



Blessed Josaphat Chichkov, A.A.

Of the three Assumptionist martyrs, Robert-Matthew Chichkov (who took the name Josaphat as an Assumptionist) was the oldest. He was born in Plovdiv, February 9, 1884. His family was a large one of fervent Latin rite Catholics. He entered the Assumptionist minor seminary at Adrianopolis when he was only nine. He did all of his grammar school and high school studies there. He was only sixteen when he entered the Assumptionist novitiate at Phanaraki, in Turkey, April 24, 1900. He was ordained a priest in the Latin rite July 11, 1909, at Malines in Belgium, after having studied philosophy and theology at Louvain.

Bubbling over with activity

Back in Bulgaria, he taught at St. Augustine College in Plovdiv and at St. Michael College in Varna. He was also Superior of the minor seminary of Saints Cyril and Methodius in Yambol. He served as pastor of the Latin Parish in Yambol and was chaplain of the Oblate Sisters of the Assumption. Later he returned to Varna, as the Superior, in 1937, and served there until he was arrested in December 1951 by the Communist militia.

He was a man who bubbled over with activity and a man of enormous erudition, a fine musician, an eloquent preacher, a good educator, jovial and with a fine sense of humor. He expanded the Yambol seminary to accommodate thirty seminarians for both rites, Latin and Byzantine-Slav, celebrating the liturgy one week in Slavonic and the next in Latin. In order to cope with the financial needs of the house he organized fundraising campaigns and taught French to teachers, civil servants and officers of the Bulgarian Army. Attentive to progress, he had a radio receiver and a movie projector installed at the Yambol seminary, to show the popular "Pathe-Baby" films. A very fatherly educator, he was also a true storyteller. He dazzled his young friends with stories, making them sing, teaching them to pray.



Father Josaphat with Bishop Angelo Roncalli in Yambol, June 3, 1934

At Varna, he launched a Franco-Bulgarian club that had more than 150 members, most of them students of Advanced Business Studies, the town being a port on the Black Sea. He was often the host of Bishop Roncalli (future Pope John XXIII), then Apostolic Visitor in Bulgaria, who liked to drop by to a rest. In 1949, Bishop Eugene Bossilkov appointed him to the Latin parish of Varna. He worked hard to run the parish, while actively writing for the "Poklonnick", a little magazine for Catholic Bulgarians.

His life could be summarized in two short sentences taken from a letter he wrote in 1930: "We seek to do as well as we can what is expected of us in order to sanctify ourselves without putting on airs;" and another of 1942: "I can assure you, dear and Reverend father, that we do not forget to live as good religious even though we are constantly involved with young people taken up with this world; for, in the end, the essential is to attain God by living for Him; the rest is incidental".