

PROMINENT ASSUMPTIONIST: Fr. Amarin Mertz, A.A. World-wide Missionary (1907-1985)

Early Years

The fourth of six children, René Mertz was born in Riedwhir (Haut-Rhin), France, on February 18, 1907. After attending several Assumptionist high school seminaries, he joined the congregation and made his first vows on November 5, 1926, taking the name Amarin. After studying philosophy in Belgium and theology in France, he was ordained a priest at the end of 1934.

First Assignment: Manchuria (1935-1948)



Shortly thereafter, in October 1935, he left for Manchuria with Fr. Cyrille Paratte, the first two

Assumptionists to set off for this Far East mission. He stayed for 13 years (1935-1948). During this time he would never be able to leave in order to see his family and often times he had a hard time corresponding with them. Already during his lifetime Fr. d'Alzon had his eye on the Orient and even mentioned to the Oblates of the Assumption, with a touch of humor, that they shouldn't rest easy until they had arrived at the foot of the Great Wall of China! Since 1931 Manchuria had been in the hands of China's bellicose and imperialistic neighbor, Japan.

On his arrival in Manchuria Fr. Amarin began teaching at the minor seminary in Kirin with priests from the Foreign Missions of Paris. As the Assumptionists slowly gained the trust and respect of the native episcopacy, they were asked to build and run a major seminary in Hsinking in view of forming the local clergy. In trying circumstances (strict controls of the Japanese occupying forces, the political troubles caused by Soviet intervention, and the Chinese Communist revolution), the Assumptionists, with the generous support of the Province of Lyon, completed the seminary, which opened in April 1940. Fr. Amarin's great consolation was to see the priestly ordination of 10 of their seminarians before the liquidation of the seminary.



United States, Canada, France, Algeria (1948-1973)

After several months back in France where he was once again able to see both his natural and religious families, Fr. Amarin accepted another missionary assignment --- far from Manchuria, namely, Worcester, Massachusetts (USA). In the United States he first taught French at Assumption College, became the dean of discipline of Assumption Prep School, and oversaw the schools vocational efforts as well. Seven years later, he was off again, this time to the province of Quebec to found an Assumptionist high school seminary (alumnate) in the small town of Bury, not far from Sherbrooke. He would be its first superior.

Jerusalem (1973-1981)

Even at the age of 66, Fr. Amarin was ready to pull up roots and accept a new missionary challenge. This time: Jerusalem. On October 6, 1973, the feast of Yom Kippur, the holiest day in the Jewish calendar, Egyptian and Syrian armed forces launched a surprise attack on Israeli positions. The war lasted less than three weeks with the Israelis inflicting a devastating defeat on the Arab coalition. Tensions were high, therefore, when Fr. Amarin arrived in the Holy City to become the superior of the community of St. Peter-in-Gallicantu, located in the Palestinian neighborhood of East Jerusalem.

His stay was supposed to be short, but in 1976 he was re-appointed superior. During this highly charged period, he was able to create peace in this international Assumptionist community, not surprisingly pulled apart by opposing political views. He exhausted himself in providing visits to this important Biblical shrine. He combined the qualities of a perfect guide: multilingual, personable, good-humored, even-tempered, and knowledgeable of the Holy Scriptures. He used every visit of pilgrims as an opportunity to share the Christian message, both in word and example.

Alsace, France: The Final Journey (1982-1985)

After nearly 37 years of missionary activity, his last years were to take place back in his native land, France, in the semi-active community of Souffelweyersheim (Bas-Rhin), not far from Strasbourg, where he spent his time in prayer, reading, gardening, and a series of community services. He was a delightful companion to the end, witty, serviceable, unassuming, and full of

kindness. After suffering from respiratory problems, he made his final journey, back to the Lord he had served so energetically, on July 24, 1985.