

Kamen Vitchev; Josaphat Chichkov; Pavel Djidjov

Assumptionists Bulgarian Martyrs - Models of Faith



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Cause for beatification. "The courageous faithfulness in the lives of Blessed Kamen Vitchev, Pavel Djidjov and Josaphat Chichkov in the face of suffering and imprisonment has been acknowledged by their former pupils—Catholics, Orthodox, Jews, Moslems--, by their parishioners, by their religious colleagues and by those imprisoned with them. Because of their *dynamism of their faith, their fidelity to the Gospel, their disinterested service of the nation,* they present themselves as model Christians today especially for the young people of Bulgaria who try to made sense of their lives and who want to follow Christ in the lay state, in religious life and in the priesthood" (homily of Pope John Paul II on the day of beatification, May 26, 2002).

Brief biography of the martyrs. Blessed Kamen Vitchev was born May 23, 1893 to an Orthodox family in Srem, Bulgaria. On September 8, 1910, he received the habit of the Augustinians of the Assumption and was ordained priest in the Oriental rite on December 22, 1921. He taught philosophy, theology and Bulgarian literature and was prefect of studies and rector of Saint Augustine College. Blessed Kamen earned the esteem of his students and colleagues as an educator. Pastorally, he attended to those with the least material and spiritual resources. He passionately promoted unity between Catholic and Orthodox Churches under the authority of the Roman Pontiff. Shortly before his arrest by the ruling communist government in Bulgaria, he was nominated Provincial of the Oriental Mission of the Assumptionists. He was arrested on July 4 1952.

Blessed Pavel Djidjov was born July 19, 1919 to a Latin rite family in Philippopoli. He received the Assumptionist habit on October 2, 1938 and was ordained priests in the Latin rite on January 26, 1945. He was appointed bursar of St Augustine College and of the Vicariate of the Orient. With all his heart he sought to protect the goods both of his congregation and the Church in a time of turmoil. So strong was his confidence in God that when the persecution against Christians began, he displayed an admirable calmness of the soul. H was arrested the same night together with Blessed Kamen.

Blessed Josaphat Chichkov was born in Plovdiv in 1884 to a Catholic Latin rite family. He received the habit on August 24, 1900 and was ordained July 11, 1909. He devoted himself to teaching and publishing for Catholic edification in an environment that was hostile to Christians. When many religious were forced to leave Bulgaria, he was nominated Pastor of the Varna community. He was noted for strong and authentic faith, sustained by an ardent devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary. He was arrested six months earlier in July 4, 1952.

Together the three Bulgarian martyrs were sentenced to death after a mocked up trial and were executed by firing squad in the courtyard of Sofia central prison. During their imprisonment they were subjected to inhuman conditions and torture. Blessed Kamen wrote to his provincial in France before the arrest: "The iron curtain is closing around us… Pray and ask those around you to pray for their brothers in Bulgaria who may be *called to testify to Christ and his Church.* May we be worthy

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