
Blessed Kamen Vitchev, A.A.

Born May 23, 1893 at Srem In Bulgaria, Father Vitchev came from a peasant Christian family of which two of six boys became Assumptionist priests. His baptismal name was Peter, but he changed his name to Kamen when he entered the Assumptionists.

He began his novitiate at Gempe, in Belgium on September 18, 1910. Previously he had taken courses at the minor seminary at Karagatch, near Adhanopolis and at Phanaraki, on the Asian bank of the Sea of Marmara. After his novitiate, young Kamen, who was considered to be pious, serious and a hard worker, was sent to Louvain in Belgium to study philosophy and theology. His studies were interrupted by periods of teaching at St. Augustine College in Plovdiv and at the alumnate (minor seminary) at Kum Kapu (Turkey). He was ordained a priest at Constantinople on December 22, 192I, in the Oriental rite.

Having returned to Europe, he furthered his theological studies in Rome and in Strasbourg, where he obtained his doctorate in theology in l929. Very knowledgeable in the history of the Bulgarian church, he published several articles in "Echos d'Orient". In 1930. he was appointed professor of philosophy and Dean of Studies at St Augustine College in Plovdiv until the school was dosed by the Communists on August 2, 1948.

**An influential teacher**
All his former students remember him with fondess, gratitude, and respect . This outstanding Assumptionist college had become the pride of the Bulgarian intelligentsia. It had accepted as students young Orthodox, Catholics, Armenians, Jews and Muslims. They lived peacefully together, each keeping his faith. It was an extraordinary ecumenical and inter-religious success. An institution of this kind, which held French culture in the highest esteem, was bound to fall into the grinder of the Communist regime. The college having been closed, Father Kamen became Superior of the Seminary of Plovdiv with some fifteen religious, five theology students and fourteen seminarians. In 1948, all foreign religious were expelled from Bulgaria and Father Kamen was named Vicar-Provincial of the Bulgarian Assumptionists. They numbered twenty, and they staffed five Oriental rite parishes and four Latin rite parishes. Difficulties started to increase. Everyone was closely watched by the police. Financial troubles got worse. An

Assumptionist, Father Assen Tchonkkov, was arrested in August, 1950.



Father Kamen with Father Ausone Damperat (Superior of the Mission in the East) with students of the 1943 class of St. Augustine College in Plovdiv, Bulgaria

**The man to eliminate**

In a letter sent to Father Gervais Quenard, the Superior General of the Assumptionists, on November 24, 1949 Father Kamen Vitchev foresaw a horrible future: "The Iron Curtain is becoming thicker ond thicker. Without doubt, they are preparing dossiers on Catholic priests, who will be treated when the right time comes as were the Protestant mrnjsters." He was arrested during the night of July 4, 1952, along with Father Pavel Djidjov.



Byzantine church of the Ascension and Seminary of Plovdiv

Fr. Kamen was an Assumptionist with great faith, very fervent and faithful. As a teacher, he was esteemed and respected. He was eloquent, had a clear mind and was a fine educator of those with a priestly vocation. He cared for others and worked hard for the unity of the Church. He was such an important figure in the Bulgarian Church that the Communists had to eliminate him. Besides, during his trials, they tried to destroy everything about him, inlcuding his reputation.