



It's been a while since we have posted news from the community in Plovdiv but we are doing quite well and energetically trying to answer any number of challenges.

The first challenge deals with our presence and contribution to the Near Eastern Mission ('Mission d'Orient'). At the time of the canonical visit of the Superior General, Fr. Benoit Griere, and one of his assistants, Fr. Marcelo Marciel, from March 30 to April 3, it became clear to us that in the near future we cannot count on, as we had hoped for, the presence of another Assumptionist.

Our other wish, which we have proposed over and over again, was that the community might be recognized as a formation center in the Byzantine rite and in Eastern spirituality.

Here as well several problems were raised and we don't hold much hope that we will be recognized as formators.

In spite of these 'disappointments' we remain fully convinced of the unique character of our mission and hope, and we maintain our conviction that Assumption as a whole could take greater advantage of the possibilities which this mission offers.

The second challenge is connected with our concern to preserve the memory of the recent history of the Assumptionist mission in Bulgaria, especially that of the period of the Communist regime which still remains little known. Thanks to our collaboration with an Italian Passionist priest, we have been able to gain access to and use of thousands of documents detailing the directives given by the government against Catholics, essentially against Bulgarian priests and religious. Well before the interrogations took place once individuals were arrested, these directives were being put in place by virtue of a network of informers tasked with spying on certain individuals and groups and making written reports about what they saw and heard. This effort to preserve these memories is painful, because the accusations against our three martyred and Blessed brothers and all the other Assumptionists who were imprisoned were based on carefully prepared reports provided to agents of the regime for many years by the "agent Assen», a pseudonym for none other than an Assumptionist priest, Angel Arabadjiyski.

Today it is still possible to visit the concentration camp at Béléné, situated on an island in the Danube, a camp which covers several squared kilometers. It's quite moving to visit these sites where thousands and thousands of innocent victims suffered and were even mercilessly put to death. Passionist Paolo Cortesi, pastor of the Catholic parish of Béléné, would like to transform this site into a Museum of Memory, but he is meeting up with lots of problems, an obvious sign that a part of the Bulgarian people, and especially some political authorities, are still tied to the past and refuse to be reconciled to the truth of their history. While it is still possible today, it would be interesting to foresee pilgrimages to these sites "in the footsteps of our martyrs."

The third challenge has to do with ecumenism, the work of Church unity. Fr. Juan Antonio Sanchez, the provincial assistant in charge of the Near Eastern Mission, encouraged us to watch a video produced in 2014 by the New Way Community.

In this video, one can see how much the work of Church unity matters to Pope Francis and also how the rapprochement between Christians is a reality that is moving forward. Moreover, the news that Pope Francis would like to find a common date so that all Christian confessions can celebrate Easter together on the same day filled us with enthusiasm. This being said, we have to be realistic. This won't be possible unless 14 autocephalous Orthodox Churches, often quite conservative, agree to renounce their own way of fixing the date of Easter already deemed sacred by virtue of the fact that it dates back to the first millenium.

The fact of being the only remaining Assumptionist community in the Eastern rite leads us to carry on living, with a special awareness, and sometimes with suffering, our ecumenical commitment, driven by the concern that the Assumption may breathe ever more deeply from the two lungs of the Church.

The community of brothers and sisters of Plovdiv, June 2015