

“Can we continue to work as we have until now to spread far and wide the Catholic spirit, open to all people, to all rites, to all traditions? My father, I believe so, in spite of all the difficulties.” (Pavel Djidjov)

The feast of our three martyrs is approaching and once again we are called to reflect on the meaning of their witness, on the importance of this event, today, for the entire Assumption Family.

The road to holiness is not a solitary road, but rather it is written in a long history where God’s grace is revealed through our relationships, through places or people who prepare the ground for us, who show us the way.

One cannot understand the witness of faith of our three Bulgarian fathers, Kamen Vitchev, Pavel Djidjov, and Josaphat Chichkov, without recalling all the men and women religious who preceded them and who created the conditions that fostered the flourishing of their faith.

This feast of November 13 invites us to expand our horizons. It is necessary to acknowledge with gratitude that the “Mission d’Orient” (Mission in Eastern Europe) is the fruit of self-giving of numerous priests, brothers, and sisters (coming first of all from France and, then, particularly from the Province of Lyon, which extended well beyond the borders of France) and that this mission to Eastern Europe continues its history thanks to the generosity of the Province of France.

Moreover, the example of our three martyrs pushes us to look even more deeply and more widely. At the present time we cannot forget the Assumption in Africa. In a special way we think of our brothers in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Among them, there are some who have risked and continue to risk their lives in the service of the Gospel. There are some there who have been imprisoned and been beaten by the police. Likewise, the history of Assumption in Latin America guards the memory of brothers who were imprisoned and killed because of their faith. Kamen Vitchev, Pavel Djidjov, and Josaphat Chichkov invite us “to spread far and wide the Catholic spirit, open to all people.”

They are at the side of our founding brothers in the Philippines and in Togo. They are there in

a special way at the side of our brothers in Communist Vietnam. These fathers are the living source of unity and communion for all of Assumption. We could make of November 13 a feast which recalls the Assumptionist missionary spirit, a spirit which “impels us... to go wherever God is threatened in man and man is threatened as image of God.”

The presence of our three Bulgarian martyrs among us is a life-giving source where we can find the strength, the courage, and the faith necessary to keep on being founders and witnesses to Christ in the world. Their faces remind us of the faces of all those brothers, sisters, and lay friends in the Assumption Family who have given and continue to give their lives for the common good, for the coming of the Kingdom of God.

Happy feast-day to you, brothers, sisters, and friends of the Assumption family,
The Community of men and women religious in Plovdiv - November 2006