***

This gift will not enable us to delve into such deep mysteries as we hope to comprehend when we get to Heaven – but even here below it will aid and increase our faith. The more we understand of the things of God by the light of faith, the closer we will cling to what we cannot yet grasp but look forward to understanding one day. So this gift of understanding will help us to study, to meditate

and to pray. It will assist us in our search for God. It will make us work hard to get to know Him better and better. Better and better. Yes, the gift of understanding will make us do better and better. *Da mihi intellectum et scrutabor legem tuam, et custodiam illam in toto corde meo* (“Give me insight to observe your teaching, to keep it with all my heart” Ps 119:34). This gift is possessed by every Christian soul in the state of grace. With God's help it must be developed. Faith also brings us the gift of knowledge, whereby we discern what we have to believe and what we don't. This gift is more concerned with the acquisition of human knowledge, the development of human thought. But, seen from the supernatural point of view, it does enable us to employ our human knowledge in the service of God. Lord, give me a deeper understanding of things human and things divine. In the light of faith, let me comprehend, as far as possible, what I must believe in – and do, as perfectly as possible, what I have to do.

*Eleventh Meditation,
from The Essential d'Alzon (ES p. 404)*

August 20

Saint Bernard of Clairvaux

Let us pray well and you will see how God will treat us with His greatest love. *Mulier cum parit, tristitiam habet*¹. Oh! Why didn't I take care of the alummates first of all? Why? But the good Lord had not yet inspired me with that idea. So, the time had not yet come. When Saint Dominic established the core of his Order, he dispersed the members, sending them out one by one. Numbers matter little; what counts is bravery. And the bravery of religious consists in holiness. Make use of Fr. Laurent; the best way to deal with Bro. Edmond and Fr. Thomas is not in reproaching them but in engaging them in dialogue; finally, have people pray a lot. I am totally convinced that relentless prayer will obtain immense spiritual treasures for us. Look at Saint Bernard. He wanted to become a religious; his parents tried to dissuade him. It was he who influenced them and, with thirty young persons, he knocked at the door of Cîteaux. Have the zeal of Saint Bernard and thirty religious will rise from the earth.²

*Letter to Fr. Emmanuel Bailly,
August 20, 1875,
(Letters, vol. XI, p. 213)*

¹ Jn 16:21: “When a woman is in labor, she is in anguish”.

² Fr. d’Alzon had a great devotion to the founder of Clairvaux, “the Virgin’s cantor.” He liked to recall that the feast-day of this saint made a deep impression on him, “having undergone a sort of conversion on the feast of Saint Bernard in 1830, each year I have felt repercussions from it” (*Letters*, vol. I, p. 68-69).

August 21

The figure of a much beloved student: Félix Hedde

Pray to God for the Assumption of Nîmes; this is the sixth child that has died this year. I bless God, but like Job, with suffering that cannot be washed away by tears. A child who last year was given the title “old student,” and who was preparing for the Polytechnic school: the young Hedde that Mr. Tissot knows well. He took ill some two weeks ago when he went to Beaucaire, and until thirty-six hours before his death, the doctor was not worried. He died in the arms of his father and mother. The poor mother had lost six children; the seventh remained, alone and full of hope, and God took him. So long, my daughter. Only one thought consoles me: he left for heaven

as the first fruits of the Assumption; for, as long as he was alive, he never stopped talking about becoming a religious with us. God took pleasure in his desire. Do not be scandalized if I show a bit of weakness. He was one of the children that I loved the most. God takes for Himself what is the best; it's in His plan. May His will be done in everything and everywhere!

*Letter to Mother Marie-Eugénie de Jésus,
August 8, 1851
(Letters, vol. I, p. 64-65)*

August 22

Of manual labor

I must tell you the result of my own experience on this matter and also discuss the different opinions that people may have about it. Every now and then at Le Vigan, Father Hippolyte sends his novices to work in the fields, to cut hay or harvest the grapes, whatever the season requires. When Fr. d'Alzon is there, he also goes to the fields to give edifying example, but he quickly gets winded and his sixty years force him to stop. Well! Fr. Laurent who is, you know, an excellent

religious, very fervent, even scrupulous, is extremely scandalised by this way of doing things. He feels it is perfectly useless to put novices, destined for the priesthood, the teaching profession, or missionary work, to this kind of servile activity. Let's examine this matter, and without getting into a quarrel with Fr. Laurent, I'll say straightaway that Fr. Hippolyte is right. It's very useful to impose manual labour on novices, because it's good to taste humility once in a while; manual work is a marvellous means to cure laziness and to correct certain attitudes of independence. Without launching into the opinions of Mabillon and de Rancé¹ on this question, all I want to say is that I'm convinced that in certain cases there is nothing as effective to cure headstrong characters as work outside in the open air. If a sister drives her superior crazy, then let the superior send her to gather the hay. I guarantee that in a very short time, thanks to fresh air, she will mend her ways... If we gave the job of drawing water from the well to deranged sisters, many a head would get cleared up.

*Conference to the Religious of the Assumption
(November 1870),
from The Essential d'Alzon (ES p. 673-674)*

¹ De Rancé was the founder of the Cistercians of the Strict Observance at La Trappe in France. Mabillon was a Benedictine monk and scholar.

August 23

Saint Rose of Lima
(patroness of Latin America)

Even though I hope to see you next Friday, my dear daughter, I want to wish you a happy feast of Saint Rose. Although your devotion to this charming little saint is not a devotion of the first order, it seems to me that in her life there are many virtues that you could imitate, if only her ardent love for Our Lord. Why wouldn't this love fill you with enthusiasm? If you persist in the plans you have revealed to your mother, why wouldn't you apply yourself to undertake that more serious life that you have spoken of with her? The feast-day of Saint Rose would be a beautiful feast on which to decide what you should do. I promised that I would help you see all the disadvantages of the life that you choose: I believe that I have adequately fulfilled my promise. If you persevere in preferring above all

your white crown and lily, well then, be a young lady bent on perfection.

*Letter to Marie Correnson,
August 29, 1864
(Letters, vol. V, p. 124)*

The feast of Saint Rose of Lima, renowned for her penitence and the first one to be canonized on her continent, was celebrated on August 30 in the 19th century (in Latin America the feast is still celebrated on this day). Fr. d'Alzon had recently read a biography of this saint.

August 24

Saint Bartholomew, apostle

I was beseeching the good Lord for you a short time ago with great fervor. I still believe that you could be an auxiliary of love, suffering, and sacrifice for me. You can ask the Assumption for books that are not too serious, but interesting. Louise, when Our Lord announced the Eucharist, He declared that one must eat His body and drink His blood to have eternal life¹; finding such a discourse too hard to accept, the Jews left him. And Jesus, turning to the Twelve, said these simple words to them: "*Do you want to go away,*

too?” I say to you: Incline the ear of your heart toward the tabernacle and if you hear Our Lord say to you: “And you, too, shall you go away?” Answer Him with Saint Peter: “Jesus, my God and my spouse, to whom shall I go? You have the words of eternal life”².

*Letter to Louise Chabert,
May 31, 1870
(Letters, vol. VIII, p. 392)*

¹ Jn 6:60

² Jn 6:67

August 25

Feast of Saint Louis

And you, Christian parents, present at this celebration that is so dear to you, I shall give you no other encouragement to work for the education of your children than to remind you of your duties toward them. And these duties, I find them expressed magnificently in the words that an illustrious princess said to her son, whose feast the Church celebrates this very day: “*My son,*” said *Queen Blanche to Saint Louis,* “*God knows how*

dear you are to me, and nevertheless I would rather see you dead at my feet than to know that your soul was stained by a mortal sin.” That is the foundation on which the education of this king, one of the glories of the Church and of France, was established. Don’t let others educate your families; thus you will cooperate worthily with the tireless efforts of the devoted teachers of your children. You will have understood as well what inspires these men to strive incessantly to obtain better results from their teaching. And finally, you will pay your debt to the first magistrate of this city, whose enlightened zeal has as its goal a lasting good, since he sows it in the heart of young generations.

Speech on the occasion of the distribution of prizes to the students of Saint-Maur (1840), according to T. D., vol. 48, p. 141-142.

On this day the Assumptionists and the entire Assumption Family pray in a special way united with the Religious and the Oblates serving in the parish of Saint Louis in Moscow where, since Bishop Neveu’s arrival, they have shared a beautiful page in inter-Christian fellowship, in times of tears as well as in times filled with hope, something that makes ecumenism shine forth daily.

August 26

***Between war and peace,
a patriotism of charity***

After a glorious war also comes a glorious peace thanks to the moderation of the victor, the principles that it honors, the fears that it calms, the sacrilegious hopes that it confounds. Later, you will be asked to pray in thanksgiving for a benefit so promptly obtained; today, we are approaching you so that you might point out to your parishioners a duty of Christian charity. Even though the war was ended quickly, nevertheless there were victims: some died, others are stretched out on a bed of suffering. The families who have lost a member and the wounded reduced to inactivity call out for help that France should offer them with pride. A national fund has been established for this purpose, and we approach you, dear Pastor, to call on the patriotism as well as the charity of your flock. You are asked to collect all the monetary gifts as well as those in kind that will be entrusted to you and asked to deposit them either with the mayor of your commune or the mayor of your district, whoever has been named president of the special committee to receive this kind of help.

*Letter to the diocesan clergy of Nîmes,
July 16, 1859
(Letters, vol. III, p. 120)*

This call for solidarity for the victims of the war followed the Franco-Sardo-Austrian conflict that saw the birth of a first kind of Italian state in 1859. Even if the Church cannot stop conflicts, it always tries to humanize their sad consequences.

August 27

Saint Monica

Since receiving your letter yesterday, I have prayed a lot for you. An hour after reading it, at St. Croix de Jérusalem, we were able to venerate the relics of the passion. This morning, the feast of the Dedication of Saint Peter and anniversary of the consecration of His Excellency, we went to celebrate Mass at Saint Peter's: all of the relics are exposed on the main altar. Again I asked that many graces be showered upon you. His Excellency stayed for the High Mass; I preferred returning slowly and visiting a few churches on the way back. I stopped at that of Saint Augustine; I prayed in front of the famous Madonna, at the Saint Nicholas chapel, and at that of Saint

Monica. Shall I admit it? Nothing tempts me to join the Augustinians. It is a dead Order. There is only cardinal Pitra who would want to see me mitred abbot of Saint Augustine. Let me tell you that I wouldn't want that at all.

*Letter to Mother Marie-Eugénie of Jesus,
November 18, 1869
(Letters, vol. VIII, p. 20)*

In November 1869, Fr. d'Alzon was in Rome with Bishop Plantier for the opening of Vatican I. It is in the church of Saint Augustine that the remains of Saint Monica were transferred from Ostia in 1430 under Pope Martin V. As he faced the church, Fr. d'Alzon could recall his ordination to the priesthood in December 1834 which took place in the buildings of what had been the vicariate of Rome, now la Casa del Clero. Concerning Augustine's mother, Fr. d'Alzon sticks to tradition: "*You saw, during these days, that, on the feast of Saint Monica, Saint Augustine was content to cry for his mother's death a tiny half-hour*" (*Letters, vol. II, p. 436*). In 1858, he mentions his intention of starting an association of Saint Monica, patroness of all mothers praying for the conversion or the protection of children and of Christian schools.

August 28

*Feast of Saint Augustine.
The Assumption in the Augustinian tradition*

To be loved, Jesus Christ must be known. We must study him first and foremost in the inspired books. Jesus Christ will be for us the prized treasure sought as we delve into the sacred pages. We will strive to know him as God, as man, and as the author of the supernatural gifts which unite us to the Father. Saint Augustine, our patriarch, will be our principal guide. Study his treatise on the Blessed Trinity – study the wonderful writings for which the Church has given him the title of “Doctor of Grace” – let these form the substance of our theology. To these we would add his “Letter to Volusian” in which he treats the Incarnation; and, as an introduction to true philosophy, his treatises, “Against the Academicians,” “On Free Will,” and the “Letter to Dioscorus.”

*Closing Address to the General Chapter of 1868,
from The Essential d’Alzon (ES p. 140)*

The study of Saint Augustine’s thought was the occasion for a first-class patristic editorial initiative under Fr. Fulbert Cayré (1884-1971). Since 1956, The Institute for Augustinian Studies (Institut des Études augustiniennes),

which enjoys an international intellectual reputation today, has continued to pursue its work of diffusing the thought of the Patriarch of the West. There is no lack, moreover, in Europe, in Africa as well as in America of Assumptionists with an intellectual, spiritual or apostolic temperament who do honor to this Augustinian heritage. The review *Itinéraires Augustiniens* generously opens its columns to all of Augustine's friends. The Assumptionist scholasticate of Bulengera in the Congo is named after Saint Augustine.

August 29

The Martyrdom of Saint John the Baptist

You have Sisters who pray for you in heaven and their prayers are efficacious because their sacrifice was accepted. I don't want to send all of you to the cemetery at the same time but I do want you to make the resolution of becoming true victims of love for the salvation of souls. Have a bit of courage, and let it grow a bit every day. Ask Our Lord to make of you ardent and brilliant lamps. Like Saint John the Baptist, seek to be his forerunner everywhere. Yes, in every place where He could be better known¹. Two weeks ago the Pope said to missionary bishops: *'I bless your sweating, your tears, I bless your blood'*, and this evening I heard the bishop of Tulle preach to the

Zouaves and say that the superiority of the soldier over the angel is that he can spill his blood as Jesus Christ did. Who knows if you will not spill your blood? I am not worthy of martyrdom, but who knows if before I die, I won't have the joy of seeing some of my daughters soar toward heaven with the martyr's palms? Why not?

*Letter to the Oblate novices,
December 22, 1869
(Letters, vol. VIII, p. 83)*

¹ You can refer to the Gospel texts of Mt. 25, Jn 5:35 and 15:1. The masculine branch of the Assumption saw the Church recognize the martyrdom of three of its Bulgarian religious in May 2002, in Plovdiv.

August 30

Case of conscience concerning mixed marriages

One day in 1848, Rev. Coquerel, the father, narrated a story in the halls of the National Assembly of which he was a member, in which he had just been the main actor. "*Imagine,*" he said to me, "*that a young Catholic wanted to marry a*

Jewish girl. Neither the pastor nor the rabbi wanted to marry them because their religious observance made it repellent. They came to see me in a sorry state. Oh! I said to them, I don't have such scruples; in the name of charity, come let me bless you. And I married them." All of liberal Protestantism follows such thinking. Be you Catholic, Protestant, Jew, Muslim, pagan, as long as you are an honest man and that you have charity, of what importance is the rest? There is surely some difficulty for the Jew who detests Jesus Christ; but the Protestant Coquerel, having fixed things up with the marriage blessed by him, why be more severe? One must be more open. Mr. Cazaux affirmed it! Mr. Vigié, in his fine description of the last judgment, confirms it! Mr. Joubin, the headmaster, supposedly a Catholic, with his crown of immortals, will not dare to invalidate it, and this will not only be tolerance, but justice in the name of equality, a message from the Protestant Midi!

*Gazette of Nîmes, April 11, 1875
(T. D., vol. 7, p. 322)*

In this page Fr. d'Alzon especially wanted to stigmatize a certain religious indifference that leveled everything. As far as the practice of the Catholic Church, it has become much more supple in accompanying to the altar couples with mixed religion (what is known in Canon Law as "disparity

of cult”). The Church thus takes into account the desire of the spouses to be recognized at the same time in their religious difference and their mutual respect to grow according to their own spiritual roots. Let our prayer sustain these homes where listening to the other goes through a certain suffering since they are not able to share fully one and the same faith.

August 31

Mary Mediatrix¹

We ought to know how to leave Jesus. Sometimes, Jesus leaves us and we should not grumble. We say to the Savior: “*Quid fecisti nobis sic?*”². Jesus answers: *Quid et quod me quaerebatis?*². In Jesus, there are two things, His humanity and His divinity. For, if we can imagine an imperfection in Mary, she sees in this moment in Jesus more her son than her God, and Jesus wants her to see more her God than her son. We must do the same. As long as we are on earth, we must go to the mediator, Jesus Christ the man, yet remember that as man He is only the mediator. If we have to treat Jesus in this way, what are we to say of the means that God has given us? Let us use them as means, but only as such. Let us see

the holy humanity of Jesus, but a mediating humanity.

On Jesus rediscovered
(*T. D.*, vol. 48, p. 356)

¹ This feast of Mary Mediatrix, born in Belgium in the wake of a powerful Mariology, is meant to evoke the participation of Mary in the work of grace of Christ. The super-eminent place of the Virgin in the Christian mystery must still be understood and interpreted in the light of Christ, the only Savior and Mediator between God and man. Let us remember the wise precisions of Vatican II: “*Therefore the Blessed Virgin is invoked by the Church under the titles of Advocate, Auxiliatrix, Adjutrix, and Mediatrix. This, however, is to be so understood that it neither takes away from nor adds anything to the dignity and efficaciousness of Christ the one Mediator.*” *Lumen Gentium*, #62.

² A reference to the passage in Luke’s gospel when Jesus is left behind in the Temple and his parents return to find him there. They say, “*Son, why have you done this to us?*” Then he replies, “*Why were you looking for me?*” Lk 2:48, 49.

MONTH OF SEPTEMBER

September is the month for harvesting crops, both of grapes and of students, as they return to school, at least in the Northern Hemisphere. Between 1864 and 1874, after the dog months of summer, Fr. d'Alzon used to take an opportunity to disappear from Nimes for a little while and enjoy the shade of the country side, especially at Lavagnac, or the company of the novices at Le Vigan. There is no particular theme to the writings that we have chosen from this month. A few feast days and memorials occur in the course of it. They are: the 3rd: St. Gregory the Great; the 8th: the Birth of the Virgin Mary; the 13th: St. John Chrysostom; the 14th: the Triumph of the Cross; the 15th: Our Lady of Sorrows; the 21st: St. Matthew; the 27th: St. Vincent de Paul; the 29th: the Archangels and the 30th: St. Jerome, a selection that offers a few appropriate d'Alzonian

quotations. Moreover, each day the Founder allows us to deepen an aspect of his thought and of his spirituality that we find here and there in his writings, of his activities or his instructions, even sometimes some of the improvisations for which he had a gift and which were spared the oblivion that often comes with the passage of time.

September 1

A wonderful start of a new school-year, the beginnings of a fine harvest

The school-year has just begun. The number of students is really much better than we had dared to hope for, almost thirty new boarders, and I wouldn't be surprised if we exceeded that number before New Year's Day. I'm convinced that we were quite wrong in not sending out more recruiters. Our trips this year produced very good results, and we have decided to do more. The members of the admissions committee are determined to pursue this work and they want me to go out and beat the bushes as well. I have an idea for an association: of St. Monica, patroness of all mothers, sisters, etc. and having them pray for the conversion, or rather the protection, of children and of Christian houses of education in particular. Tell Mother about it. I shall elaborate and set down a plan.

*Letter to Fr. Hippolyte Saugrain,
October 20, 1858
(Letters, vol. II, p. 549-550)*

In the 19th century the beginning of the school-year occurred much later, usually in late October, in order to allow youngsters from the countryside, at least those who went to school, to help their parents in the heavy farm work.

September 2

Acting together in one concerted effort

Every day they come to do their exercises under the chestnut trees. I marvel at all the arm and leg movements, the orders well executed and not, in order to become soldiers, even though, after all, they will only be peaceful national guards. How sorry the nation protected by such people! How sorry the nation with so many of them! Well, religious life is very similar. So many repetitions of the same exercises before we can be what God wants us to be. Not to mention those that we don't do. Even if France were to have a great national guard or even a valiant army, what would it be capable of without a leader? Thus, all the members of the congregation have to work at different levels, from the postulant on up to the superior general. However, instead of a single leader, the congregation needs a sort of aristocracy so that the key ideas will not die with

the one leader. It needs, if I may say so, a permanent council of war even if it isn't always in session, at least meeting often and exchanging their views by correspondence, as frequently as possible.

*Letter to Fr. Emmanuel Bailly,
October 27, 1870
(Letters, vol. VIII, p. 519)*

Father d'Alzon was not afraid of making tough statements. During the 1860's he encouraged the formation, at his college in Nimes, of para-military units that might prepare youth to enroll in the ranks of the Pontifical zouaves for the defense of the States of the Church which were then being threatened, or later in 1870, in a voluntary national guard since the country lacked a system of obligatory military service.

September 2 is the national holiday of Vietnam. Let us pray for and with our brothers and sisters of the Assumption Family in Vietnam. May the Lord bless their apostolic desire to hasten the coming of the Kingdom of God in every heart.

September 3

Saint Gregory the Great

There are beautiful ruins here: ruins of palaces, of tombs, of temples. But ruins of commodities as well! What memories! The present generation will not leave any, unless you become saints. Harsh words, but true! I went walking the other day in the garden of St. Gregory the Great. On the one hand, there are the ruins of the Palatine, beautiful ruins soiled by the orgies of Nero and Caligula; opposite, the Baths of Caracalla; at my feet, the stylish quarter of that period; then Saint Peter's on the right, Saint Sebastian on the left, and under my feet, the cradle of the faith in England. What remains of Nero, of Caligula, of Vespasian, of Domitian and so many others? Look at what remains of St. Peter, the saints who came after him, the works they did, initiated or completed!

*Letter to the students of the Collège de l'Assomption,
March 30, 1870
(Letters, vol. VIII, p. 292)*

Before his ordination Gregory the Great was prefect of Rome; at first he became a monk in the monastery of St. Andrew. Later he became the evangelizer of the Angles by commissioning missionaries sent forth in the spirit of St. Augustine. He wrote many letters of which 858 are extant.

One of them contains this observation: "*Man is a leaf fallen from the tree of paradise*".

September 4

Our Lady of Consolation

It was after coming out from Mass, at which I received the profession of Bro. Alexis Dumazer, that I found your letter, my dear daughter. I shall pray for your father and I think it's not for nothing that the Blessed Virgin permitted that he leave this world almost on the eve of the day dedicated to this beautiful feast, the mystery of which you wanted to honor in a special way in the Congregation that you placed under the protection of the triumph of the Mother of God. I understand your concern for a soul of someone who had already caused you so much anxiety, but the spirit of faith of your brother and of your family must have given all of you the consolation that one may ask for at such a time. Please your brother my best. I must admit that I like him very much, first of all because he is your brother, and also because he is who he is.

*Letter to Mother Marie-Eugénie de Jésus,
August 15, 1864
(Letters, vol. V, p. 116)*

This feast day belongs to the Augustinian proper. This letter was written when the father of Mother Marie-Eugénie died in August of 1864. The brother of Mother Marie-Eugénie mentioned here is Louis Milleret who had been very active in promoting the interests of sisters' collège in Clichy.

September 5

Reading with pen in hand

For it is not sufficient to have ploughed through twenty or thirty volumes of Church History in order to learn all there is to be known. The problems which keep on cropping up in this "Progress of the Peoples" have each to be placed in their context, and carefully studied. You can't just turn over page after page, and expect to absorb the lot. Each page contains facts, affirmations and denials, more or less elaborated. Pen in hand, you must sift the material and extract the essential. At times the truth stands out as clear as daylight – what is so patently true must be borne in mind. At other times it is difficult to see your way – so you must advance slowly, but with

dogged persistence, accepting nothing you cannot be sure of.

Underline passages by all means – but ask yourself questions as you go along. It appears that Bossuet's Bibles and Saint Augustine's Commentaries were smothered in notes. So I would like this young man I am thinking of – this young man condemned to the kind of solitary study which Monsieur de Bonald describes as both requiring and creating genius – I would like him to deface and massacre his Church History text book by scrawling all over it. Let him tussle with it and get the better of it! Having read it once, let him read it all over again – even if he were to find in this rereading stains, lacunae, and incomplete solutions.

*From The Essential d'Alzon (ES p. 1044-1045),
"The Revolution: Enemy of the Church."
The 26th Nîmes Lecture"*

September 6

To resemble Christ

Lord Jesus, you had nowhere to lay your head (Luke 9:58), and you were obedient unto death

(Phil. 2:8). You are the Lamb of God whose blood is the wine “bringing forth virgins.” Come and crown the three faculties of my soul with the three-headed crown of regeneration. O let me be poor like you, obedient like you, chaste like you, so that I may resemble you in all things. Of all my wishes, you know what I long for most: it is to become like you – to share everything with you, especially the Priesthood in which you were not only Priest but Victim. But before exercising its redoubtable functions on you, my Lord and Saviour, teach me how to exercise them on myself. Teach me to offer myself to you all the days of my life – my entire self: my passions that they may be enslaved to your service. And one day let me hear your voice summoning me higher yet: “Quia super pauca fuisti fidelis super multa ego te constituam.”¹.

*Personal Notes: “My Portrait,”
February 19, 1831
from The Essential d’Alzon (ES p. 744)*

¹ Mt 25: 21, 23 “Well done, good and faithful servant. Because you have been faithful in a few little things, I will place you over greater things and more.”

September 7

Positive Education

Let us work to make Christians out of our students; the rest will follow. Don't you think that perhaps we have been too busy with our students' faults and not enough with the virtues that we should be helping them to acquire? We have proceeded negatively, or, rather, we have proceeded by destroying and not enough by edifying or planting seeds. You may be inclined to respond: "Before planting good trees, you first have to pull out the bad roots". Not always. In America they leave a lot of tree trunks to rot in the fields, but the harvests are even better as a result. It is a matter of obstacles being transformed into means. Let us leave aside the trivial questions which seem to inundate us. As we would with brambles, let us set fire one fine day to all that and let us go on with our work. Let us demand a lot of virtue from our students; let us have the courage to speak to them of their call to holiness; let us train them. If the parents want to protest, let them. Believe me, Assumption has a marvelous future if its main concern is none other than God and the Church. Let us love; let us get them to love Jesus-Christ and his Blessed Mother; the rest will

follow. However, to achieve such a goal requires a lot of contagious faith.

*Letter to Fr. Emmanuel Bailly,
October 12, 1878
(Letters, vol. XII, p. 580)*

This beautiful reflection on the ministry of education at the Assumption, recalling the paramount characteristic of a positive commitment to those values which must be fostered and developed in the hearts of the young, no doubt inspired many Assumptionists and Oblates in their dedication to teaching. We recommend the beautiful piece on this topic which Fr. Jean-Michel Brochec wrote: *To Educate and to Teach according to the Assumptionist Spirit*.

September 8

Birth of the Virgin Mary

I've been preparing to celebrate this feast for a number of days, and, as I was telling you, I think, in my last letter, I would have wanted it to be for me like a second birth. That's the thought that struck me the most. So, to prepare myself to enter into this mystery of the birth of Mary, I have spent these last few days reflecting on it for several hours. What struck me the most are the necessity

for limitless dedication, a great sensitivity of conscience and then a great remorse for not having pushed you enough toward the good. Also, my dear child, I insist on asking your forgiveness. And if I don't do it on my knees it's because the Rule of St. Augustine forbids it. This morning, at Mass, I renewed the vows that you know I have made. I made an additional one: to devote myself entirely to your perfection.

*Letter to Mother Marie-Eugénie de Jésus,
September 8, 1846
(Letters, vol. C, p. 128)*

This Marian feast, celebrated since the High Middle Ages, was honored in a particular way by two Fathers of the Church, Andrew of Crete and John Damascene. In addition, there is this unpublished composition by the poet Leconte de Lisle:

*O Earth, forget for a day your ancient distress;
O sky and sea alike, beat with sure happiness.
The Blessed Virgin was born in the womb of God.
She flies, enlightened by a fiery rainbow broad,
Like the dove that carried to the ark of refuge,
The olive branch that survived the deadly deluge.
The morning star illumines the seas; creatures without
number, greet her and bless her,
The One whom the Most High God's shadow will cover,
The One Virgin who would carry within,
God existing before time would ever begin .*

September 9

Beautiful grape harvest

Now then, do all you can to prepare for the arrival of Mother Françoise-Eugénie (de Malbosc); do all you can to welcome her with all the solemnity that corresponds to the position she holds. Also, before I forget, without adding to the expense, remind your Reverend Assistant, Sister Marie Gabrielle (de Courcy), that on the 19th I would like her to do the adoration of the Blessed Sacrament at a parish that has asked to have their day changed. What shall I say about the recent grape harvest? I would imagine that is of interest to you. The harvest won't be as abundant as it was last year, but it will be of a much, much, much better quality. Someone has asked me for a little barrel of 45 liters. If you are very good, I shall have you taste some. We have some grapes that are as large as those of the Promised Land. Now then, repent, and at each new degree of holiness that Sister Marie-Gabrielle observes, I promise to send you a bottle.

*Letter to Sister Thérèse de la Conception Bardou,
September 8, 1864
(Letters, vol. V, p. 135)*

Father d'Alzon was resting at Lavagnac from the 18th to the 22nd of September, 1864. He had plenty of free time to oversee the ripening of the grapes. At the time, his cousin, Edmond d'Alzon, was nearby at the family residence of l'Estang. He had introduced a variety of table grape, called chasselas, for that wine-growing region.

September 10

The Goal of Assumption

Our little Association intends to grow in holiness by extending the Kingdom of Christ in souls. The most characteristic aspect of our spirit must be love: a burning love for Our Blessed Lord and for his Blessed Mother who is to be our special patroness – an immense zeal for the Church – an eradicable attachment to the Holy See. Our life must be one of faith – of dedication and self-sacrifice – of prayer, apostolic activity, and complete frankness in all our dealings. We are distressed at the sight of so much rivalry between the diocesan clergy and the religious orders. Let us be extra-specially careful to avoid it by remaining within our assigned limits. We must not meddle with what is specifically their task. We must know how to hand over to them some of the

good work we ourselves have been doing well – to restrict ourselves to what they wish us to do. Let us always be humble and disinterested. What matters is that Christ's servants should co-operate in brotherly love – each cultivating that portion of the vineyard entrusted to his care.

*“General Overview”
from The Essential d’Alzon, (ES p. 648)*

September 11

Working for the Master of the field and not as though we were the masters

Mr. Thiers (a nineteenth century French economist) wrote a book in which he maintained that a field belongs to whoever cultivates it, to whoever labours and sweats to make it productive. I do not intend to discuss this theory now - but the fact remains that everybody experiences an extraordinary propensity to appropriate the soil from which he earns his living. Look at the delightful little field you have been given to cultivate: orchards laden with fruit - kitchen-gardens full of choice vegetables name them and count them. Look at the souls, look at the

hearts. Watch them budding and ripening. Look at these lovely flowers. Look at these luscious fruits. You have laboured so hard to produce them, that it is only natural for you to think they belong to you. But you mustn't. Their perfume and their sweetness belong to God. You must never forget that you and I are - I won't say "machines," but I will say, "humble tools" wherewith he operates. It is so easy to say: "What a pity this child is no longer in my charge. I was the only one who could do him or her any good" But here we are enthroning our own spirit, our own thoughts and feelings, where the Catholic spirit, the thoughts and interests of God, are alone entitled to dwell. It's like many a priest whom the bishop has placed in charge of a particular parish. He introduces so many of his own ideas, his own attitudes, his own devotions, that it can hardly be called a "Catholic" parish any more - it has become "Father So and So's parish." Don't laugh. The same applies to many a school - it becomes "Mother So and So's school." No, we must work for Our Lord - and with his help we must increase his influence, not our own. Bring Christ to souls. Don't just bring yourself. Amen.

*Auteuil, February 1869,
from The Essential d'Alzon (ES p. 709-710)*

September 12

*Commerce and morality or
the corrupting reign of money in society*

What have become of industry, trade and commerce? For many of us they have degenerated into one vast system of carefully organized theft. What is the purpose of financial speculation, of private or public enterprise? It's to make money, as quickly and abundantly as we can, with the minimum of effort and inconvenience. But in order to waste no time, to grow rich quick, we have to twist and fiddle with basic morality. This we do – and it's amazing how many people make a fortune overnight. Immense fortunes, rapidly amassed by God knows what scandalous methods.

So much for the wealthy and influential men in high places. What goes on further down the scale? What would you expect? – imitation, of course. They have a far better excuse. The big thieves steal because they want the best of everything – the little thieves steal because they've got to live! But meanwhile, respect for other people's possessions has become a thing of the past. The “haves” know the others are casting envious glances in their direction, and this makes them constantly on the lookout. They've got to defend their goods – whether they have been well

or ill-gotten – to defend what is theirs at all costs, even at the cost of further malpractice. As for the “have-nots,” they may not desire much, but they do desire what isn't theirs. They aspire to dismantle the rich – sharing the proceeds with their companions in poverty.... but as for sharing what they themselves have earned, they wouldn't dream of such a thing.”

*Seventeenth Meditation,
from The Essential d'Alzon (ES p. 458)*

September 13

Saint John Chrysostom

I have set out to make myself very familiar with St. Augustine, St. John Chrysostom, Tertullian and a few other Fathers of the Church. Everyone has to agree that these men were outstanding. In their writings we can often see the faults of their era coming through. For example, the antitheses in St. Augustine or a neologism in poor taste in the harsh African are things that mar his masterpieces. Still, they deserve their reputation. They deserve an even greater one than the one they enjoy today. It seems to me that one

might find in them the answer to many of the objections that are made against Christianity, objections which can be found among the Greeks as well. In this regard, ecclesiastical education may develop, and will, I hope, develop before long a great deal along those lines. I hope that, once all the memories of the Sorbonne will have died, a few arguments, a few scholastic proofs that are now out of date will be abandoned for the good of the truth. Thus they will be able to present to the young the marvelous parallel of Catholic dogmas that are immutable like the truth which they express, in contrast to the thousand and one errors which arise and die every day and are as elusive as the principles on which they are based.

*Letter to Eugène de La Gournerie,
September 4, 1832
(Letters, vol. A, p. 333)*

The love and study of patristics is part of the Assumptionist heritage. Fr. Antoine Wenger had the good fortune to discover on Mount Athos the text of five Baptismal Catecheses of St. John Chrysostom, which were published in volume 50 of *Sources Chrétiennes* (1950).

September 14

Feast of the Triumph of the Cross

The heat of summer has taken a toll on me. I went away and found an almost complete solitude at Betharam, in the Pyrenees. I might have been able to write to you from there at greater length if I had felt that I owed something to my beloved daughter. My dear child, you are worthwhile, very much worthwhile, that we take care of you. Consider the dates of our two letters. You wrote to me on the 14th, feast of the Triumph of the Cross; I answered on the 17th, feast of the Stigmata of St. Francis of Assisi. Doesn't that show that although you ask me to keep my promise on the day of the exaltation of the triumphant instrument of salvation, you have an opportunity to take advantage of it by crucifying yourself a little? Could it be that that the major fruit of our correspondence is that we learn to suffer in the spirit of the cross by impressing on our souls the meaning of the sacred wounds of our Lord? We are growing older and we are no longer young. We need, therefore, to ask which guide will be given to us on the road to eternity, toward which we are making our way. It seems to me that Providence has shown it to us: the cross.

*Letter to Mrs. d'Escures,
September 17, 1874
(Letters, vol. X, p. 306-307)*

September 15

***Mother of Sorrows
(Patroness of our Eastern Missions)***

I have asked Our Blessed Lady – in virtue of what she had to suffer as she stood at the foot of the Cross – to obtain for me the grace of giving birth, howsoever painfully God wills it, to our little religious family.

This morning at Mass I experienced the deep feeling of how utterly I depended on God – and as I held the Sacred Host in my hands, I besought Him to accept me too as a victim.

I put it to Our Blessed Lady that, since the work of ransoming captives from the Muslims was now an anachronism, could she please transfer the appropriate graces to that of ransoming souls from the captivity of our pagan universities.

*“Personal Reflections” September 1854,
from The Essential d’Alzon (ES p. 815)*

The Mission to the Eastern Europe (“Mission d’Orient”) usually refers to the apostolate, begun in 1862 by Father Victorin Galabert in Constantinople and its surroundings. This came in response to a desire, expressed by Pope Pius IX to Fr. d’Alzon. After some trial and error Fr. Galabert settled in Philippopoli, today Plovdiv, a Bulgarian city under Turkish control. The apostolic work began with the foundation of a modest primary school. From there, Fr. Galabert moved, in 1867, to Andrinopolis, at the gates of Constantinople, but on the European shore. This move had as its purpose a better insertion into the Greco-Slav world of that period and greater proximity to the Eastern Christian population of various rites and jurisdictions. Subsequently, as things developed, this apostolate moved into Turkey (1883), Jerusalem (1883), Russia (1903), Greece (1912), Romania (1924) and the former Yugoslavia (1924), without neglecting the original foundation in Bulgaria.

It was not possible to find a quotation in Fr. d’Alzon’s writings where he explicitly placed the Eastern Missions under the patronage of Our Lady of Sorrows. Most probably this fact was passed down orally by the Oblates of the Assumption and Mother Correnson.

September 16

Condolences to the parents of René d’Esgrigny

My dear friend, du Lac has informed me that your sacrifice has been consummated. God has

taken back what he had given you for such a short time. Your silence, during my last visit, told me how much your heart had been broken, and I was at a loss as to how to tell you how much I was suffering with you. You can derive at least some relief from the thought that if God gave you a child, you did everything that was asked of you and Mrs.d'Esgrigny to return to him an angel. He left us for God on a Saturday, according to what du Lac wrote to me. Now the Church encourages the belief of those who think that on that day the Blessed Virgin obtains even greater graces for the dying. No matter how deep the wound caused by blows such as the one that has just struck you, there is nevertheless some consolation in telling oneself: We did everything that was asked of us to help our son to take his place in God's presence. In spite of the horrible break in nature, which death creates, the soul rests in contemplating the horizon that faith reveals to him. I am praying a lot for you, my dear friend, for your spouse, for little Jeanne. I am not sure I am praying for René. Isn't he already in heaven? Farewell. On the day after tomorrow, the feast of Our Lady of Sorrows, I will be saying Mass for you.

*Letter to Luglien de Jouenne d'Esgrigny,
September 16, 1859
(Letters, vol. III, p. 158)*

Out of friendship Fr. d'Alzon had accepted be the godfather of Rene's sister, Jeanne, a privilege that he had refused to give to his sister, Marie-Françoise, for his nephew, Jean de Puységur, and for a son of his cousin Edmond d'Alzon.

September 16 is the national holiday of Madagascar. Let us pray for our brothers and sisters in Madagacar and their work.

September 17

Careers and planning for the future

At the end of the academic year, a certain number of young men pass through the doors of the institution where they were formed, never to reenter as students. Their departure does, however, leave many pre-occupied with the future and which career to pursue. This preoccupation begins long before the end of the year. It seizes in its grip not only fathers and mothers on whom such a great responsibility weighs at this time, but also these young people with their hyper-active imaginations. And instead of pushing them to greater study, they are often led into some kind of dreadful distraction. The fact is that not every thought in the head of an eighteen year old is serious. In pursuing what they call the "positive,"

they sometimes stray from the real. Alas, how many times have we not groaned on seeing them consider life only from a materialistic point of view. Not that we have ever thought that all students should think of soaring toward the sublime; but we have often regretted sensing that even modest ambitions were not ennobled by superior motives. Oh! how we have deplored that love for what is simply of this world wherein the only consideration is for practical and serious results, that is, those which entail higher salaries and produce greater financial benefits.

Discours de distribution des prix ("Talk given on the Occasion of the Awarding of Academic Honors"), 1863, T.D. vol. 1-5, p. 207 bis and 208.

September 18

Spiritual lessons to be derived from nature

You are absorbed in your sadness and in the reasons for your sadness. That is not good, not good at all. I really take issue with you and, as much as I can, I order you to abandon this absorption. Sadness is good when it serves as a spur driving us to have recourse to God who gives

us the joy of His salvation, but to become absorbed in one's sadness, to take pleasure in it, is not good at all. Sadness that is treated that way is the eighth capital sin that Cassian writes about. Let go of it as soon as possible, my dear, and be sad only for having done so little, for having asked wrongly, for having been so rigid. What you really need to do is preserve hope that Jesus, meek, humble, patient and gentle in spite of your rigidity is waiting to raise you up and lead you to perfection when you are once and for all meek, small and humble in the very depths of your soul. You express quite well your supposed incapacity for loving, but everything you say lacks something, the truth. You can certainly love God, not by permanently developing the sentiments that you may have had in the past, but through a new series of sentiments. Since you use the comparison of the fruit that follows the flower, I will tell you that when the fruit has been harvested, the leaves fall, the North wind takes the last ones, and during winter, under the snow, the tree seems to be dead. Often we prune the useless branches and so in the spring it's a damaged tree. Even though the flowers and the fruit that it gives are not those of previous year, they are not any the less good. As a matter of fact, they are tastier. The best wines are those which the oldest vines give, those which were pruned the most.

*Letter to Mother Marie Eugénie-de Jésus,
July 6, 1848
(Letters, vol. XIV, p. 431-432)*

September 19

From the season of flowers to the season of fruits

You tell me you're feeling sad. Are you praying? Prayer does not always dispel sadness, but it makes it fertile; it gives life to that which was sterile. Tell me, where has your languor brought you? I felt like you a few times. I tried to find some distraction. Because we're not good for anything, we waste our time and efforts. Well, my dear friend, we're still only in our springtime. Let us wait for our autumn before we start losing our freshness, become yellow and fall to the ground. To each being, its own destiny. For trees it's flowers, fruit and shade; for people it's virtue, work and love. Every barren tree will be cut down (Mt. 3, 10), and the man who doesn't bear fruit will also be cut down and thrown into the eternal fire. Therefore, produce your fruit and don't tire yourself out in melancholy or in discouragement which produce no results. Dense fog has always

destroyed buds. Get out of that fog, seek the sun, seek God who will warm you, give you love and enable you to do good.

*Letter to Luglien de Jouenne d'Esgrigny,
November 2, 1830 (Letters, vol. A, p. 241)*

September 20

Dreaming about one's friend in the "Lane of Sighs"

If you come to see me, come in the spring or in the fall. Why not come right now, for example? In the garden we have named a lane of old chestnut trees the "Lane of Sighs." It is enclosed at each end by two small hillocks. At one end, there is an old wall almost eaten away by moss and ivy; at the other, there is a grove. There is nothing more agreeable than to stroll there alone or with someone who understands you. It's a lane of secrets. Oh, if you could have seen it during the last fortnight with the lilacs in bloom, the rosebushes heavy with buds, and the old chestnuts with their leaves so fresh and with their whitening clusters! You can't imagine how much of a pleasure it is to see the cherry tree, with its white

flowers in crumpled beauty, or to discover under some brushwood a nest of grouse or of guinea-fowl, or in a young cypress tree a nest of canaries. I love all these things; they make my spirit soar. Maybe you think they hedge me in? In short, be assured that I love you always, always.

*Letter to Luglien de Jouenne d'Esgrigny,
April 4, 1831 (Letters, vol. A, p. 198)*

Today in the Church's calendar we commemorate the Korean martyrs, Andrew Kim Taegon, Paul Chong Hasang, and their 101 companions beatified by Pope John Paul II during his visit to Korea on May 6, 1984. This day gives us a special opportunity to pray for the Oblate and Assumptionist communities there whose headquarters are located in Kwangju (for the Oblates since 1985 and for the Assumptionists since 1991).

September 21

St. Matthew, Apostle and Evangelist

It's a real pleasure for me, my dear daughter, to chat with you a little and to tell you how much I would like for the trials of your position to serve toward your sanctification. Alas! We mustn't complain about these opportunities to become

saints, but rather, for letting them pass by without taking advantage of them. I strongly encourage you to read the Sermon on the Mount in St. Matthew (ch. 5). Applied to a religious superior, there are some wonderful passages for enlightening, strengthening and consoling her. You will find there happiness from tears and from problems. You will find there the perfection of charity expressed in terms of loving one's neighbor, the complete abandonment of self from day today. All that is good, even the sentiment that we are good for nothing and that God seems to be making a fool of himself when he uses us as his instruments.

*Letter to Sr. Marie du Saint-Sacrament de Gouy,
March 15, 1860
(Letters, vol. III, p. 216)*

Sister Marie du Saint-Sacrament de Gouy (1824-1908) was a Religious of the Assumption and had Fr. d'Alzon as her spiritual director. One of her sisters was also a Religious of the Assumption: Sister Marie de Jésus (1826-1906). The family was originally from Wamin. Their father was a member of the military.

September 22

Spiritual Alms

Spiritual Alms! It's a protest against the invading flood of materialism. These waves rise with ever frightening rapidity. Material well-being, that's what everyone wants above all else. And in order to obtain it they cling to the surface of the earth as though it were about to escape from them, as if death wasn't destined very shortly to receive the dissolved dust of their bodies into its bowels. Material well-being! Such is the source of those gigantic and criminal efforts expended in financial speculation. They're willing to ruin a hundred people if it will enrich them; and if they're willing to roll around in the depths of the abyss, heaven only knows how many victims they have drawn down with them as a result of the craziest of schemes! Now where does it come from, all this disorder in fortunes, if not from the conviction that material satisfaction and the wealth that can procure it must take precedence over everything? I am well aware of the fact that accepting the great principles of Christianity is almost impossible for those who have no other preoccupation than to increase their wealth. But we must protest against the dreadful doctrines behind which they try to hide their immoral

project that we have to protest. Almsgiving is a life-saver for the masses; it's an obstacle to the progress of materialistic speculations.

Discours de distribution des prix ("Talk given on the Occasion of the Awarding of Academic Honors"), 1861, T.D, vol. 1-5, p. 192.

September 23

The Classical Christian writers: true beauty

In discussing the quarrel concerning classical authors, we shall disengage it from other matters that need not be treated here. About such matters, I shall only say, given that the efforts which have been made to note unity have in fact detected, to the contrary, their divergence, that we will maintain our freedom, our complete freedom, until a higher authority makes a pronouncement. In every controversy there is an infallible sense that alerts individuals, without their even being aware of it, with regard to the secret relationship that exists between questions which are apparently secondary and those that are of major importance. This distinction takes place naturally as well. And if we know who is against us, we know also who

is for us. Against us, there are those who put the cult of form above all else and pretend to find in paganism the most complete realization of literary beauty. They forget that a pagan, among the most eloquent, the divine Plato, defined beauty as “the splendor of the true.” Even as we might find a certain degree of beauty in pagan works, its highest expression here below cannot be found elsewhere than in the doctrinal deposit of the highest and the most complete truth. Against us are all those who place perfection of beauty in the expression of the exterior world, in all that flatters the senses, unaware that in the same way that the soul is above the body, so also the beauties of the intellectual world are above the beauties that the material world can offer.

Discours de distribution des prix (“Talk given on the Occasion of the Awarding of Academic Honors”), 1852, T.D., vol. 1-5, p. 152.

September 24

***Concerning the foundation of a Catholic
university***

While waiting for the tree (which, I hope, has already seen the axe put to its roots) to be toppled by the very weight of its branches and fruit of iniquity, do not Catholics always have a strict duty to prepare the way for free universities side by side with the official (State) university? In these free universities the faith of students will not only be respected but will also inform the very life of all disciplines which, in turn, borrow from it that sap which is faith's crown. In order to achieve this, Catholics can invoke two rights: that very right already usurped by the State, that is the right to teach, which everyone possesses in virtue of the principles of '89. Where there is freedom of the press, there also should reign freedom of education. The monopoly of higher education is all the more a flagrant contradiction. Either they should reestablish censorship and oblige all citizens to pay for the Official Newspaper (*Journal Officiel*), or they should finally bring this scandal of State education to an end. But, for us Catholics, this argument has value only against the adversaries before whom we find ourselves. We have something else besides, the conviction of

our absolute right not only not to be educated in the manner of the (State) university, but to be educated in the manner of the Church of God, with the authority that this Church received from its founder.

Discours de distribution des prix ("Talk given on the Occasion of the Awarding of Academic Honors"), 1871, T.D., vol. 1-5, p. 274-275.

September 25

The Catholic Commissions

Pius IX used to say: "It's not enough to pray; one needs to act." Don't you think that we anticipated the thought of Pius IX when we formed these Catholic commissions everywhere which came to birth as a result of much reflection in Paris, at an intimate meeting of a few courageous men during the evil days of the Commune, surrounded by enemies outside and those even more formidable enemies within? By the light of our monuments ablaze and the sound of hostages being executed, a few energetic Christians founded the first Catholic Commission in a tiny room. In various parts of France others

imitated this powerful example. Pius IX blessed and encouraged a general gathering of all these individual groups in order to form a vast association. I would add with a certain pride that an alumnus of the Collège de l'Assomption deserves the credit for later straightening out the legal difficulties that arose as a result of the development of similar commissions all over France. From now on we can count on obtaining all the necessary authorizations that already exist in Nîmes.

Discours de distribution de prix ("Talk on the Occasion of the Awarding of Academic Honors"), 1874, T.D. vol. 1-5, p. 319-320.

September 26

The Spirit of the Christian Teacher

One day I was coming out of St. Stanislaus where I had studied twenty years earlier. I was with one of our former deputies, who is missed much, and with Mr. Charles Lenormant whom the free-thinkers of those days had just forced to abandon his chair at the Sorbonne. Two young men came to give me a hug. "Who are these

gentlemen?" queried Ferdinand Bechard. From their accent he recognized that they came from the same part of the country as he did. "They are," I answered, "two former students that I was obliged to send home." "Ah," commented Mr. Lenormant. "I had all sorts of success at my prep school but it never occurred to me, once I had finished my studies, to preserve a hint of a relationship with my former headmaster." With very rare exceptions, this is the great privilege of Christian teachers: they have the power of forming groups, of extending their influence far beyond the school years. It's this incomparable power that one must develop, and increase for the good. The secret of our influence, a secret which we must preciously preserve as a privilege, is that we love our students, that our students know themselves loved. In other institutions people do not love. In general, they give more or less heavy doses of Greek, Latin, mathematics and even gymnastics. However, they don't know how to show affection, and, above all, they never receive it.

Discours de distribution des prix ("Talk given on the Occasion of the Awarding of Academic Honors"), 1872, special edition, Nimes, Lafare, p. 8-9.

September 27

Feast of St. Vincent de Paul

Imagine for a moment, in a dark little valley in the Pyrenees, a child returning at night with his small flock to a poor thatched cottage; his clothing is coarse, and to feed himself along the way he has been obliged at times to beg for pieces of food fallen from the French army convoys. Here you have the reformer of the French clergy; here you have the man who, during almost half a century, would have in his hands the power to select those he judged worthy of being made bishops. Without being concerned with his own material well-being, he would weigh, in view of that challenging burden, the merits of those he thought should be called to the authority of the sanctuary. Here you have the man who, together with men like Berulle, Bourdoise, Olier, would render to the Church of France its ancient splendor. Follow him in the obscurity in which he hides to prepare himself for the priesthood; observe him being cast away by storm onto the Barbary Coast, enduring very harsh slavery for three years. But, Lord, how time passes! Your servant was incapable of accomplishing all the plans you had for him. Be assured, my brothers, the ways of God are not the ways of man.

September 28

Literary contests at the collège

Here at the collège we are still under the charm of the most wonderful rebuttal made by Mr. Monnier against the ideas put forth by Mr.(Germer)-Durand. Yesterday, for an hour and a half, the former presented the principles of higher education regarding the great pagan rhetoricians and the Christian method, as he understands them. He injected into his presentation a fire, an ardor and a spirit that compensated for the occasional and faltering incorrectness of his speech. I tried to heat up the debate which will continue, I hope, because these are things which enlighten minds sometimes numbed by routine. Mr. Durand was delighted to see his position attacked, although he stuck to his guns. Monnier's speech proceeded like an attack ship sailing in full sail and, releasing its broadsides, without pausing for a moment in its advance. I was quite pleased with his success. This was just an ordinary meeting of the Third

Order of the congregation, but we have resolved to transform our meetings into literary discussions for a while.

*Letter to Mother Marie-Eugénie de Jésus,
November 8, 1847
(Letters, vol. XIV, p. 385)*

September 29

Saints Michael, Gabriel and Raphael, archangels

I must tell you that I fear criticism of the national pilgrimage since so many people are planning to go. Either you will get lost like a drop of water in the ocean, or at least in a demijohn. That is my horribly profound impression. Ah! What won't we see in heaven? First of all, God; and already there are more than ten thousand novices. Then there is our Lord, who is quite handsome as well. And the Blessed Virgin, of course, not to mention St. Peter and St. Paul with the other apostles. And good St. Joseph! Personally, I would like to see St. Michael and Saint Gabriel. St. Raphael a bit less, though I have no intention of playing down his merit, which is

considerable. St. Raphael makes me think that I am a lot better off here now than during the time of the Council. What have you done to Fr. Brichet? He's always talking to me about you with inexpressible tenderness. I deeply regret not having gone to Rome these past seven years. If I can find a spare 600 francs, I'd like to return there every year. Fare thee well, all of you. Become saints and pray for me.

*Letter to Fr. Vincent de Paul Bailly,
February 6, 1877
(Letters, vol. XII, p. 45)*

September 30

St. Jerome, Doctor of the Church

That was a wonderful idea you had to read the letters of St. Jerome. He's not tender-mouthed. Far from it. He goes straight to the point and does not mince his words. If you feel the need for that kind of vigor, so much the better. Nowadays we have such softened natures that sometimes such energy offers a pleasant contrast, besides being the only thing that gets results. I hope then that, having begun so well, you will move briskly on and

before long you will become a perfect Christian. If you can't go to Mass every day, try at least to engage in frequent adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. You have to go straight to our Divine Savior with immense confidence. He's the object of great hatred. It's important to make it up to him by loving him twice as much. You can take it from me: leave aside the novels and the serials. That sort of thing is no longer for you. God expects something very different from you. You are, no doubt, young, but suffering has made you mature. Take advantage of what you have gone through to offer our Lord a life of suffering and holiness.

*Letter to Ms. Fayet,
September 1, 1880
(Letters, vol. XIII, p. 387)*

MONTH OF OCTOBER

The month of October has been observed for centuries as the month of the Rosary.

To avoid needless repetition of the Marian texts already used in the month of May, during October we will explore an alphabet, A through Z, of d'Alzonian themes, while honoring a few feasts of the sanctoral calendar which find a resonance with Fr. D'Alzon. These themes reflect the spirituality of the 19th century but with undisguised attachment to the Christological accents linked to the Incarnation, Passion and Redemption. The century of the Curé d'Ars and of Lourdes invites us to penance, sacrifice and prayer in a style or with an insistence that can surprise us; but the Christian God that d'Alzon reveals to us, in losing jansenistic rigor, allows Himself to be sought in prayerful intimacy, in the experiences of faith and love, but also in the

generous gift of one's soul through an abundant flowering of charitable works that engender without ceasing apostolic women and men attentive to the common good and the societal needs of that era.

October 1

A as in Abandonment in Love

Imitating Jesus Christ is a full-time occupation which at any given moment can reach white-hot intensity. One single act of love on the part of the Lord Jesus was of greater value, in terms of love, than all the acts of love on the part of the angels and saints since creation began. This is the very degree of love you and I are called on to imitate. As for Our Lord's other virtues, are they not all expressions of his immeasurable love? Even our human weakness can help us to progress in holiness. With God's help we keep on trying, and eventually we find ourselves drawing closer and closer to him day by day. Our intentions become purer. We become more whole-hearted. We abandon ourselves more and more willingly to whatever God asks of us – not only in our general attitude of life, but by loving application to every single detail whereby we can imitate the Saviour we love. Isn't it wonderful – isn't it marvellous? The more we study the Lord Jesus, the better we know him. The better we know him, the dearer we

love him. The dearer we love him, the more we wish to imitate him. But in order to imitate him better, we study him again. And thus by triple process of study, affection and imitation we grow in sanctity as the years go by.

*Second Meditation,
from The Essential d'Alzon (ES p. 325-326)*

October 2

B as in Beatitude or Happiness

But man on his part, to whom God has revealed Himself by Faith to be the Supreme Truth containing all truth – to whom God has revealed Himself by Hope to be the Supreme Goodness containing all happiness – man who seeks his happiness in possessing God, finds in Him so much loveliness and charm that he longs to be united to God beyond the possibility of separation. He now loves God for God's own sake. He wants to offer God everything a creature can who owes God his very existence. He wishes God to be adored and glorified throughout the universe. Let every knee bend before His Supreme Majesty – let the hearts of all his children be filled with love for

Him..... No matter how perfect our dispositions may be, no matter how purified our will, it is God who sets us in motion and gives us the power to love Him. Saint Thomas Aquinas tells us: “Caritas est amicitia quaedam hominis ad Deum, fundata super communicationem beatitudinis aeternae --- Charity is a friendship between man and God, established by the communication of His own eternal Happiness.” It is Hope which reveals to us this eternal happiness in God. But, if God is generous, we, in turn, want to be so as well and so out of sheer thankfulness we begin to love God for Himself.

*Thirteenth Meditation,
from The Essential d’Alzon (ES pp 411, 415)*

October 3

C as in Confidence in spiritual union

Obedience should rest on two foundations, trust and humility. You are the only judge of the trust aspect. Am I really the guide that God wants for you? It is not up to me, but rather up to you to decide. You will be the one to receive the grace in making your choice. And if later you say: “Father,

I believe that I have made a mistake, I will say: “My daughter I give you your complete freedom.” [If] the fondness I have for you and the desire that I have to do you good and the sympathy that I have for a soul such as yours are not sufficient, understand it well. It is you, before God, who must make your choice; but once that choice is made, your trust must be complete, and I have the right to require it in order to do you good. Humility must be joined to obedience and must allow you to speak freely. I promise to help you in the practice of that virtue as soon as you will have said: “I wish to be a trusting soul, humble and obedient.” I will suppose that you have agreed to this and I will follow suit.

*Letter to Angelina Chaudordy,
March 24, 1865
(Letters, vol. V, p. 275-276)*

Prayer intention: Germany, as it celebrates the reunion of West Germany (Federal Republic of Germany) and East Germany (the German Democratic Republic) as of October 3, 1990.

October 4

Saint Francis of Assisi

I have asked Saint Francis to give me a great love of Poverty – and that affection he had for every creature..... Turning my thoughts once again to Saint Francis, it seems to me that I must seek my peace, and learn to love my neighbour, in complete poverty of spirit. If I have nothing, if I am entitled to nothing, then what have I to complain about? This spiritual poverty comprises everything: my feelings, my self-esteem, my reputation, my very life. Detached from all these, I will be poor indeed. Some things irritate me. I must ask Our Lord, the Holy Lamb of God, to give me that meekness wherewith he overcame the world.

*Personal Reflections,
from The Essential d'Alzon (ES p. 816, 817)*

If it is true that no two angels are alike, it must be true that no two of them praise God in the same way. What goes on in heaven must also happen on earth. Whence I conclude that we must use the means given us by God to praise Him. Did not the viewing of things of nature foster in Saint Francis of Assisi a greater love? Why should it not be the same for you? (*Letter to Marie Eugénie of Jésus, October 6, 1843. Letters, Vol. B, p. 100*).

October 5

D as in Deprivation or Stripping Oneself

Working for one's perfection consists in two things, according to St. Paul's phrase: stripping oneself and reclothing oneself. One strips oneself by working to destroy every defect, every human attachment, every imperfection. Harsh aspects of one's character, bouts of sadness that are too natural, discouragement, self-centeredness, touchiness, love of creature, the need for consolation, human joys, a desire for the "finer" things, a certain laziness, a great desire to escape in the midst of certain trials: all of this and everything that resembles it must be set aside as carefully as possible. And, to be sure, this effort must never lag if we don't want the moss of half-heartedness and laziness to take root in those small corners where we have already overcome the enemy. Yes, we must strip ourselves. As long as we hold on to the rags of our sinful nature, we cannot pretend to be putting on the clothing of light which Our Lord has planned for us.

*Letter to the Adorers,
July 31, 1857
(Letters, vol. II, p. 295)*

October 6

Saint Bruno, founder of the Carthusians

I am writing to you from Valbonne, Madam, where I have come to pay a visit to Fr. de Vaultchier. We are perhaps saying farewell to each other because who knows where we'll be in two or three weeks? We want to proceed against Freemasonry. Religious need to get together and agree among themselves on the best approach possible, despite the ill-will to which they are subjected. When I attended some of their functions, I said to myself: They find that all these musicians who play in the streets, in cafes, or in concerts are not dangerous; but these individuals who get together only to pray, to work and to give alms (because this is what they do), they consider them to be a danger to society because they sleep when Mr. Gambetta¹ is eating, and they get up in the morning asking God's forgiveness for everything that happened in the darkness of the night. France has lost much of what it used to be. This is the conclusion that must be drawn, and this is also the reason why I have come here, instead of going to Servas. You acted very prudently in not inviting me to baptize Mr. Jean-Baptiste. Who knows? I might have made a Carthusian of him, because

Saint John the Baptist is the great patron saint of the sons of St. Bruno.

*Letter to Mrs. Varin d'Ainvelle,
September 15, 1880
(Letters, vol. XIII, p. 399)*

Fr. d'Alzon knew and loved the Carthusians. He visited the Grande-Chartreuse in 1835 and often visited the community in Valbonne. He was even tempted to join the Carthusians, even if we might doubt somewhat his real capacity to lead such a life. He maintained close ties with a former classmate, a seminarian at Montpellier, Roch Boussinet, who became the Prior General of the order in 1877.

¹ Léon Gambetta was a French statesman prominent particularly after the Franco-Prussian War of 1870. He was a freemason together with other towering figures such as Jules Ferry and Jules Simon. Freemasons were at the forefront of republicans calling for the regulation of Church activities, especially in the missions.

October 7

Our Lady of the Rosary (To Jesus through Mary rather than to Mary through Jesus)

We adore Our Lord, eternal Word and infinite truth, with a deep faith in revelation. We view our

devotion to the Blessed Virgin --- whose virtues we consider models of the inner life and prayer --- - in the context of hope. As for charity we seek its growth through zeal for the defense and triumph of the Church. Now these three characteristics call for a triple action and, as it were, for a triple apostolate. The love of Our Lord Jesus Christ should instill in us the desire to make him known through teaching and preaching. The filial devotion to the Blessed Virgin should prompt us to help direct and sanctify those souls which are called to a certain degree of perfection, a work which seems to be far too neglected in our time. I have already broached some of these questions with you. Moreover, the meditations which I am presently composing should be of some use, at least to the younger ones among us, as examples of the ideas with which you should be nourishing yourselves and of the way in which you should make use of them later on to nourish the souls entrusted to your care.

*First Circular
Letter, p. 1-2*

Fr. André Sève (1913-2001) has already given a wonderful commentary on this aspect of Marian devotion in Assumptionist spirituality in the framework of what has become known as the “triple love” (love of Jesus Christ and everything he loved, his mother and the Church), a love

which is directed principally to Christ who illumines the entire mystery of God and of the Christian faith (*Christ is My Life: The Spiritual Legacy of Emmanuel d'Alzon*, New City Press, New York, 1988, chap. 10).

October 8

E as in Exemplariness

Nothing in the whole world is more sublime than such a mission – that of purifying the souls of youth – making them brighter and whiter – increasing their likeness to Jesus Christ, the Exemplar of all brightness and purity. But how is the Christian teacher to set about operating this purification – administrating this additional baptism – with the greatest possible efficacy? In umpteen ways. But surely the best means at his disposal is the good example he gives. “Words push,” they say, “but example pulls (*Verba movent, exempla trahunt*).” And, indeed, we may evaluate a teacher by his moral influence over the pupils. The good tree produces good fruit (Mt 7:17). Let me not be accused of making “sweeping statements.” It is possible for a veritable saint to turn out pupils of mediocre moral calibre – just as it is possible for a teacher

totally unworthy of his noble profession to exercise a most salutary influence on those whom he is in charge of. But such phenomena are rare, to say the least – and it is here, more than anywhere, that we can talk about the exception confirming the rule. But this good example we are rigorously obliged to give our pupils does meet with obstacles – and the greatest of these obstacles is: “What will other people think?” Let's face it: this subservience to public opinion which so often prevents our students from being as good as they ought to be, is not unknown to have an equally pernicious influence on their teachers. We don't wish our colleagues to notice that we have turned over a new leaf. Now let me tell you: such a mentality is to be shunned like the plague if we are to become worthy of teaching in a Christian establishment. Let our students notice – “let them see our good works” (Mt 5:16). They will certainly follow our good example – certainly, spontaneously and openly.

*Instructions addressed to teachers
at the Collège de l'Assomption, Nîmes,
from The Essential d'Alzon (ES p. 1341-1342)*

October 9

F as in Fervor in regularity, in community

What was the situation in the house when you took over from your predecessors?¹ Was there regularity, fervour? Notice that in our modern world where machines do so many things for us, it's not enough to have one so that the work gets done. We have to use it, run it; we have to maintain it, change parts, renew the springs, oil the wheels. It's the same with a community. If it runs well, so much the better! It is important that it continue to go well, and that's why it needs constant supervision to assure that nothing stands in the way of regularity in performing all the exercises, in carrying out all the duties of religious life. Guidance is needed to help each one grow in his vocation, in seeking greater perfection through prayer and obedience, fraternal affection, and a spirit of penance, work and zeal².

*Thirty-fourth Meditation,
from The Essential d'Alzon (ES p. 596-597)*

¹ Addressed to superiors on retreat.

² It is easy to pick out in this list of the characteristics of a well-run community the general criteria which Fr. d'Alzon mentions, in passing, for the direction of institutions and apostolic works, both internally and externally.

October 10

Gas in Gravity

What do we mean by seriousness? Surely not that exaggerated and altogether disagreeable seriousness, otherwise known as pomposity! The kind of seriousness Jean-Baptiste de la Salle recommended to his disciples wouldn't do for us either. In their 'Christian Schools' the Brothers are expected to maintain a visible dignity – a degree of seriousness which duly impresses the uncouth characters of their pupils (usually younger students) with sentiments of awesome respect. But a teacher in charge of secondary education must aim at something higher than this. De la Salle trained his Brothers to outward dignity. To this we must add inward dignity, inward seriousness. We must learn to radiate our dignity, to communicate it to the students assembled before us, to earn their respect because we ourselves are what we hope them to become. Let us take note that even the most serious occupations do not necessarily produce serious characters. Indeed, the character of a man, however serious his occupation, is often neither more nor less serious in consequence. And this is the deplorable product of the superficial atmosphere in which we now live. We live in a day and age of singular superficiality. We are

'mass-producing' characters incapable of attaching due importance to anything under the sun! So how can our generation be expected to take Christianity seriously? And whoever is not imbued with the true spirit of Christianity will always remain, no matter what his occupation, a superficial character. Some people seem to possess a certain natural dignity, a certain majesty of manner. It's a quality, a pleasing and desirable quality – but it's not what I mean by seriousness. They still seem to lack that purposefulness, that concentration of effort, whereby, adopting a Christian standpoint, we come to envisage the world around us with all due gravity and in all due proportion. Genuine seriousness is Christian seriousness. Whatever we do is impregnated with the thought of our eternal salvation. We never lose sight of God – we never cease to worship Him in our hearts – and thus we never forget what life is all about.

*Spiritual Advice,
from The Essential d'Alzon (ES p. 1299-1300)*

October 11

*H as in “Hardiesse”
or the Boldness of a supernatural love*

Oh, yes, let us be bold. When dangers surround us – when yawning chasms threaten to engulf us – when the baying of the very hounds of Hell deafens our ears with its diabolical rhythm.... then to be prudent according to the maxims of this world – to consider vested interests and political expediency – is more than being careful and cautious – is worse than being lazy and negligent – it's downright treason and downright sacrilege. We are accused of being rash – of taking too many chances – of “sticking our necks out.” Well then, let this be our glory! You so-called wise and prudent men – you would probably have accused Jesus Christ of being fool-hardy when he risked the life of the Church by dying on a Cross. You would have found the Apostles mad and the martyrs out of their mind, when with dauntless courage they faced up to persecution by Jew and Gentile alike, boldly proclaiming to all and sundry that Our Lord had, indeed, risen from the dead. But we in our madness – we both envy and emulate the audacity of the Apostles and the boldness of the martyrs. It is with such audacity and such boldness that we claim to love and serve

the Church of God with all our might. What do we care about what other people think? – in any case our foes contradict one another in their efforts to overcome us. How was the world saved? It was saved by the folly of preaching and the imprudent boldness of the preachers.

*Closing Address to the General Chapter of 1868,
from The Essential d'Alzon (ES p. 137-138)*

October 12

I as in Mystical Incarnation

Jesus Christ has two kinds of birth: that in the crib and that in our hearts. The Word was made flesh in the womb of Our Blessed Lady. He manifested himself in Bethlehem – he continues to manifest himself in the lives of those who love him. Saint Ambrose tells us: “Where is Christ born in a deeper sense of the word, but in your heart, within your breast? *Ubi enim secundum altio rem rationem nascitur Christus, nisi in corde tuo et in pectore tuo?*” Today I wish to speak about this deeper sense of Our Lord's birth – about the wonderful effects it produces in us. Jesus Christ becomes incarnate in you and me, 1) to

make of us new creatures and 2) to make of us sons of God. Our Divine Saviour, in his measureless mercy, wishes us to participate in his birth. How? – by Baptism. By being born in us he obliges us to be re-born. Listen to Saint Leo: “Baptism has sprung up as the universal source of Christian life. By it we are crucified with Christ in his Passion, restored to life in his Resurrection, seated at God's right hand in his Ascension – and by it we are born again with him in his Nativity. *Universa summa fidelium fonte orta est baptismatis, sicut cum Christo in passione crucifixi, in resurrectione resuscitati, in ascensione ad dexteram Patris collocata, ita cum ipso sunt in ista navitate congeniti.*” This is indeed, a new birth – and this new birth is the starting point of our imitation of Christ in the various stages of his human existence. We go through his sufferings and death – we share his victory when he defeats death – we even share his triumph in Heaven above. In all these epic events we must become and remain his true and faithful imitators.

*Love of Our Lord,
from The Essential d'Alzon (ES p. 887-888)*

In Spanish-speaking America, October 12 has been chosen as the day to celebrate “la hispanidad” (Hispanic culture). It is an opportunity for us to pray with and for all of our

communities in Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, and Mexico.

October 13

J as in Jesus Christ

“I no longer call you servants – I call you my friends” (Jn 15:15). These words were spoken by our Divine Master to his apostles at the close of the Last Supper, when he was about to die for them – and this comforting assurance of his friendship is addressed not only to the apostles but to each and every Christian soul. Yes, Jesus Christ wishes to be your friend – and it is in the Holy Eucharist that he offers you this precious gift of friendship. You cannot turn the offer down without being guilty of the most appalling ingratitude. Who would dare say there is anything selfish about Our Saviour's love for us? Does God need us? – would his happiness be incomplete without us? Of course not! It is out of sheer kindness that he insists on our loving him. Was it not sufficient for him to save us creatures to whom he owed nothing at all? But his love is not content with this. He has nothing to gain by offering himself up in the Holy Eucharist –

nothing to look forward to except a greater or lesser degree of ingratitude.

*Eight Sermons on the Blessed Sacrament,
from The Essential d'Alzon (ES p. 973-974)*

October 14

Loss of Fr. Jerome Kajziewicz.

Once again we've lost a few people — actually quite fortunately in the final analysis. Fr Desaire left us and that's not to be regretted, far from it! It's unbelievable how much this young man dealed and schemed. Still, we have 18-20 excellent novices; that will allow us, sooner or later, to send you quite a few troops. I approve your trip to Constantinople with the Sisters. I will bring your last letter to Paris where I shall be going in two weeks. Good-bye, good friend. I have just learned of the death of Fr. Jerome¹. This misfortune won't change the situation of the Polish fathers at all, will it? Things have been quite serious here in France and I think that we will avoid a crisis only with great difficulty. I shall soon be leaving for Paris. Let me know if

there is something that I should be requesting at the Ecoles d'Orient.

*Letter to Fr. Victorin Galabert,
March 1, 1873
(Letters, vol. X, p. 30-31)*

¹ Fr. Jerome Kajziewicz, Superior General of the Resurrectionists, died in the middle of the street in Rome, Ash Wednesday, February 26, 1873. He was with Fr. Semenenko, an old friend of Fr. d'Alzon; all three of them had worked together on steps to bring the two congregations together in the years 1855-1856.

October 15

*Saint Teresa of Avila, doctor of the Church.
To allow oneself to be won over
by an apostolic missionary spirit*

From this point of view, zeal for the extension of the Kingdom of Our Lord in souls and an apostolic spirit are absolutely the same thing. Do I have such zeal? Do I have this spirit? I am not going to say that this has nothing to do with women. Saint Teresa, a simple woman and cloistered religious, truly had the zeal of the apostles¹. Why wouldn't I have it? Why wouldn't

I do everything that depends on me? And here, since everyone's position is different, it is up to each one to examine herself from the point of view of her position in order to appreciate what she could have done in the past, what she is currently doing, and what she should do.

*Letter to the Adorers of the Blessed Sacrament,
May 11, 1859 (Letters, vol. III, p. 84)*

¹ Fr. d'Alzon would not know another saint Thérèse (1873-1897), a Carmelite from Lisieux, who was to develop an apostolic and missionary spirit so intense that Pope Pius XI, in canonizing her, didn't hesitate to proclaim a patron of the missions. The admiration of Fr. d'Alzon for Saint Teresa of Avila (1515-1582), the Carmelite reformer, can be seen time and time again in his writings. Thanks to the founder of the Assumptionists a community of Carmelites was founded in Nîmes as of 1843. His own niece, Alix de Puységur, became a Carmelite in Paris.

October 16

L as in Liberty or Freedom of the soul

Freedom from the world devolves from a higher kind of freedom which is freedom of soul. This freedom consists in being the slave of no

earthly desire or ambition. It consists in saying these words of the Lord's Prayer: "Give us this day our daily bread. Panem nostrum quotidianum da nobis hodie" – and meaning every word of it.

Absolute trust in God never lets us down. If, at times, God seems to take pleasure in putting our trust to the test, this is only to manifest his munificence when the time comes for him to show us he really cares. Interior freedom comes from poverty. How could you expect to get through your meditation while dreaming of money? It is worthwhile trying to see how it works. Attach yourself to anything whatsoever – then see if you can pray half so well. It will prove an invincible "stoppage" every time you are supposed to be thinking of nothing but God. Need I mention those unhappy souls who wish to "have their cake and eat it?" How often do we feel while dealing with such cases, that they are chained to something which prevents them from flying straight up to Heaven!

*Twenty-Second Meditation,
from The Essential d'Alzon (ES p. 501-502)*

October 17

M as in Meditation

You deserve a little to have your ears pulled. You haven't spoken to me about the novitiate; there you're really in the wrong. Well, I am going to speak to you about it. I am hopeful that shortly you will have 15 to 20 novices or postulants. First of all, we have to find place for them; then we have to find things for them to do; finally, we need to form them better than others have been formed up to now. To do so, for my part, I am planning to develop a commentary on the Rule, on the first book of the Constitutions, and on the Directory, as well as a series of meditations. In addition to the ones I write, I will try to explain a method for meditating well. I'd like to begin all this by the beginning of May. In such a way, it seems to me, we can finally develop a tradition of religious life. It's understood that you will give me a hand. This course would take place from May 1 to January 15, more or less. I'll tell you why I would stop at that point. Really, in 9 months, one can, it seems, form quite a few people and tell them quite a bit. Let us not forget that for those who are going to do a serious novitiate, we have to make them study: 1) Sacred Scripture; 2) The Fathers of the Church; 3)

Church History; 4) the Liturgy. If to this you add mystical theology, their time will be well spent.

*Letter to Fr. Alexis Dumazer,
April 2, 1874
(Letters, vol. X, p. 220)*

October 18

Saint Luke, evangelist

My daughter, you have asked me to send you some words of encouragement. I have just read a few from the gospels that are quite consoling. One can see in the Gospel of St. Luke Our Lord commanding St. Peter to cast his nets. St. Peter replies, ““Master, we have worked hard all night and have caught nothing, but at your command I will lower the nets”¹ and he made a miraculous catch of fish. I am not sure why it has seemed to me, for some time, that Our Lord has been saying to a certain person to throw her nets for a catch, that is to say, to throw herself completely into his service, leaving aside all human considerations: the mocking of her sister, the distractions of her children, the reproaches of boredom. It seems to me that this person must feel that, since people

around her find that she has changed and is “less lovable” than before, she need not pay too much attention to this but should give her all to the one who is calling her. I do not think that God is calling you to lower your nets to catch lots of men and women, like St. Peter, my dear daughter; but it does seem to me that you are approaching that time when you will have no worldly obligations and that without regard to the opinions of others you will embrace everything that Our Lord requests of you, regardless of all those judgments that people may make either about your physical or moral well-being.

*Letter to Mrs. Doumet,
September 2, 1861
(Letters, vol. III, p. 504-505)*

¹ Lk 5: 4-5

October 19

N as in Nature, Naturalism and Supernatural

In studying the goal of the Council, one can see that what is being proposed above all is a re-establishment of the entire supernatural order

which Our Lord brought to earth and which has been attacked by the forces of unbelief, naturalism, rationalism, and socialism. That's what's wrong! To unbelief, the Council wishes to oppose the principles of the faith; to naturalism, the complete plan of supernatural help and hope; to rationalism, the unshakeable foundation of divine authority, strengthened by the doctrine of papal infallibility; and to socialism, the more perfect notion of social principles as they are presented by the great Christian society, the Church.. The affirmations of the faith, the superiority of the notion of happiness and how to obtain it, the power of the reasons to believe, the social life of the Church: here is what the Council is taking as a starting point. But once these overall guidelines have been put in place, you have to draw the consequences. From a faith which is more forcefully affirmed flows teaching that is more powerful and the need to study once again. From supernatural hope, which is opposed to modern naturalism, flows a more fruitful notion of holiness. From the authority of the Sovereign Pontiff, more vigorously confessed, flows the need to receive from him a clearer, more compelling direction. From a more complete presentation of the Church's principles flows the light to work to cure society's ills.

October 20

O as in Openness of Conscience

As fellow members of this association¹, we give ourselves a two-fold aim – or rather a single aim with two complementary aspects. We are to work for the glory of God, and for the salvation of souls by the extension of Christ's Kingdom here below. Hence our motto : “Adveniat Regnum Tuum” – “Thy Kingdom Come”.

How are we to set about it?

1. By mutual help which results from a close-knit brotherhood.
2. By the self-conquest which results from submission to a common rule of life.
3. By the condemnation of worldly attitudes which results from living in austerity.
4. By the establishment of Christ's Kingdom which results from the evangelisation of souls.

The Spirit of our Association

1. It must be one of deep love for Our Lord. He must be the model and the ideal of every one of us.

2. We must be kind, compassionate, full of fatherly love for everybody.

3. Openness and sincerity. We must be absolutely genuine in the accomplishment of our duty, and in our relationship towards one another.

4. Personal poverty – this is to constitute our primary mortification.

*Rule of the Association of the Assumption,
from The Essential d'Alzom (ES p. 1283-1284)*

¹ The Association of the Assumption refers to the community of committed teachers, lay and religious, whom d'Alzom gathered at Collège de l'Assomption.

October 21

P as in Peace in Truth

“Peace be to you” (Jn 20:19). Gentlemen, what more appropriate text could I take for our farewell than the words from today’s gospel reading? We have closely collaborated, and produced excellent results. The Apostles, assembled in the Upper Room in what could be called the first congress, must have felt very downhearted at Jesus not being there. Then to comfort them he appears

miraculously among them, and says simply, "Peace be with you." I have taken these words from our Savior's lips and address them in my turn to you, "Pax vobis." So let this peace be among you, the fruit of your past labours and the aim of your future endeavours. "Peace be with you" for you first, because, unless you yourselves are at peace, you will never transmit peace to others. We are now going our separate ways, each on a mission of peace. And the secret of this peace – between yourselves and among these to whom you are returning – lies in Faith, Hope and Charity. Peace in yourselves – peace among yourselves – peace with others and among all men (Luke 2:14). Let your peace be founded on Faith. Walk in that light whereby we see events and situations from God's point of view. Be sons of Truth. Be men of principle, and not men of expediency. Let your whole life, patterned on the example and teaching of the Savior, be characterized by fearlessness, virtue, and fruitfulness. May you be at peace because you breathe truth.

*Sermon at the Closure of the Catholic Congress of 1872,
from The Essential d'Alzon (ES p. 1436-1437)*

October 22

Q as in the Social Question

“Down with God! Let us have no more God!”
Hear this latest atheistic war-cry, echoing throughout Paris, echoing throughout a world without God! And in the face of all this, shall there be no warriors in God's camp? Will there be no men and women ready to lay down their lives for his cause? Do you understand the opportunity Assumption has, I am telling you, to give God his rights back and to proclaim the Kingship of Jesus Christ? This, my dear Sisters¹, is what we may call the social question. We don't take it seriously enough. We look for the answer everywhere, except there where it can be found. The rights of God imply his supreme dominion over all things. “The Earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof.” (Ps. 24:1) *Domini est terra et plenitudo ejus.*” Communism destroys this order of things. It deprives the Lord of his sovereign rights. The rich are saying: “It all belongs to us.” The poor reply: “No it doesn't. It belongs to nobody.” And both are wrong because it all belongs to God. Such is the never ending struggle between the poor and the rich over who owns what – and it will go on until the rights of God are firmly established. So cannot you see what our social problems really

amount to? They amount to a struggle between the “haves” and the “have nots.” By human standards the problem is insolvable. God alone can provide an answer. May his Kingdom come with his rights intact.

*Conference to the Religious of the Assumption (1871),
from The Essential d'Alzon (ES p. 660)*

¹ A series of lectures to the Assumption Sisters (RAs) – given by Father d'Alzon during the year following the 1870 Franco-Prussian War. The sisters had taken refuge in Nîmes at their priory. There were 53 of these lectures in all, given over a period of several months from November 5, 1870 to March 20, 1871. Some have been published in full; of others, only excerpts remain.

October 23

R as in Responsibility

First and foremost, you must feel responsible¹. You cannot do everything yourselves. You have to see that it is done, and well done. Remember that your overwhelmingly principal task is to look after your community. This is the first question you will be asked on Judgment Day: how have you cared for your community? And you will

bring about your own damnation if, by allowing your community to deteriorate, you allow your brethren to lose their souls. Their damnation will be laid at your door. Your life among them must be that of Jesus Christ among his Apostles. Let it comfort you to consider that Judas was one of them – but think of the personal love Jesus had for Judas (Mt 26:50). “The good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep. Bonus pastor animam suam dat pro ovibus suis” (Jn 10:11). Have you that tender, loving, persevering care with which Jacob looked after Laban's sheep night and day? (Gen 30:29). The souls of your religious are bound to you by their vow of Obedience – the souls of others, not so. What good would it do to save many of these others if outside interests keep you from properly watching over your own community?

*Ninth Circular Letter,
from The Essential d'Alzon (ES p. 272-273)*

¹ Addressed to superiors of communities.

October 24

S as in Simplification

I am not sure what to say with regard to your retreat. What I try to do is to engage in as much mental prayer¹ as possible and, what's surprising, I have proof that I am doing good to souls when I have resisted the boredom of prayer that is dry, arid, and full of aversion and distraction. I have learned to pray mostly as a result of my experience in prayer itself and I don't have much in the way of advice beyond what I have tried to do myself. Remain before God; tell him that you are nothing and how much you need him. Ask Our Lord to give us his spirit; ask the Holy Spirit to give us his love. It's as simple as saying, "Hello" and by so doing I have found all the strength and hope I need. I don't know of any greater goal than to search for God with all one's strength. In a word, I have tried to simplify things as much as possible and can only urge you to become as simple as possible in your prayer.

*Letter to Mother Marie-Eugénie de Jésus,
November 26, 1878
(Letters, vol. XII, p. 619-620)*

¹ Fr. d'Alzon used the term "oraison," which, for want of an exact English equivalent, is rendered here by "mental

prayer.” In his Fifth Circular Letter Fr. d’Alzon expands on the meaning of mental prayer.

October 25

T as in Testament

Here is the spiritual testament which is meant for you. I am not sure if I will be preaching you other retreats, but at a time when the sending off of a certain number of you to Adrinopolis will allow us to establish a definite regularity in this mission, when a fuller novitiate gives greater hope for the future, when time has allowed you to develop more solid traditions in the mother-house, when, finally, I have established a Council together with your Mother General, a Council to help her in her deliberations, it seemed important to me to share with you in what spirit I would like to see you grow in the perfection of the religious virtues, according to your special charism. Therefore, maintain the framework of these instructions as the foundation of your spiritual life. I have already given you Constitutions and a Directory. Both of these are similar to those given to the men. In this retreat I will try to underline more vigorously the mark of originality which is

proper to you and the character by which you are to be recognized as true daughters of the Blessed Virgin, Queen of the Apostles.

*Letter to the Oblates of the Assumption,
September 10, 1876
(Letters, vol. XI, p. 465-466)*

October 26

U as in Unity or Union

Jesus prays to his Father, “Let them be brought to perfection as one. Ut sint consummati in unum” (Jn 17:23). Unity is the supreme benefit he desires for them. Unity is the last word of his Gospel. So let us meditate on it. He prays for unity among his followers, with his own Person as the centre of this unity....Unity in the Universal Church of which the Apostles are to be the foundation stones.(Eph 2:20)... Unity among themselves as individuals... Unity in their missionary endeavours. Here are four aspects of unity on which it will be fruitful to meditate. Let us suppose for a moment that the Blessed Virgin was present in a corner of the Upper Room and heard these words. Let us suppose this so that we can

place ourselves in her place and listen with her and like her to what her divine Son is teaching. This exercise will provide us with much food for thought about how best to imitate her whom Christ gave us to be our Mother. When we consider the unity brought about by union with Our Blessed Lord, was anybody ever so perfectly united to him as was his Blessed Mother? Since the very first moment of his conception in her most pure womb, had Mary ever ceased to be completely united to her Divine Son? How could her thoughts, feelings and affections - how could anything she ever said or did - fail to conform to the thoughts and feelings of Christ?

*Conference given to the Religious of the Assumption (1876),
from The Essential d'Alzon (ES p. 701-702)*

October 27

V as in Interior Life (Vie intérieure)

The religious life, strictly speaking, is but the more perfect life of Christ within us; it will flourish only on condition that we die completely to ourselves. In order to effect this death, we must practice: 1) dying to our senses, subduing them to

such an extent that they are completely under control and exercise no dominion over us. 2) Dying to our desires. As long as I wish for anything other than God or what contributes to his glory, I have not died to my desires. 3) Dying to our affections. The word of God penetrates more deeply than a two-edged sword and reaches to the division of the spirit; God wishes to be sole master of my heart. 4) Dying to creatures. Since I became a religious, the world is dead to me and I to the world. As long as there is anything which I have not renounced, I shall be living by human standards and cannot achieve interior holiness.

The Interior Life, Directory, III, 22

October 28

Was in Wiseman

Just when the tumult occurring in Italy draws the attention of Catholics to the Sovereign Pontiff, and when Catholics might fear, in spite of the most sincere intentions, that events would prove to be even stronger than men, Cardinal Wiseman's book¹ is of particular interest. The thousand and

one details which the author enjoys citing give his accounts a charm which enhances one's appreciation of that which history doesn't always say, to discover, without any dressing, the life of those men who are always and necessarily accompanied by a certain majesty. It helps one understand why human vicissitudes, at the gravest moments, leaves them unperturbed and why, like Jesus in the boat on the Sea of Tiberias, they can sleep without fear in the ship of the Church in the midst of storms which, for eighteen centuries, has destroyed so many heresies and so many empires.

Revue Catholique du Languedoc,
May 1859, p. 29

¹ Memories of Cardinal Wiseman on the Last Four Popes: Leo XII, Pius VIII, Gregory XVI and Pius IX.

October 29

X as in Xenophon

I intend to go over my studies again; sticking to my previous plan, I will pursue them historically. I will study the truth under its triple aspect of theology, philosophy and morals, in their

historical framework. I will begin by the “Discourse on Universal History,” then Saint Augustine's “City of God,” and then Rohrbacher's “History of the Church.” I will read through the Bible and its commentaries. I will consult the historical works of...[?], the “History of Philosophy” by Gerando and that of Brucker, the “Symbolique” by Kreutzer. I will make a special study of Plato and Aristotle. I will read Titus Livy, Xenophon, Herodotus, and Plutarch's “Illustrious Men.” Then, as I read through the history of the Church, I will also read those fathers of the Church (those early Christian writers) whose lives coincide with each particular period, the history of great Christian events, the history of the nations involved. I will continue with the Middle Ages, the struggles between spiritual and temporal power, and the philosophic movements. Saint Thomas Aquinas and Saint Bonaventure will draw my particular attention. I will examine the roots of the Reformation. I must also study the history of monastic orders. History unfolds itself as they come into being.

*Note, between 1845-1850,
from The Essential d'Alzon (ES p. 789)*

October 29 is the national holiday in Turkey. Let us pray for this country, for inter-religious dialogue, for Christian

minorities, and for the joint community of Assumptionists and Oblates in Istanbul Kadikoy.

October 30

Y as in Yankee

Trying to find canonized saints in that part of North America occupied by the United States would be something entirely useless. There are several reasons for this. First of all, these good Protestants (Episcopalians, Puritans, Anabaptists, Quakers, Methodists, etc.) persecuted each other so cruelly, how could they not have persecuted Catholics? If you rely on the work written by Mr. de Tocqueville on the United States or the more than fantastic examples of Mr. Laboulaye of the Collège de France on American tolerance, you would arrive at the reality of the situation fairly well. But if you take up the two excellent volumes of Mr. Carlier on the foundation of the United States and if you add to that the more recent work, no less remarkable, of Mr. Claudio, both of which come from Protestant hands, you may be surprised by the counterclaims. I am speaking of the counterclaims that these two lovers of Yankee freedom have gathered on American tolerance.

Excommunication, the whip, arms, the red-hot iron, death; all these means were acceptable in the hands of these fierce sectarians. They used them against each other. Having left England without knowledge of civil laws, they had recourse to Mosaic laws.

*Letters of a Pilgrim, in Le Pèlerin,
March 29, 1879, p.197.*

October 31

Z as in Papal Zouaves

Maurice is probably about to leave at this very hour, my dear cousin, or at least will be leaving soon. Here we have received the order to send the diocesan “zouaves” back to Rome. Ours have already taken up their assignment, but I immediately thought of your son. Alas! Yes, we must face terrible suffering, but what great honor in God’s eyes. Our hearts bleed and are broken, and yet would we want to take back what we once offered? It is with such a feeling, I am sure, that, not without great pain, doubtlessly, but also with great love, you give what is dearest to you in the world. I must admit that there is at such moments,

in my opinion, a difference between allowing a son to enter the monastery and sending him to a battlefield in Italy. Finally, my dear daughter, know how much you are in my thoughts. I pity you sometimes and admire you. My heart is so attached to yours that I wish to support you, if possible, as much as I possibly can.

*Letter to Mrs. Louis de Giry,
October 7, 1867
(Letters, vol. VI, p. 385)*

Maurice de Giry (1847-1870), son of Louis de Giry and Constance (nee Roussy de Sales), was educated at the Collège de l'Assomption in Nîmes and died as a papal "zouave" at the Porta Pia in Rome, in 1870. The Papal Zouaves were formed in defense of the Papal States by Lamoricière in 1860. The Zuavi Pontifici were mainly young men, unmarried and Roman Catholic, who volunteered to assist Pope Pius IX in his struggle against the Italian Risorgimento. They formed an international regiment, coming from Flanders, France, The Netherlands, Bavaria, and even Canada.

MONTH OF NOVEMBER

The month of November opens with All Saints Day followed the next day by All Souls Day. This gives this fall month when the trees lose their leaves and when the vegetation takes a vacation, as it were, a mournful quality, half asleep or misty. Despite the fact that everything in nature dies during this season (at least in the Northern Hemisphere), November is still in full bloom with the solid optimism of the faith and the prayer for the deceased. Sadness is not its spirit. It is rather characterized by the fervent, fraternal supplications for those whose memory we continue to cherish just as Fr. d'Alzon continued to carry in his heart and in his prayer the members of his family on earth and those of the Assumption who preceded him in death. The Congregation remembers her own this month,

more especially on November 13 when the Augustinian calendar recommends prayer for the deceased members of the Order and when we celebrate, likewise, the three Bulgarian martyrs who were beatified by Pope John Paul in May, 2002, in Plovdiv. The mystery of the Communion of Saints teaches us that grace is a two-way street.

November 1

All Saints Day

Because it is impossible for human beings to express the ineffable mysteries of God exactly, it is necessary to represent them in metaphors and symbols. That is why the dwelling-place of the saints is called the New Jerusalem in the Scriptures and why the Apostle John in the Book of Revelation¹ describes its layout and mysterious beauty in images borrowed from cities on earth.

On the day when the militant Church celebrates the glory of All Saints, she joins in a certain way with the permanent feast of heaven. Saint Gertrude, who was blessed to experience in this life a taste of heaven in numerous visions, saw, on one All Saints Day, the gentleness, the joy and the beatitude of the Holy Trinity being communicated to the saints of the earth in a way that human language is incapable of expressing. She tried, nevertheless, to describe this revelation by using images.

Le Pèlerin, October 26, 1878, p. 694.

¹ Rev 6: 9-17

November 2

All Souls Day

There is never a feast day without a sequel. On the day after All Saints there is a new joy in heaven because of the arrival of those souls that the unanimous prayers of November 2 deliver from purgatory. The commemoration of the dead is the feast of the saints in purgatory with this difference that the saints in heaven pray for us while we pray for the saints in purgatory. Yesterday we received. Today we give.

This feast, characterized by generosity, was instituted in our own country of France, like so many other holy solemnities, and from France it was extended to the Catholic world by Holy Mother Church...The French feast for the dead, which preceded the universal feast which we celebrate in the Church, is the work of an abbot of Cluny (992), St. Odilon, born in Auvergne... A century ago the feast received extraordinary growth thanks to an indult from Pope Benedict XIV. Just as we say three Masses at Christmas to celebrate the birth according to the flesh of the Child in whom we all are born again, so the Pope authorized one portion of the Church, who had requested it, according to ancient usage, to celebrate three Masses on November 2 in order

that the souls in purgatory might receive new birth in heaven.

Le Pèlerin, November 2, 1878, p.710-711.

November 3

The Rights of God

If God exists by himself, then he is the principle of all things. Everything returns to him.

If he is the ultimate good, everything should aspire towards him.

If he is perfection, everything must imitate him.

If he is truth, everything must confess him.

If he is life, everything must derive life from him.

If he is will, everything must want his will.

If he is love, everything must love him.

If he is justice and mercy, everything must fear him and seek his embrace.

If he is power, everything must obey him.

If he is happiness, everything must seek happiness in him alone.

HOLY, HOLY, HOLY

*Plan for a retreat talk,
from The Essential d'Alzon (ES p. 873)*

The theme of the rights of God, as opposed to the rights of man proposed by the French Revolution, is certainly one of the most pregnant themes in the thoughts of Fr. d'Alzon who did not hesitate to write: "*Faced with everything that has been done in the name of the rights of man, I would want to establish an association which would be devoted to fighting for the rights of God.*"

November 4

St. Charles Borromeo

As you know, people accuse me of wanting to imitate all the saints whose lives I read. At the moment, we are reading the life of Saint Charles in the refectory, and I want you to know that I have not the slightest desire to be either an Archbishop or a Cardinal¹. Nevertheless, I am profoundly impressed by the beauty, the strength, the energy, the perseverance of this man. On the one hand, the good I seek to do for my students brings me closer to them. On the other, I am even more attached to the few novices I see coming to us. They bring me to believe that more will come. Let me also add that my less than robust health, which the slightest effort adversely affects, gets me down. What should I do? Where is the will of

God in all of this? Frankly, I do not know. Sometimes I reproach myself for being too invested in the details, the little things. Sometimes I am quite incapable of doing anything that requires the least effort. What does God want of me? I think I am ready to do anything, if I see it clearly, but there are times when I see too much and other times when I see nothing. Let me know your opinion on this, if you have one.

*Letter to Mother Marie-Eugénie de Jésus,
March 28, 1859
(Letters, vol. III, p. 49)*

¹ In 1844 at the shrine of Our Lady of Consolation in Turin, Fr. d'Alzon made the vow of priestly humility; he renounced any and all ecclesiastical honors, unless they were expressly requested by the Pope personally. We know that he refused to be named bishop several times.

November 5

Meditation on Death

“Morieris tu, et non vives.”¹ Let us place ourselves for a moment on the edge of the tomb and let us look at the two horizons that we find

there: the past and the future, the end of time and the beginning of eternity.

The past: death is the end of time and of the means of profiting from it: it is the end of suffering and merits, regrets and remorse, hopes, delusions, deceits, worldly thoughts, the world of the senses, passions, guilty habits, and God's patience.

The future: death is the beginning of eternity, the separation of the soul, the corruption of the body, the justice of God, the carrying out of the sentence, the setting in place of what shall always be, the beginning of useless regrets.

*Notes for a sermon on death,
as found in T.D., vol. 44, p. 116.*

¹ The exact Latin quote is: "*Morieris enim et non vives*" from II Kings, 20: 1, "*for you will die, you will not live,*" with regard to Hezekiah.

November 6

Commemoration of our Deceased Brothers

If I had been in Nimes when I received the news of the blow you have just received, I would

have gone immediately to offer you the only kind of consolation a Christian woman such as yourself wants to receive. But you have already found it in the holy life and peaceful death of your mother. People will say that since she had already done her purgatory on earth because of her long illness, God gave her a little peace the better to think about heaven and to enjoy a few more days with those she was about to leave so as to console the during those final moments of consciousness, which were quickly disappearing and were filled with thoughts of eternity. You will feel an immense void, but Our Lord, who is very good, will fill a part of it with the return of Amédée. His time at school will be finished and since they are installing two new regiments in Nimes, he will certainly be made a lieutenant. May God allow you to use the freedom you are about to regain in terrible solitude in a holy way. All of that shows us the way. Let us encourage one another to walk in the tracks of those who have gone before us. There is a great gentleness in loved memories when we find there such beautiful models to follow.

*Letter to Mrs. Varin d'Ainville,
January 16, 1875
(Letters, vol. XI, p. 25-26)*

November 7

A Thought before Death

It will take me a long time to get over the feeling I experienced yesterday at the cemetery, as they lowered the coffin of our poor brother Edouard Patt¹ into the grave, there to await his glorious resurrection. Life and death are solemn mysteries indeed. Hardly a week ago this excellent religious was teaching – completely dedicated to his task. Did it not strike me that he was exhausted? Ought I not to have prevented his over-doing it? Too late to worry about it now – but it's a frightful burden on my conscience. If we don't look after the health of our religious, we lose them. If we look after them too well, we produce a generation of mollycoddles.

Now, this applies to us, superiors. But with regard to you, religious, you must not be overly concerned about yourselves. While this lays a heavy responsibility on the shoulders of those in charge, your attitude must be, and remain, that of one hundred per cent dedication – with generous enthusiasm, and mindless of the consequences.

*Conference given to the Religious Sisters of the Assumption
(1870), from The Essential d'Alzon (ES p. 681-682)*

¹ This refers to the death of Brother Edouard Pratt who died suddenly from a hemorrhage on November 28, 1870, at Nimes and was buried the following day.

November 8

Communion In Prayer

I think, my dear friend, that you have completed your journey and that you have become a new man having viewed the glaciers and let your hands be baptized by the snow. Unfortunately, my elder sister, also, has completed her journey on earth. And you know yourself what it means to lose a sister. She leaves us, of course, with many consoling memories. Her confessor was telling me that she was a saint of the first order because of her spirit of faith, her immense charity and her delicate conscience. However, the judgments of God are unfathomable and we still need to pray for those we love. I commend my sister to the prayers of you all. I will be in Paris on the 7th in the evening, and if you would like to drop by to see me the morning of the 8th of August, you will almost certainly find me there. Things look bleak on the Italian front and I am hoping to offer hospitality to a few professors who would like to

come and teach in Nimes. The persecution of Herod brought about the dispersion of the Apostles and was the occasion for spreading the Gospel to the Gentiles. In the hands of Divine Providence, everything is a means, even studying Roman Theology without going to Rome. You understand Garibaldi.

*Letter to Vincent de Paul Bailly,
July 27, 1860
(Letters, vol. III, p. 266-267)*

November 9

The Dear Presence of the Departed

Thank you for your fine letter. Let me tell you very simply where I am at this point. The sufferings I saw my mother going through made me hope they would soon come to an end. Since that time I have been talking with her and I know she hears me. Because I was so accustomed not to having her present, death seems to have brought her somewhat closer. Perhaps I have come to love solitude since it had already visited me when my sister died; it increases a little every day. This is self-centered, but I am telling you what is going

on. I feel fine with the souls which faith tells me are in a better world or ready to enter it. I never understood the joy of being a priest and religious better than by the prayers we are wont to offer for these poor and dear souls, and then the honor of being able to suffer in one's family at the time when the large Christian family is suffering so much. It indeed makes sense when the love of the Church is not some vain word. The person with whom I find the most consolation regarding the death of my mother is mother herself. If you only knew what I suffered when, after having written to several other persons, I entered her room and asked her forgiveness for all the pain I had caused her and I went to kiss that hand that had cared so much for me! There was sadness, of course, but after all we are not like those who have no hope.

*Letter to Mother Marie Eugénie de Jésus,
October 18, 1860
(Letters, vol. III, p. 325)*

November 10

In memory of a Sister who did good deeds

I have time only for a very brief word, my dear child, to thank you for your letter which I received yesterday. I accompanied my beloved Marie to her final resting place, and now, at every moment, I expect to see her in the parlor, in the chapel, in the corridors, in the garden. I know where her body is buried. I hope that her soul is in heaven. The spontaneous testimonies spoken at her wake were a true triumph. You could feel the respect for a saintly woman who had disappeared. Every day I become more aware of the extensive influence of her quiet charity and of that unity of purpose in doing good of which she never lost sight. After her death I discovered some very moving details. But the honors that were given her and which clearly had not been orchestrated were nothing more than an explosion of gratitude for the good she did for all. Pardon me for going on about what I saw that far surpassed what I might have ever expected. But does God judge as human beings do? Please pray for her.

*Letter to Marie Correnson,
April 7, 1869
(Letters, vol. VII, p. 284)*

November 11

Meditations and thoughts on death

Are you aware, my dear friend, that we will all die one day, you and me and everybody? Oh! We don't think about it. Still, death is our goal. Death is our worst enemy or our most faithful benefactor, depending on the way we ourselves treat it. Doesn't it appall you to think that a little dust will one day hide this body from the view of others, as well as that head and figure you love so much? *Homo natus de muliere, brevi vivens tempore, multis repletur miseriis*¹. Yet, we love these miseries. We get attached to them, for lack of something better. Why, you might ask, after writing to you yesterday, I now write about such lugubrious things? Why? Because my heart is filled with inexplicable melancholy. The Day of the Dead never comes along without turning my entire being upside down. Just as it pleases me at times, at other times it horrifies me. Die to be destroyed. Die to be untied with God. Ah! This is where I realize how far I still am from the goal to which I must aspire. Why don't I always greet death with joy?

*Letter to Luglien de Jouenne d'Esgrigny,
November 1, 1832
(Letters, vol. A, p. 363-364)*

¹ Job 14:1 “*Man, born of a woman, has a short life but never-ending torments*”.

November 12

Actual experience of a burial

A thousand circumstances are coming to me to fortify these thoughts. For example, the other day, an old priest who at one time had been the superior of the seminary, was buried there. He was really a man of the good old days, not very aware the questions of the day, but leaving all liberty on controversial matters, giving his life over to theological studies, good works and prayer. I was asked to carry the cross at the funeral and I was at the edge of the grave when they deposited his body. The casket was not well closed and that allowed me to see his hand on the priestly vestments he wore, the hand which had so often touched the One who was then his nourishment and now his judge, the hand that had been so often raised to absolve and perhaps to

condemn. And when, in a thoughtful moment, I considered that one day, after having offered many sacrifices, pronounced many absolutions, I would be thus lowered into the earth and that my judgment would be heavier than all the divine blood I had spread, than all the absolutions I had given, than all the souls that had been confided to me, than all the battles I would have to fight in defense of the truth, than all the weight of the priesthood, I was surprised to find that I was clutching the cross with all my might. And it was not only my fingers that clutched the icy metal but especially my heart that sensed at that moment the need for an absolute crucifixion, and accepted with delight whatever was in store for it that might be bitter and distasteful.

*Letter to Charles de Montalembert,
November 10, 1832
(Letters, vol. XIV, p. 13)*

November 13

*All Saints of the Augustinian Order
and the Congregation.
Feast of Blessed Pavel, Josephat and Kamen*

What chance is there of my going straight to heaven? What am I to do? Where am I going to look for friends when I see the dead being so neglected? But there is a sure means of insuring myself against that terrible day – a means at my disposal. Let me acquire a tender devotion to the Holy Souls in purgatory. The living may forget me (they invariably do) but not the dead. If I have thought about them, prayed for them, suffered for them – then they will never, never forget!

Holy Souls, this is the deal I propose. You are suffering in the flames of purgatory. Very well, I for my part am going to offer God, through Mary's intercession, the little I have to offer Him in the way of atonement from henceforth till my dying breath. I'm going to offer it all for you, keeping nothing back for myself – so much so that whatever merit I acquire goes to the relief of your pain. And in return, when my time comes to depart this life – whether by that time you are up in heaven or still down in purgatory – you will pray and intercede on my behalf – you will obtain

mercy and pardon for me, as I have endeavoured to obtain it for you.

*To the students at Nimes,
from The Essential d'Alzon (ES p. 1060)*

November 14

The gratitude of a grave digger

You can see how much I esteem my happiness by the way I compare it to the pain of others. You understand then that, if I am not unhappy, that is not an excuse for me not to understand the pain of others or not to be affected by what they suffer. Yes, my friend, that is why I feel sorry for you in your suffering and hasten to go and help you carry your cross. A great way for me to dispel any thoughts of my personal pain is to remind myself of the instructions I give every winter to the farm help. When I see these poor people, most of whom do not have a place to lay their heads, work despite the cold and the rain, obliged to feed themselves as well as their parents and their children, how could I complain? Just today someone mentioned to me the case of a grave digger. He, his wife and his five children share

the same bed. And I was also told of the joy of these poor people when the bell tolls to announce that there is a new grave to be dug. "Father, the witch has fallen," say the children in their energetic patois and their father thanks Death for giving him some bread for his children.

*Letter to Luglien de Jouenne d'Esgrigny,
December 10, 1831
(Letters, vol. A, p. 249)*

November 15

At the Catacombs of Rome

The other day I was present at the transfer of a few bodies of saints that had been found in the catacombs. Whenever the workers who are in charge of the excavations find a certain number of tombs, they advise either the cardinal Vicar or the Pope's sacristan bishop who then sends someone to reclaim the body. This time it was an Augustinian religious who was presiding the excavation of the bones. First we entered a catacomb that has just recently been excavated and which gives one a good idea of how the early Christians hid the various entrances which they

used to attend their meetings. In a vine and under an old wall hidden with bushes, we went down a very steep stairway into the long and narrow passageways which are lined with empty tombs to the right and the left. There we found three tombs, which turned out to be those of martyrs, either by virtue of the palm engraved on the stone that enclosed the sepulcher or by virtue of a small vase in which one could see the dried blood of a martyr. The Christians were always careful to leave one of these clues. When the bones have been in a humid place, they are usually very well preserved. When they have been in a dry spot, their appearance is quite beautiful but they break at the touch and are reduced to dust.

*Letter to Augustine d'Alzon,
January 17, 1839
(Letters, vol. A, p. 772-773)*

November 16

Visit to the cemetery: four planks and some worms

I have but one word to offer you today, my dear child, to thank you for your good news and to

tell you that as a small sign of my thanks I will offer Mass for you on Thursday around 8 AM. As you can see, I am trying to get to you by appealing to your feelings. I was thinking about what would be the best way for you to destroy little by little what seems to be the impossibility of becoming a good person. The only answer I could come up with: acts of humility or mortification carried out in a spirit of faith. Imagine this, my daughter, we are getting old and this comfortable and easy life, these family pleasures, the satisfactions of pride, all of this will be replaced by four planks and worms. All winter long I offered hospitality to a Carthusian who went to visit the cemetery every day. Why not go yourself and get ready to appear before God?

*Letter to Clémentine Chassanis, 1864
(Letters, vol. V, p. 219)*

November 17

Memories of an old Capuchin

When I arrived in Nimes in 1835, there were at least 40 excellent priests left in the Diocese. They had been formed by an old Capuchin, whose leg

had been broken by the former minister of Louis-Philippe, during the Revolution. He had withdrawn to a little hamlet which was accessible only by following a small river-bed and which I could not follow without getting my feet wet. Fr. Chrysostom's lodgings consisted on one room with a table in the middle. That was the study hall, the classroom and the dining-room. At night the upper part of the table was removed and he slept in his casket ready at hand as it were. His bones were swept away in a storm down the hill of a cemetery. But he had formed 40 priests. What resources did he have, in a place where the chestnut was the only food of the mountain folk? He discovered these young men and one day they were able to be ordained.

*Letter to Fr. Victor Bougaud,
August or September 1878
(Letters, vol. XII, p. 532)*

Father Chrysostom de Barjac, born Antoine Pellier in 1775, died in 1819. He was a legend in his own time among the local clergy at the time of the Revolution. His life reads like a novel. Being a Capuchin missionary, he preached in the Cévennes Mountains, was expelled and lived like a fugitive between 1792 and 1795 while continuing his ministry, even in hiding. He was arrested several times and freed until his deportation to the island of Oléron, from which he managed to escape in 1800. He returned to St. Marcel de Careiret Parish, went to Aigues-Mortes in 1804 and was pastor at

Cambon from 1805. He was especially dedicated to the recruitment of priests and opened a presbytery school which became the Saint Vincent de Paul minor seminary in 1815. He died in December, 1819, "*in the odor of sanctity*".

November 18

A landscape of death. Floods in Provence

My dear friend, yesterday I witnessed one of the most awful sights imaginable. The Rhone River flooded the plains of Beaucaire. Avignon is almost totally under water. The day before yesterday, Tarascon was under water up to the first storey. At the minor seminary, only the kitchen and the dining room were flooded. They had about 8 feet of water in the interior court yard. Yesterday I went to Beaucaire with the bishop. While I was there, two rural houses collapsed. Fortunately, water only entered Beaucaire through a break in the dike which took place down below; after opening up over a stretch of more than 300 feet, it did some terrible damage. The steamboat went to save the workers many of whom had spent the night in the trees. Several people drowned. Oxen, horses and whole sheepfolds were swept

away at a horrible rate. Some villages have been cut off for several days. They needed to lodge the horses in the church and the herds in the cemetery. In the midst of all this there are some people who are incredibly self-controlled. Albert de Tesson, who is losing his entire wine harvest, was rubbing his hands at the thought that he would be dispensed from the trouble of going to market. Only one thing bothered him: knowing the fate of the sparrows.

*Letter to Augustine d'Alzon,
November 5, 1840
(Letters, vol. B, p. 56)*

November 19

The Company of the Dead

Thank you, my dear friend, for your kind words to me and mine during this time of trial sent our way by God. You are always there to share the suffering of a friend. It is the true character of authentic affection to go especially to those who are suffering sadness. Mr. de Puységur died as he had lived, as a true Christian. In the moment of such a severe trial, it is a great consolation for his

wife, who was nevertheless too broken, even with regard to her health, to come to see my mother once again. As for me, because I was alone in Nîmes at the chancery, I had to resign myself to sending her a word to support her even though I would have desired so much to be near her. Along with this, God has sent me another sadness, of another type, but no less burdensome from a certain point of view. I was close to my brother-in-law especially because of my sister and her children. For the past six years, in the deepest recesses of my heart, I cherished a young man destined for greatness, who after achieving great success in high school was preparing for the Polytechnic Institute. At the age of 16 he had already composed a Chinese dictionary and was working on an Arabic dictionary. He had great facility for poetry and the last poem I have from him speaks of the students of the Collège de l'Assomption whom we have already accompanied to the cemetery. But he had a presentiment of his death. In fact on most of his books we found these words: "Dies mei sicut umbra declinaverunt et ego sicut foenum arui"¹. This poor child had written his memoirs.

*Letter to Luglien de Jouenne d'Esgrigny,
August 26, 1851
(Letters, vol. 1, p. 71-72)*

Ps 102: 11 “*My days are like an evening shadow and I wither away like grass*”. The person mentioned here is Félix Hedde.

November 20

The good thief: a rare example to avoid

Yes indeed, hell does exist. I hope from the bottom of my heart that no one ever goes there, neither you, my reader, nor myself, not even the enemies of the Church, if they accept to be converted. Some 40 years ago, an old paralyzed bishop told me of an apostate bishop who had just left his office. He had spoken him of the conversion of Mr. de Talleyrand. It is hard to believe, he added. Then turning with some difficulty toward his crucifix he said: “Alas, dear God, you forgave the good thief.” And he murmured under his breath: ‘Yes, but this was one of those surprises you don't pull off every day.’ God can do similar things, but not often. So, let's not place ourselves in the same difficult position as the good thief and Mr. de Talleyrand. Let's believe in hell so we can avoid it; at the same time, such a belief is a powerful means of giving us a chance of going to heaven. As for

those who believe neither in heaven nor hell, let's stay far from them. They might drag us along with them.

“Le Pèlerin”, n. 157, January 1880, p.838.

November 21

Presentation of the Virgin Mary [Anniversary of the death of Fr. d'Alzon¹]

The Presentation of the Virgin Mary is not an article of faith. It is a pious belief with many lessons. Today I would like to take a look at a few of the virtues that the Church, borrowing the words of St. Ambrose², admires more especially in Mary. I will set aside everything the Archbishop of Milan says about her amazing mortifications, her fasts, her prolonged vigils, her prayers. I will pause to consider three points that he brings to mind and that I would like to contemplate with you. “Secretum verecundiae, vexillum fidei, devotionis obsequium.” (The secret of her modesty, the standard of her faith, her devoted obedience.) This is one of those revolutions brought about by Christianity. There

was a moment when, in pagan society, women were either immodest or bound as slaves. But this chaste reserve of the Virgin Mary was totally unknown. What did these women have to hide when the master's terror didn't hold them back? Let us note today where Christian morals are heading; the absence of reserve is making itself felt. Women, too often, exercise no self-control. This can be seen and felt at every moment of life. Blessed the soul that respects itself and knows how to imitate Mary in her modesty.

*Instruction to the Third Order,
Paris, B.P. 1930, p. 22.*

¹ Fr. d'Alzon died in Nimes on November 21, 1880, the day of this Feast of the Virgin Mary, around the time of the noon-day Angelus.

² St. Ambrose, "*De Virginibus*", vol. II, post initium.

On the fourth Thursday of November Thanksgiving Day is celebrated in the United States. It began in 1621 with the survivors of the Mayflower (« The Pilgrims ») in order to give thanks for the fruits of the land. This observation became official in 1864 and is a holiday, usually celebrated in family. Let us pray for our communities in the USA.

November 22

Saint Cecilia

Saint Cecilia is too great a saint for us not to be overjoyed to do something for her. As for her devotees they would fight tooth and nail to prevent us from doing what they would like to see done for her. So, Father de Servas has been authorized to say the Mass for the inauguration of St. Cecilia School. If more is desired, we will see. I will pray especially for you tomorrow, my dear child; I will ask your patron saint for the spirit of zeal and ardor for the good that she united with great detachment from the world and remarkable purity of heart. Since the Church offers her as one of the four great virgins of the Western Church, ask her to teach you that perfection which Our Lord would have you practice it. Too bad you will not be at Servas for New Year's Day. I would have gone seeking refuge at your house. Perhaps I will be content with St. Joseph's rectory. I'll see. Thank you for the news concerning Amédée. As for the building, let me know when the first stone is laid.

*Letter to Cécile Varin d'Ainville,
November 21, 1871
(Letters, vol. IX, p. 223)*

November 23

Death and resurrection in the Christian life

But we also have our weapons. And these weapons, if we want to use them, would have great influence. The supernatural world is, as it were, at our command. The saints, the angels, God himself offer us their support. Suffice it to ask for them in prayer but especially in public prayer. Society has become pagan and tyrannical, unbelieving. Philosophical skepticism, which has turned into social skepticism, shakes it to its foundations. We must restore its vital moorings. What has already been accomplished serves as an encouragement for what remains to be done, if we really want to achieve it. Do not Catholics, from one end of France to the other, have the sense that their prayers have begun to be heard? Did the large pilgrimages of the summer and fall not bear fruit? Did the novenas of November, a scandal and a curse for many, not set in motion useful and undeniable movements? Does not the presentiment of resurrection in the Christian life appear as a source of joy and hope for some and as a subject of irritation and rage for others? Whoever has eyes to see and ears to hear is struck by the results of prayer offered to Divine Justice, ready to strike. Prayer is even more necessary as well as a

multiplication of those public acts destined to purify the political and social atmosphere, reeking from the blasphemies and sacrileges of our public discourse, our morals and some of our laws.

*Revue de l'enseignement chrétien,
January, 1873, n. 21, p. 242.*

November 24

The Vietnamese Martyrs

Ah! My dear child, if we had the hearts of seraphim and apostles, what breakthroughs we would make there and elsewhere! Do you know one of the aspects of Rome that moves me the most? It's to meet bishops from all over the world. At the Vatican, on the day of our audience, there was the bishop from Porto-Rico (sic), an elderly Capuchin. We went to St. John Lateran and there we found a Dominican bishop, with his Chinese valet. Leaving the Office of the Propaganda, I met Bishop Brunoni, the former bishop delegate of Constantinople, delighted not to be there anymore. And it is like this everywhere: North America, South America, Asia, Chaldea, Syria, Egypt, and Central Africa. Each region provides

its contingency and all of this works entirely for the Catholic Church. In all of these countries there are enormous conquests to be made. They are almost all “mission” countries, where the Oblate Sisters could work. Tell our Sisters that they have only a very limited idea of all they will have to do. I count on Sister Marguerite to teach them about this from her place in heaven. I can’t tell you how much I count on this “little flower,” placed at the feet of the Virgin Mary, to attract many graces for us. But one must be faithful. One must have a big heart, one as wide as the world.

*Letter to Marie Corenson,
November 17, 1869
(Letters, vol. VIII, p. 16)*

Let us pray today with and for our communities and the Church in Vietnam. The Assumptionists founded their first community there in 2006.

Novembre 25

Preaching revitalized: an autumn fruit

Whenever he travels, the pilgrim always attends as many “instruction Masses” as he can, at least on Sundays, that is to say, one of those Masses which include simple, homey, down-to-earth instructions that have always done him more good than those grand sermons that never end. He likes the more natural tone, supernatural but definitely not anti-natural. The natural style is that of the early bishops who called these instructions “homilies,” conversations. These early bishops did not engage in grandiloquence. They talked to the people. The nature of their supernatural style: they were not afraid to call to mind those prodigious events recounted in the Gospel. They subscribed to the school of miracles. Since everything about Our Lord is miraculous from his conception and birth to his resurrection and ascension into heaven, these great Doctors of the faith preached, as did St. Augustine who summarizes them all, that the greatest miracle of all would have been that the world be converted without miracles. Theirs was no anti-natural style.....and there lies the difficulty. How does one preach without using a few well-turned phrases, or throwing a few rhetorical flourishes to

the audience, without employing grand gestures? Fénelon notes that these early bishops would have been too embarrassed to engage in such grand gestures; anyway, the huge chasubles that they wore while preaching prevented such gestures. Besides, they knew that an instruction needs to be brief if it is to be retained. Brief but substantial; otherwise, one does not have the time to present much of anything.

“Le Pèlerin,” October 20, 1877, p. 657.

November 26

Mystery of life, mystery of faith

We all must die.....it's inevitable. What is this mystery? I have not lived very long, still I can recall the names of so many people I have known and loved. I call them; none of them ever answers. I will not meet them again either in the towns they inhabited or in the homes where they lived. I'll never meet them again. They will never speak to me. They were torn from my affection in spite of themselves and me and now everything is over. No, all is not over. At the risk

of denying my baptism, I must believe in the resurrection of the body and eternal life. I must believe that my Redeemer lives and that I will see him in my own flesh even when the worms have devoured it. I believe in eternal life and that I will be judged by the living God who gives life and death, who casts into netherworld and calls back again. What matters is that one prepare oneself for death, resurrection and eternal life. How do I prepare? By not attaching myself to that from which I will some day be separated, by remembering that the image of this world passes and that it passes quickly. When we bury some well-known man, this millionaire banker or that victor of so many battles, this king or that emperor, this president of the Republic or that actor, what remains of them? His soul appears before God while his body is condemned to the tomb and to terrible decomposition. If he is embalmed, some revolution will come along, and since his body will not have decomposed, it will be desecrated by people. We've seen it happen!!

"Le Pèlerin," November 3, 1877, p. 690.

November 27

Death and resurrection in Naim

Our Lord enters Naim and comes upon a widow making her way to the tomb of her only son. Who was this widow? And if her son had died, how was she involved? That our Divine Master, infinite mercy itself, was touched by this tragedy is not surprising. But we need to wonder if there are not today great numbers of young men who die as a result of the great weakness of those who gave them life. Where are those Christian mothers who say to their sons as Queen Blanche of Castile said to St. Louis: "My son, you know how much I love you. Still, I would prefer to see you dead at my feet rather than see you commit a single mortal sin"? Real tenderness has disappeared. We prefer to cater to the whims and passions of adolescence. We are losing souls; we are creating ingrates; we are setting ourselves up for terrible suffering, sometimes irreparable suffering. We even go to the point of favoring certain disorders. The door is opened to premature death. Then we tear out our hair and ask God what we have done to be so cruelly treated.

"Le Pèlerin," September 13, 1897, p.590.

November 28

*Mockery on the occasion
of the funeral of Fido, the dog*

There was a professor who expressed affection for his dog alone. He had not been able to keep his marriage together. This dog took all his affection, except, I think, for a pair of canaries. One day the dog fell ill. A dog Doctor was called, a homeopath like the dog's master. In spite of the homeopath, the dog died. The master, wanting to keep something as a souvenir of Fido, had the dog skinned and with the leather made a bed-spread. Exactly as a certain professor of medicine in Paris, whose name I will give if asked, used the skin of a young lady who was not his wife to make a night-table and slippers. Once Fido had been skinned, what was he to do with the rest? This professor of mine invited his colleagues to a funeral ceremony. The poor lot had the courage not to attend. These sacristans did not want a civil funeral! The servant, who was responsible for digging the grave, let it be known that at a specified hour, the remains of Fido, wrapped in the professor's finest sheet, would be carried to the tomb and interred. But before the burial, this man of mine, who still held the dog in his arms, went into the grave, unwrapped the body and, despite the skinning,

placed his hand on the heart of the deceased animal to make sure it was not beating. The undertaker's shovel finished the job. We do not know if military honors had been requested.

*Letter to the editor of "L'Assomption,"
November 25, 1876
(Letters, vol. XI, p. 516-517)*

November 29

Words of wisdom to a widow

As to the facts, among the holy individuals you mention, there is already a widow, a few young women, undoubtedly, who were housewives and, therefore, quite aware that they were not to live like nuns in their cells. Obviously, that means that a certain freedom of action is needed in this situation but it's as you would expect for missionaries. They are religious but obliged to take certain decisions on their own. What advice would be best for a widow? St. Paul says that they should truly be alone, something which favors the spirit of prayer, sacrifice, and solitude. You know that I asked you to host many in your home, but you also know that I suggested it as a

duty in charity and as an alternative to certain meetings where the ideas would obviously be less Christian than yours. As for you, life should have a certain discipline and you should not be too upset if, because of that, you seem to displease certain people. The goal of Third Order members and even more that of the Adorers, is to elevate their surroundings, as much as they can, to the level of Christian living. You can see that from this point of view a woman who has numerous contacts can do more than a person who has few. She needs to mix firmness with condescension, firmness being the base and condescension the means.

*Letter to Mrs. Varin d'Ainville,
April 8, 1864
(Letters, vol. V, p. 41-42)*

November 30

*Saint Andrew, Apostle,
Patron of the Church of Constantinople*

There is hardly a better occasion to meditate on the wonderful subject of vocation than the feast of St. Andrew. Let us examine the call from Our

Lord and the way the apostle responds. The call is recounted in two ways and both probably took place¹. There are a variety of calls. Sometimes the Lord uses other men as he did with John the Baptist. On other occasions, he acts directly as he did later on with Peter and Andrew. What matters is that one listen to the divine call, whether it comes directly or indirectly. The Lord uses the means that seem preferable and in all instances he wants us to give ourselves to him. It is not a question of looking for our vocation but rather of listening in the depths of our heart to the call Jesus Christ is making. What is frightening is that every day the Lord requires more of us and that is what our frightened, lax, and independent nature does not want. Let us resolve to listen to Jesus whenever he calls, in the everyday details of our life. Let us give ourselves to him and follow him wherever he wishes to lead us.

*Instructions to the Members of the Third Order,
B.P. 1930, p. 40-41.*

¹ Jn 1:35-40 and Mt 4:18-22.

MONTH OF DECEMBER

In the liturgical calendar the month of December features Advent, the preparation for Christmas. There are two highlights in this month: the Immaculate Conception (8th), the dogma being proclaimed in 1854, and the Nativity of the Lord (25th). In addition to these two feasts, there is a host of others, including St. Stephen (26th), St. John the Apostle (27th), the Holy Innocents (28th), before turning the page to the feast of St. Sylvester (31st). Fr. d'Alzon helps us to enter the spiritual season of Advent, a time of waiting, of longing, and of preparation. On the night of Christmas 1845, the adventure of faith which led to the foundation of the congregation began. Fr. d'Alzon enjoyed fully the proclamation of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, a decision which he had already prepared since the provincial council of Avignon in 1849 and, on the occasion of the

proclamation, he wanted to point to his Collège in Nîmes as a citadel of faith. The calendar of December is sanctified by many other figures of which we have retained only a few: Francis-Xavier (3rd), Ambrose of Milan (7th), John of the Cross (14th), which serve as so many stepping-stones leading to the star of Christmas, in the middle of the winter solstice when light is overtaken by night (at least in the Northern Hemisphere).

December 1

***A Resolution for entering
into the season of Advent:
Being love at the heart of the Church***

Why, my dear daughter, beyond all these questions, does an interior voice keep telling me that I must make a saint of you? I beg you, throughout Advent, to enter into the following dispositions. The Holy Fathers assure us that “the virgins are, in a very real sense, the mothers of Jesus Christ”¹. During this season, from now until Christmas, please be sure to have Jesus Christ in your heart and to picture yourself, since you are his mother, as having to manifest to him the purest of your being, so that he might grow in you in proportion to that which you will give him of your being. That thought must be sustained by an immense love and a heart like that of a mother for your God.

*Letter to Mother Marie-Eugénie de Jésus,
November 24, 1852
(Letters, vol. I, p. 216)*

¹ A veiled allusion to a thought of St. Gregory Nazianzen, Oration 38 (para. 1) on the Theophany (Church Fathers, ed. Schaff): “Christ is born of a Virgin; O you Matrons, live as Virgins, that you may be Mothers of Christ.” Therese of Lisieux was able to bring this touch of religious fervor to her love of the Church by finding her true place in it: to be love at the heart of the Church.

December 1 is the national holiday of Romania. Let us pray for all the Churches of this country and, in a particular way for the mission of the Assumptionists and the Oblates united in the same ecumenical effort.

December 2

Entering Advent, the time of waiting, like Mary

Is it possible that you find astonishing the fact that Martha’s occupation, as you say, has replaced that of Mary? But you are going to take it up again after all your emotions, ups and downs, joys, sadness, and fatigue. You are going to take up the yoke again and I promise you that we will seek to keep you firmly under it. The first thing I recommend to you for Advent is to keep yourself in the presence of God deep within your heart, just as the Blessed Virgin, before the birth of Our

Lord, adored him within herself. It is a practice to which I am deeply committed and which, it seems to me, is quite suited to maintaining us in God's presence in the most useful way since we can bring to it the Blessed Mother's own attitude¹. So, there is something already, I believe, that you can sink your teeth into. To begin with, during Advent, as you await Christmas and the feast of the Immaculate Conception, it seems to me that you can perfectly get out of the rut you say you have been in. All that is needed is a bit of good will. You told me that you have a lazy spirit. First of all, I don't believe a word of it and, moreover, everything that you have just done proves that laziness and you don't go together at all. Finally, even if you were to be so, there would be but one thing to do: no longer be so! Courage! Your great mortification during Advent shall consist in being extremely patient and in offering Our Lord a heart once again steeped in gentleness.

*Letter to Mrs. Paulin de Malbosc,
December 2, 1878
(Letters, vol. XII, p. 624)*

¹ Lk 2:51 "...his mother kept all these things in her heart."

December 3

*St. Francis Xavier, S.J.,
patron saint of the missions, Apostle to Asia*

This absolute dependence, whereby you and I are to place ourselves in relation to our neighbor, makes up a part of our practice of obedience. It's our way of fulfilling our vow. It must be accepted with love. Doesn't St. Francis de Sales say that the devotion of a bishop is one thing, that of a Carthusian another? We are a bit bishops, my daughter; we must bear the burden of our office. Nevertheless, I strongly urge you to carve out moments for yourself. Didn't St. Francis Xavier take two hours every afternoon to get away to the bell-tower in Goa in order to care for his soul? That's a bit what we also must do. There is the rub, however. In summary, I find that everything without exception will be taken care of, if, given that we take a certain amount of time necessary for ourselves, we then abandon ourselves absolutely and without reservation.

*Letter to Mother Marie Eugénie de Jésus,
January 30, 1854
(Letters, vol. I, p. 379)*

Francis Xavier, canonized in 1602, was declared patron of the missions by Pope Pius X in 1927. Francis arrived in Goa

in 1542 with dreams of going to work in China, a dream which led him in fact to India, Ceylon, Malaysia, and Japan. Together with St. Paul, Francis Xavier is the greatest individual missionary in the history of the Church.

December 4

***The best preparation for Christmas:
becoming a living copy of the Christ Child***

I ask of Our Lord that we might see in each one of you a living copy of the Christ Child. Indeed, what better can you do than to be like him in his childhood? An alumnist¹ must prepare himself to become, when he is ordained, another Christ, the Pontiff, par excellence. To reach so high, one must penetrate the depth of his humility, his self-effacement; one must give oneself over unreservedly to the practice of all virtue which he preached at each moment of his existence. One must become not only poor, but detached from wealth as he was, obedient as she was, a man of work and of prayer as he was. That is why the feast of Christmas should mean so much for you. It's a point of departure. From the crib, one springs toward the perfection of one's age that

later was that of Our Lord as he continued to grow.

Now, while the Christ Child worked and obeyed, he also prayed with all his heart; he became the most perfect child of prayer that ever rose from earth to heaven.

*Letter to the alumnists of Notre Dame des Châteaux,
December 25, 1878
(Letters, vol. XII, p. 646)*

¹ Alumnist: this is the name given to young boys, seminarians, from families of modest means, whose education was directed toward the priesthood. The schools themselves were called alumnates.

December 5

Jesus, Loving Savior

Here I am back again writing to you in order to tell you that my deepest conviction is this: that you should make every effort to change whatever is bad into whatever is good, that is to say, to vanquish all things in yourself as Jesus Christ did when he became man for us sinners, in spite of our sins. For he loved us while we were yet

sinner; if he had not loved us, in spite of original sin and the others that ensued as a result, he would not have given himself up for us. So it is that I propose to you as a model Jesus Christ who loves those he has created in spite of their sin. This is an excellent topic for reflection during Advent: this love of the Savior who seeks us out beyond our sins. You can compare his divine dispositions with your own and I have no doubt that it will be for you an abundant source of embarrassment and humility. But now I have to stop; I am being disturbed. I intend to pray a lot for you during this Advent; do the same for me. I cannot tell you how much I wish you every measure of holiness that would make of you a worthy spouse of Our Lord.

*Letter to Mother Marie-Eugénie de Jésus,
November 30, 1848
(Letters, vol. XIV, p. 462)*

Since the time of St. Anselm, there exists a theology of suffering, well known and very Western, the entry-way to which is atonement. But in Eastern theology redemption itself is a return to God, that is, a return to a human nature that is capable of divinity. The call to holiness, therefore, is not a consequence of the sinful nature of man. By his redemption Christ draws all men and all of creation into union with God, the return to true life.

December 6

Humility and Charity, doorways to Advent

But now I return to the topic of Advent. Well, my dear daughter, I have been quite preoccupied the past couple of days about the degree of holiness that I would like to see you acquire. You say that you don't have the heart to remedy your self-centeredness. Well, ask for it these days from Jesus, humiliated, emptied out in his mother's womb. Bear in mind that if you wish to attract the Christ Child into your heart, the only way is humility. You want me to be more specific, but I cannot. In all of your letters I believe I have discovered nothing but a desire to withdraw within yourself, one that is content to despise what is not you and to be sorry for all that you could have been. Perhaps, from such a great distance, I am mistaken as to the exact nature of this disposition; however, if it's not exactly that, it's pretty close. I don't think you should attack this problem head on. What will make you better is greater love for Our Lord and it seems to me that Advent is a wonderful season to enter into acts of emptying oneself out in charity.

*Letter to Mother Marie-Eugénie de Jésus,
December 5, 1848
(Letters, vol. XIV, p. 463)*

December 7

***St. Ambrose, bishop of Milan
and Doctor of the Church***

The weather is superb. When I say superb, that is not to say that it is not hot; to the contrary, there have been refreshing rain showers every two or three days. It couldn't be nicer. May God grant that it remain this way until my arrival and I'll be able to boast of having made a delightful trip. My Aunt Rodier has suggested that once I arrived in France I visit the tomb of St. Francis Regis. I encouraged her to visit the tomb of St. Rose of Lima, in Peru. Today I celebrated Mass before the tomb of St. Charles Borromeo; I had already celebrated it before the tomb of St. Ambrose. Although I have great respect for the saints, I don't believe it's necessary to visit them all; besides, life wouldn't be long enough! I have to admit that, when it comes to celebrating Mass, all this moving about from place to place affects me a bit. In Rome I went to say Mass in very few

places. I hope that the saints won't hold this against me, but I have little devotion to this kind of piety.

*Letter to Augustine d'Alzon,
June 18, 1835
(Letters, vol. A, p. 847-848)*

December 8

Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary (patroness of the North American Province)

Behold the wonderful provision of God's most loving care! A woman had been the first to be seduced; by an incomparable grace, a woman would be the first to be preserved of all stain. A woman would be raised to the unique privilege of sinless beauty. *Tota pulchra es, amica mea, et macula non est in te* ("You are all-beautiful, my beloved, and there is no blemish in you." Song of Songs 4:7), thus cries the heavenly Spouse of spotless souls. In Mary there is absolutely no sin, no stain, not even a shadow – all is beauty, all is perfection, all is light. And in this perfection, this beauty and this light, see her advance along with her Son. *Specie tua et pulchritudine tua, intende,*

prospera, et regna (“You are the fairest of the children of men; in splendor and majesty ride on triumphant! Ps 45:3,4). She is to be the Queen of all queens, and the Virgin of all virgins, *adducentur regi virgines post eam* (“Virgins will follow her into the king's presence” Ps. 45:15). What makes her so beautiful is her humility, this humility which does away with pride, the source of all ugliness: *quia respexit humilitatem ancillae suae: ecce enim ex hoc beatam me dicent omnes generationes* “For he has looked upon his handmaid's lowliness; behold, from now on will all ages call me blessed. Lk 1:48). Satan inherited terrible and everlasting torments as the inevitable consequence of his pride. Mary will inherit inexpressible and everlasting joy to crown her humility. Even here on earth all generations will proclaim her glory, bless her name and beg her intercession, for the Lord God has looked with favour upon her. Humility and purity: these two sister-virtues walk hand in hand.

*Love of the Blessed Virgin,
from The Essential d'Alzon (ES p. 996)*

December 9

Advent Preachers at Assumption

At the moment Fr. Emmanuel (Bailly) is preaching in Toulon. Wherever he goes he is successful. It's too bad that Fr. Edmond (Bouvy) can't be the superior! No one can contest his many superior talents, but he flies off the handle too easily and gets caught up in too many details. Still, he is a wonderful teacher in the upper classes, preaches well, and is a very holy religious. I would have wanted to relieve Fr. Emmanuel of the business side of governance. That isn't possible yet. Although he's assistant director, Fr. Edmond won't be able to replace Fr. Emmanuel for a long time to come. If I was not afraid of the proximity of Fr. Edmond's family in Paris, I would lend him to you for some preaching assignments. He'd certainly be successful.... Writing this letter has cured me. Last night I was suffering from pain between my shoulders; in order to write a few letters before this one to you I had to stop several times and rest in my arm-chair. But now I feel much better! Still, I'll have dinner in my room and not go out the rest of the day. I am quite prepared to believe in your miracles, not only when we call on you, but also when we write

to you. However, one must not overly tempt Providence, so I'll stay close to my fireplace.

*Letter to François Picard,
December 2, 1878
(Letters, vol. XII, p. 622-623)*

December 10

Advent in Rome, 1869

You do well to read as much as possible; but, please, take notes, then give yourself completely to this love of the Church which is the true guiding-light of our times. I am witnessing quite a spectacle: wonderful on the one hand, painful on the other. Rome has its human side, as is the case for every human institution composed of men. But what wonders as well! Sunday I saw a procession of some 20 heads of Orders, 300 bishops, some 30 cardinals and the Pope, carrying the Blessed Sacrament in St. Peter's. It was the first Mass of Advent that is ordinarily said in the Sistine Chapel, but had to be held in the Vatican basilica because of the crowd of people who attended. And these bishops came from the five parts of the world to bear witness to the Catholic faith. It

would take me too long to explain to you why, humanly speaking, the Council is a huge mistake; but, in the order of faith, it is a miracle such as has not been seen, perhaps, since Pentecost. Pray for the foreign missions; pray for the Orient especially. Oh, my daughter, a Catholic heart, as big as the universe. I send you my blessing.

*Letter to Louise Chabert,
November 30, 1869
(Letters, vol. VIII, p. 34-35)*

December 11

Growing in stature: from the beauty of creation to that of vocation

You have been in Le Vigan for two weeks, my dear children. What's becoming of you? How has your fervor grown? Are you good postulants? I would like to know. I had hoped you would write. But, nothing! I suspect that you are a little homesick. Have I guessed correctly? Do you know that when my mother would bring me to Paris¹ --- yes, even Paris --- I was homesick as well. There were days when I was sad, as sad as three old maids. I remember I was once crying, in

bed, because I missed the sun of the South. You, you must be crying because you miss the snow. Perhaps I'm mistaken. In any case, it's just a guess. In the end, though, I realized that there was nothing like Paris and I was really upset when I made the sacrifice not to live there². Likewise, you must be experiencing some tough moments or, surely, you will. But, if you hang in there, you will see that little by little, with Our Lord showing you the beauty of your vocation, you will become devoted children of Assumption, apostles, missionaries, in a word, all that is most beautiful on earth, instruments of God for the conversion of the world. Notice that I am the first to write. So, you have to answer now.

*Letter to the postulants of Châteaux,
October 5, 1873
(Letters, vol. X, p. 125)*

¹ Emmanuel's first trip to Paris took place in 1823 for the beginning of the school-year, when he was 13 years old. To speak of the "sunny climate" of southern France is not to speak in vain especially if you're comparing it to the weather in Paris where the sky is overcast at least six months of the year.

² Emmanuel left Paris in May 1830, wary of the revolutionary winds that were blowing.

December 12

Jesus in the womb of Mary

Ask the Blessed Virgin to teach you to adore Jesus Christ as she herself adored him during the months that she carried him in her womb, especially at that moment when she was about to give her divine Son to the world. Mary can teach us to what intimate extent we should dwell with Jesus Christ, to what extent we should live the very life of Jesus Christ. With her we shall study the characteristics of the adoration of her divine Son in the womb of Mary. The three principal characteristics are: sacrifice, prayer, meditation. Jesus in Mary's womb was in a state of sacrifice for the salvation of the world and the glory of his Father. He, the holy God, the perfect God, the God of all purity, the almighty God had lowered himself to a state of total emptying out and of silence. He had voluntarily stripped himself of every prerogative of his divine nature to take on the form of a slave. In fact, he lowered himself even to less than that, because, while he was still in Mary's womb, what was he if not less than nothing...? Jesus Christ sacrificed, silent, forgotten, unknown in Mary's womb. Now there is the model for our adoration.

December 12 is the national holiday of Kenya and Russia. Let us pray for the Assumptionist missions in East Africa and St. Louis in Moscow. December 12 is also the feast day of Our Lady of Guadalupe, patroness of Mexico and all the Americas. Let us pray for all of our brothers and sisters in Mexico.

December 13

Tender thoughts of friendship

So I remember that last summer, while in the country on a moonlit night, I would go down to the orchard to pick peaches, frost-covered from the night breeze, or I would go down to the vineyards to pick grapes. My hands full of fruit, I would take delight in going to the top of a barren hill that overlooks the mansion (the chateau of Lavagnac); from there, I could see in the plain below smoke rising to-and-fro above the roofs of a dozen villages. In the plain, the River Hérault glimmered in the darkness as it glided past several groves of trees. I could hear the dying murmur of these waters as they approached a nearby dike. However, few things could have matched, even in

such moments, the delights which friendship offers. As I sat on a bare rock, the memory of my friends caused me to forget the passing hours. And so it happened that from time to time I would dream of that other nocturnal journey which brought another trip of two hundred leagues to an end when, alone, on foot, I reached once again the paternal mansion and where, in order to soothe the weariness of the road, I imagined myself arm in arm with one of the friends I love more than anyone, recounting the adventures of the road.

*TD, vol. 43, p. 143 and following
(June 1829), D00294*

December 14

St. John of the Cross. Doctor of the Church

Read and re-read St. John of the Cross; it's hard, but it's helpful, even excellent. Nevertheless, it seems to me that it's not really necessary to see him as a Carmelite. For example, the Jansenists have claimed that since religious are meant to live a life of penitence and solitude, they shouldn't at all be involved in the work of saving souls. Their position was countered by quoting a

number of conciliar and papal writings and, among other things, a canonical text from a council held in Nîmes in 1096, under the presidency of Pope Urban II, at which 10 archbishops and 86 bishops or abbots attended. This canonical text indicates that religious are better suited than other priests to administer the sacraments. Therefore, it is beyond doubt that there has to be Trappists, Carthusians, Carmelites, with their customs; and there may be as well Jesuits, Franciscans, Assumptionists with theirs. The same principle should be valid everywhere: freedom of heart and the purest possible love of God. While some may remain in silence and solitude, the others who are required to live in the world should mutually support one another: “*A brother is a better defense than a strong city, and a friend is like the bars of a castle,*” says the Holy Spirit¹.

*Letter to Marie Correnson,
August 19, 1868
(Letters, vol. VII, p. 140)*

¹ Prov. 18:19

December 15

*In all things, to submit oneself with the utter
fullness of love*

I would have liked to undergo a conversion on the feast of Saint John of the Cross. What have I done about it since? I had to cancel the retreat I intended to preach to the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul. Man proposes – God disposes. In the course of the Minor Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament recently established at the cathedral, I promised Our Blessed Lord to concentrate on my duties of state – that is to say, on my duties as a religious superior. These duties had to take priority over the retreat I had set my heart on preaching. But however incapacitated I may be, I must learn to accept my illness like a saint. I must learn lovingly to submit to whatever misfortunes come my way. So this is the pact. I am delighted at being ill, since Our Lord wishes it so. With all the love I am capable of, I offer him my miserable little aches and pains, that his Kingdom over souls may be extended.

*Personal Reflections: The Years of Trial 1851-1858,
December 4, 1854,
from The Essential d'Alzon (ES p. 817-818)*

December 16

Faith-sharing at Assumption

Such a reading (of the minutes of the meeting of the third Order), Fr. d'Alzon tells us, is an excellent thing. It becomes a stricter way of committing ourselves to observing the Rule; it develops in us a spirit of simplicity and leads us naturally to speak of divine things and to share our reflections with one another. One of the marks of a piety that is good and authentic is this mutual sharing of thoughts which fosters within us a certain confidence toward those who have spoken to us in simplicity. We shouldn't forget that we are entering into Advent. It is a time of waiting which should rouse our desire to redouble our devotion in order to offer Jesus Christ something that will please him. Once we have reminded ourselves that although we have chosen a mentor, we must not forget the responsibility which the novice-master exercises on each one of us (Mr. Monnier for the Third Order). Fr. d'Alzon, the director, concluded the meeting by insisting once again on this simplicity, source of such abundant fruit.

*Notes of the Third Order
(ACR CE1. E00348)*

December 17

God made man, light of truth

What are you about to receive? A God made Man. But this Eternal God is also the Eternal Truth, and this we must never forget. He is *“the radiance of his Father's splendour”* (Heb1:3). He is that *“light which enlightens whoever comes into this world”* (Jn 1:9). He is Jesus Christ, Son of Mary. Beneath his humanity dwells this light which never fades – *“a light which shines through the darkness, and which the darkness cannot comprehend”* (Jn 1:5). But he is no less infinite beauty as well. Saint Augustine observes that every being draws its beauty from the light. You may come face to face with the most magnificent panorama, but unless some ray of light shines upon it you can see nothing. It may be beautiful in itself; however, unlit it appears as nothing but blackness. It is, therefore, light which gives things their beauty. And our Doctor (Saint Augustine) adds: *“Is not the sun the most beautiful object in all of nature, since it provides light for everything else?”* But what is the sun compared to that light which is divine – that light which is God, that light which is *“the radiance of his Father's splendour”*? (Heb1:3). This infinite light wishes to come down to you and endow you with

something of its infinite beauty. And when, with his light, he has communicated his beauty – then he will say to you: “*O, my beloved, how beautiful you are!*” (Song of Songs 4:7).

*On the Occasion of a First Communion
at a school run by the Oblates of the Assumption,
May 27, 1880
from The Essential d’Alzon (ES p. 1222)*

December 18

Retreat prior to Christmas 1834

I am about to place myself into the hands of an old Jesuit, at a retreat house, and I shall be scrubbed, soaped down, and thoroughly washed by him for a whole month. After this experience, if I am not white, it’s because I’m really dirty. Nevertheless, support me with your prayers because they can, I have no doubt, do much for my conversion. I’d like to share all my plans with you. I begin my retreat on November 30; on December 8 I will be ordained a sub-deacon by Cardinal Odescalchi. On the Saturday of Ember Days I will be ordained a deacon of the Roman Church, or at least in the Roman church, since the

ordination will take place in St. John Lateran, which is *omnium ecclesiarum mater et caput* (the mother and head of all the churches). On Christmas Eve Cardinal Odescalchi will impose his hands upon me and raise me to the order of the priesthood and on Christmas Day I hope to say my first Mass before the crèche where Jesus Christ is born. It is kept in the basilica of St. Mary Major, where Cardinal Odescalchi is the archdeacon.

*Letter to the seminarians at Montpellier,
November 15, 1834
(Letters, vol. A, p. 731-732)*

This timeline was, for the most part, maintained. However, Fr. d'Alzon was only ordained a priest in the oratory of the vicariate of Rome which faces St. Augustine Church the day after Christmas, on the feast of St. Stephen, and celebrated his first Mass in the crypt of St. Peter (in the chapel of St. Clement) the following day, December 27 (the feast of St. John). The conferral of the subdiaconate took place on the Third Sunday of Advent, December 14, 1834; that of the diaconate the following Saturday, December 20.

December 19

God, Christmas' Child

Without leaving his place of repose, God hurls into space thousands of worlds in the fullness of his creative power to such far-flung corners of the cosmos that the masses stand in awe, sensing themselves as lost, as imperceptible points in this vast universe. As these worlds turn throughout space, they contribute to the harmony established with other worlds and glorify, in silence, the wisdom of the Creator. In the midst of these worlds, a seed has been planted, preparing the Savior's birth. This mystery of Christmas presents to us a God who is a child. Following his example it is necessary for us to become children. A newborn child who enters the world knows nothing, can do nothing, possesses nothing. We must acquire a sense of our ignorance, of our powerlessness, our poverty.... Let us go to the crèche. This is how Jesus is ignorant, powerless, and poor. So it is that we must embrace this ignorance, this powerlessness, and this poverty.

*Christmas sermon, 1838-1839,
T.D., vol. 46, p. 318, D00965.*

December 20

A trying birth

Hardly a year had gone by since his wedding day than Mr. Monnier became a father. He was so happy that he almost strangled the nurse; so he had to be taken out. He ran to Fr. d'Alzon. When d'Alzon saw him, wild-eyed, he asked him what catastrophe had occurred. "Did the child die before being baptized? Did the mother depart this life?" Only with the greatest of effort was Monnier able to say, "I am a father" and then fainted. Not new to such situations Fr. d'Alzon took a bottle of ether, poured a few drops on some sugar, and had his agitated friend breathe in the concoction. Then he took him into the chapel of the Blessed Mother in the cathedral to pray, had him take a walk along the boulevard, and brought him all the way back to his home, where he was allowed to enter only after promising that his joy at being a father would no longer lead him to strangle anyone!

Assomption et ses oeuvres, 1875, n° 4, p. 26.

December 21

*Christmas, a double birth
for thousands of cribs*

If you see nothing in the crèche but the crib of God made man, you have understood nothing of the mystery. With Jesus Christ is born the entire Church. Two births: that of the Church and that of each believer. What happiness there is when the Church reflects on her beginnings, in the midst of persecutions: the One who gave her a manger for a crib shall give her her Son's cross as a support. So, she shall forever walk between extreme misery and extreme greatness. We, too, are born and the manger, if we so desire, will be our crib; and if we wish to be reborn, we have to go there. For we were dead because of sin and the one who has life eternal, in taking on our flesh in the manger, gives us eternal life. He accepts death; he does more, he digests it; he devours it within himself and then gives us the life that he has within himself, which is none other than himself. He has this life within himself; he communicates it to us, he passes it on. Do you desire this life? Enter this crib, go to the crèche. Humble yourself at the side of Jesus.

T.D., vol. 42, p. 239, D00141.

December 22

*Christmas, the ancient sceptre
and the new power*

What Caesar Augustus was doing was nothing less than observing that the sceptre had been withdrawn from the House of Judah. Indeed, if this sceptre had continued to hold sway in Jerusalem, Caesar Augustus would not have ordered a census. The Christ was able to come since the sceptre of the house of Judah no longer prevailed. Thus it is that Providence arranges things. Far away, among men who would come from the East, there was spreading a belief in a universal governing power; Tacitus took note of this, just as Caesar Augustus was asserting that he was truly the master of this East. It was from here that there was to arise a new power and its universal law-giver. Nevertheless, at the same time, he gave an order that would serve another purpose as well. The lawgiver, the head of Israel, had to be born in Bethlehem and, without the edict calling for a census, he would have never been born there. Because the Roman Emperor demanded it, Joseph once again returned to the land of his ancestors and brought Mary with him, the instrument of God's mercy toward the guilty human race. What a lesson for us and how we

must understand that God's ways are not our ways.

*To the students of the Collège de l'Assomption,
the end of 1877,
T.D. 47, p. 221, D01068.*

December 23

The Beginnings of Christianity

In just a few hours you will celebrate the great mystery that the angels announced to the shepherds on Bethlehem plain. In her turn the Church stirs with joy and will invite you to go and contemplate the God-child. But being more fortunate than the shepherds of Judea, you will not say, "Let us go to Bethlehem," since you have prepared a home here for Our Lord, whom you come to adore today hidden under the Eucharistic veil and since this chapel is your Bethlehem, that is to say, the city of bread par excellence. The spirit of faith that gives you life has the power to push you on to adore Jesus just as the shepherds did. What a wonder are you offered! It is no different than the one offered to the shepherds. They went in haste and found the child and Mary

and Joseph. Let us, too, approach in great haste and contemplate the first elements of Christianity: a crèche, Joseph, a common carpenter, Mary, a simple housewife, and a small infant. This is how Christianity began. And what lessons there are to be learned in such rapid strokes!

*For the Association of the Servants,
December 23, 1877,
T.D. vol. 47, p. 192, D01064.*

December 24

Five rays emanate from the crèche, around the crib of Jesus

I want to wish you a Merry Christmas and I'm doing it a bit in advance because I don't know if I'll have time later. At the same time I want to wish you five virtues, which, it seems to me, are the primary rays which shine forth from the new born Jesus, in the humility of his manifestation. He desired to be born in a crèche in order to preach poverty to us. He allowed himself to be wrapped in swaddling clothes by his mother, to be carried by her, and to be held every which way in order to teach us obedience. Mary gave birth to

him in a stable, after experiencing all of the inn doors of Bethlehem closed to her and Joseph: an excellent lesson in accepting the contempt of others. What is more simple than a child? I wish that you might become such just as the Christ-child in the crib. Why enter this world? For love of his Father's glory and for the salvation of men. Here is the sublime lesson of charity which he gave at his very origin.

*Letter to the Religious of the Assumption in Paris,
December 17, 1854
(Letters, vol. I, p. 499-500)*

If one understands well Fr. d'Alzon's thought, the five rays of the crèche are five virtues: humility, poverty, obedience, acceptance of the contempt of others, and simplicity. The sisters have surpassed this number a long time ago!

December 25

*Christmas, the Nativity of Our Lord.
The humble beginning of the Assumption (1845)*

I would like to speak to you only of the work by which God has permitted me to repay him part of my debt. We began with six; you began with

five. We needed a slightly larger number to compensate for the head start that you had. The night before last, we met as we had agreed. But this first talk of mine was ice cold; I was worn out, I had hardly slept the night before and I had spent the entire day in the confessional. The other brothers were also sleepy. At 10 PM, when I had to leave for the cathedral where I was to sing the Office and say midnight Mass, I wasn't very happy with myself or the others... When I tried to give myself to the Lord, it seemed to me that it had already happened and there was no need to come back on the matter... On my return, I wanted to spend the night next to the crèche. I was going to sleep there when, after about a half an hour, one of our fathers, who had also celebrated Mass elsewhere, came back and I thought it better to go to bed. Someone was supposed to wake me up at 6 AM; I had to say Mass at 6:30 for the community. They forgot and only came at 6:45. The Mass for the students had to be celebrated at 7, so we pushed ours back to 7:30. So, I said the midnight Mass for you, the second one for the students, where I had the pleasure of seeing many receive Communion, and the third for our community...

December 26

St. Stephen, the first martyr

You must begin by establishing love as the principle of your new life. You shall ask it of the Christ-child, requesting that he enter your soul on Christmas Day. You shall also ask it of St. Stephen, as well as a readiness to be stoned to death¹ rather than to be lacking a spirit of obedience. You shall ask it of St. John, the apostle of love, together with the permission to rest your head on the breast of Our Lord², as he did. On the feast of the Holy Innocents, you shall undergo in your heart a great massacre³ of all of your self-centered thoughts, which you cherish as your dearest children, but who are certainly not worth all the little ones that Herod had slaughtered. Finally, on the Feast of the Circumcision, you shall take the knife of penitence, so dreaded, and you shall begin to cut to the quick.

*Letter to Mother Marie-Eugénie de Jésus,
December 21, 1848
(Letters, vol. XIV, p. 468)*

¹ cf. Acts 7:58. The figure of Stephen would also inspire Fr. d'Alzon at the time of the events of July 1879: "*The dispersion of the collèges will have the same result as the martyrdom of St. Stephen: leaving Jerusalem and going to the Gentiles.*"

² Reference to Jn 13:25.

³ Reference to the massacre of the Holy Innocents in Mt 2:16.

December 27

St. John, Apostle and Evangelist of Love

Let us listen to how Our Savior, once he had restored and enriched our intelligence, wanted, as well, to mend and enlarge our hearts. On the occasion of the Last Supper he eagerly wanted to eat with his disciples. It was on that occasion that the disciple whom he loved rested his head on his breast, "*I give you a new commandment: love one another. As I have loved you, so must you love one another.*" There you have friendship in all its perfection; you must love as Jesus loved. Even in love, he desires to be our model, "*as I have loved*

you.” And how did he love us? Until death, St. Paul says, and death on a cross. It is in this way that in Jesus love is purified or, to put it more accurately, it is from him that love flows. Before him, what was love, what was friendship than a natural attachment of one man for another like him? There is nothing loftier in this relationship where divinity doesn’t play a role. One man, then another man, and that’s it. But now it is no longer so. It is two intelligent beings, gifted with the faculty of knowing and loving, who, as the Serbian poets say, are wedded in God.

*T.D., vol. 43, p. 219 and following,
June 1829, D00294.*

December 28

Feast of the Holy Innocents, martyrs

Will you allow me now to speak to you of my little ones and of an exceptional experiment that I tried recently? It was so successful that I am determined to do it again next year. I gave them the Feast of the Holy Innocents¹ off. For 24 hours I withdrew as director of the house. I had the students name a headmaster from among their

ranks, a dean of discipline, a head monitor, assistant monitors, and Council members. We ceded all our power to them: the library for their deliberations, supervisory powers, in a word, the entire running of the house. We obtained some really precious results: 1) an inexpressible feeling of fatigue, on the part of the leaders, who all discovered, by the end of the day, that it is better to obey than to command; 2) the certainty that these children love us and aren't as bad as we may have thought. They only went overboard once, when they allowed themselves to have half a dozen cigars brought into a room.

*Letter to Mother Marie-Eugénie de Jésus,
January 3, 1847
(Letters, vol. C, p. 177-178)*

¹ This practice, inaugurated at the collège in Nîmes in 1847, was maintained for a long time in the alummates (the minor seminaries of the Assumption). Fr. d'Alzon was undoubtedly inspired by his own experience as a student at the Collège St. Stanislas in Paris. This experiment underlines his desire to introduce pedagogical practices that foster proximity and trust with students.

December 29

Memories of an elder

If I take up the pen to recall my memories, it is because I am witnessing so many generations of the Assumption passing by that I am afraid to see it lose some of its venerable spirit. It wavered at times, but just as fir trees, buffeted by a storm, after bending their heads this way and that, hasten to direct their tops toward heaven, I would like to see our venerable and much appreciated spirit of yesteryear, after so many tribulations, *tempora mea* (“*the dangers I’ve witnessed*”), as Cicero says, return to its original direction. Who am I? What does that matter to you, dear reader? As long as I can hold your interest as a faithful witness! Believe me: if I bore you, I’d be happy to see you yawn at the mere sight of my name. I am among the elders now: let that suffice to understand that I know a few things that you don’t. I love young people, and, as a vicar general of Moulins would say, I do not see why someone who had been a fool for 50 years should be preferred to someone who has only been in his right mind for 25. Besides, at the Assumption, the elderly love the young; the young respect the elderly, which is a great consolation for the elderly who can be upset at being old and for the

young who will grow old one day. In any case, this method is essentially-anti-revolutionary.

L'Assomption et ses oeuvres, 1875, p. n. 1, p. 1-2.

December 30

God alone remains

Time passes, but God remains, eternal, unchanging. He existed before me, and when my body is destroyed, he will still exist. He has given immortality to my soul and a time will come when I will come face to face alone with him for my judgment. However, before being my judge, he is my Creator, my Father, my Savior. Can I not understand that if he remains when all will be taken away from me, that it is on him alone that I should depend? As St. Augustine says, “Certainly I must avail myself of passing creatures like myself, but I must depend on God alone”¹. I have often heard these words sung, “*Et veritas Dominis manet in aeternum*”². What does it mean? The truth of God is the being of God, the reality of God: God in his fullness, the beauty of his being; God with his infinite power, his wisdom, his

goodness, his love, his happiness. So, if God remains and if I can go to God, why do I need anything else? My God, who remain for all eternity, I no longer need anything since you will be mine eternally.

*Instruction to the members of the Third Order,
B.P., 1930, p. 54.*

¹ This is a thought that would have been familiar to Fr. d'Alzon, as can be found in *De Doctrina Christiana*, chap. III

² Ps 117:2 "*The truth of the Lord shall last forever.*"

December 31

Greetings, good wishes, and advice on the occasion both of year-end and new year

Happy New Year, my dear Numa! I should have answered long before this. Do you know why I have kept you waiting? Because I wrote first to your sister, who, in the name of her friends, sent me a delightful letter for my feast-day¹. In your regard, my dear friend, I hope that you will develop everything that God has given you. Wrestle a bit with all the defects of your

character, your laziness, your petty weaknesses. Always be a man of faith; courageously hold to this faith in every circumstance.

Let me urge you to read the *Traité des lois* by Suarez. You can find it in the *Cours de théologie* by Migne; it's in our library. Buy a copy of the *Summa* by St. Thomas in Latin and read a section of it every day. This reading, dry at first, will, little by little, fill your mind with the assurance of things known. Never go to bed without reading a chapter of the *Imitation of Christ*. Receive Communion as often as possible.

*Letter to Numa Baragon,
December 31, 1856
(Letters, vol. II, p. 172)*

¹ Fr. d'Alzon's first name was Emmanuel and his feast-day was celebrated on Christmas Day, the birthday of "Emmanuel" (God-with-us).

By 1856 Numa Baragaon was already an alumnus of the Collège de l'Assomption. He was preparing to become a lawyer and begin a political career in the ranks of the conservative legitimist party. His loyalty to Fr. d'Alzon and to the Assumption was faultless.

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GUIDE TO ABBREVIATIONS

- A.A. Augustinians of the Assumption
ACR Archives of the Augustinians of the Assumption in Rome
A.R.T. “Adveniat Regnum Tuum,” Motto of the Augustinians of the Assumption, “Thy Kingdom Come”
B.P. Bonne Presse (now Bayard Presse), international publication house of the AA, with headquarters in Paris
C.A. *Cahiers d’Alzon* (a series of writings on various topics organized by Fr. Bisson)
E.S. *Ecrits spirituels* (foundational texts of Fr. d’Alzon chosen by Fr. Athanase Sage and soon to appear in English under the title, *The Essential d’Alzon*)
O.A. Oblates of the Assumption, a missionary congregation of sisters founded by Fr. d’Alzon in 1863
R.A. Religious of the Assumption, a congregation of religious sisters founded in 1839 by Mother

Marie Eugénie de Jésus, a close friend of Fr.
d'Alzon

T.D. Texts of Dossier submitted at the Congregation
for Saints for Fr. d'Alzon's process of
beatification

(Rabat de couverture de devant)

Fr. Emmanuel d'Alzon

(1810-1880)

Founder of the Augustinians of the Assumption (1845)
and the Oblates of the Assumption (1863).

Faithful disciple of Jesus Christ, in the spiritual school
of St. Augustine, Emmanuel d'Alzon consecrated his
life to the service of the Church.

Sensitive, by nature and grace, to the changes of his
time, he made his own the great causes of God and
man.

His favorite apostolic work included: the education of
the young, vocations, Church unity, seminaries for the
poor, the press, pilgrimages, and missions in Eastern
Europe.

Following in his footsteps, the Assumptionists, male
and female religious as well as lay associates, work out
of love of Jesus Christ for the coming of the Kingdom
of God in us and around us.

(Rabat de couverture du fond)

Identity and Charism of the Assumption

“Our spiritual life, our religious substance, our ‘raison d’être’ as Augustinians of the Assumption is to be found in our motto: *Adveniat Regnum Tuum*.

The coming of the Kingdom of God in souls, by the practice of Christian virtues and the evangelical counsels, in keeping with our vocation;

The coming of the Kingdom of God in the world by the struggle against Satan and the conquest of souls ransomed by Our Lord and yet buried in the depths of error and sin;

What could be more simple! What could be more common, if I dare say it this way, than this form of loving God!

If, to this primary love, you add the love of Our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of the blessed Virgin his Mother and of the Church his Spouse, you will have in a nutshell the spirit of the Assumption.”

(Fr. Emmanuel d’Alzon, Instruction of 1868)