



(As we recall the end of World War II and the incredible stories emanating from the German Nazi concentration camps, the following story recently appeared in a local French newspaper about Fr. Delory and his own experience.)

**Liberation from Dachau.** *"I am at Dachau and in fairly good shape. It was Sunday, April 29 at 5:30 PM that American soldiers liberated us. As you can imagine, it was with absolute delirium that they were welcomed by the 30,000 plus prisoners who were awaiting them! Before they even entered the camp, they saw piles of dead bodies, fellow prisoners that our S.S. guards had executed --- a horror --- a total breach of all international guidelines of accountability. When our liberators did enter the camp and saw with their own eyes scenes that outsiders could hardly believe, they better understood our enthusiasm, our emotion, and our gratitude. All of us appeared before them. Thank God that seeing what was happening within the camp, they stopped to liberate us before marching on to Munich. I am lucky to be counted those in fairly good shape. There are thousands in poor shape, others who are totally exhausted, especially survivors from the last trains that arrived. How many victims and in what terrible condition! Tomorrow we will have a ceremony of thanksgiving as well as a Mass for the dead on the site where roll-call took place every day and where an altar has been set up ... ". Fr. Delory May 2, 1945.*

**Biography of Fr. Delory, A.A, a member of the Province of Paris.**

**From a family close to the Assumptionists**

Joseph-Désiré was born on March 13, 1906 at Fort-Mardyck (near Dunkirk), to a family of sailors. One of his sisters became an Oblate of the Assumption (stationed in the Congo) and another a Little Sister of the Assumption. His mother, who was widowed young, spent many years at Saint Bernard de Clairmarais (Pas-de-Calais). Joseph completed his junior and high school years at two Assumptionist minor seminaries, Saint-Maur (1918-1921) and Sart-les-Moines (1921-1923). He did his novitiate in Belgium at Taintignies in 1923-24, taking the name Géry-Joseph, and pursued his philosophy studies at Saint-Gérard (1924-1927) before completing his military service (1927-1928). Having completed his theology studies at Louvain, he was ordained on June 5, 1932. "Brother G.-Joseph has real qualities. He loves liturgical prayer and his studies, inspired by the thought of Dom Guéranger. He knows how to conduct beautiful liturgies. He desires to give of himself and has a facility for manual labor, especially carpentry. He likes to be recognized a little too much and can be a bit brusque with others. These are usually shortcomings that fade as we grow older and think more about things". His first assignments took him to teach at a number of Assumptionist high school seminaries from 1932 to 1938.

### **Parish ministry: before, during, and after the war**

In August 1938, Fr. Delory was appointed to the parish of St. Christophe de Javel in Paris (1938-1948), ten years that were interrupted by the war mobilization of 1939-1940, the institution by the Nazis of the S.T.O. ("Service de Travail Obligatoire"/forced labor of Frenchmen in Germany), a trying stay in Vienna and finally internment at Dachau (1943-1945). When the German authorities refused to recognize the role of priests for those sent to forced labor in Germany, the French bishops decided to send 'clandestine chaplains', presenting themselves as volunteer workers and intended to assure a religious life for their countrymen. A book by Jean Pélissier (*Prêtres et religieux, victimes des nazis*, 2009) borrows several of Fr. Delory's memories, relating his struggles and sufferings while in Austria and Germany. When Fr. Delory resumed his duties in Javel after the war, the parishioners gave a warm welcome to this emaciated survivor. The photo of him in his internment uniform reveals the multiple agonies he was forced to endure in this forever-damned location. His parishioners discovered that he had never lost his easy-going and warm personality, but his health had been deeply affected. As a result it was recommended that he spend some time in the warm south of France, in Montpellier from 1948 to 1951. However, he found it difficult to adapt to the southern mentality.

So he came back north to the Parisian region and served in parishes from 1951 to 1961 at Longpont and de Villiers-sur-Orge, entrusted to the Assumptionists by Bishop Roland Gosselin. He was a wonderful preacher and people found him approachable and welcoming, at ease in almost any setting. Having developed a particular devotion to Our Lady, he was asked to

assume direction of the regional office of the Assumptionist pilgrimage agency, Notre Dame de Salut (1961-1964); but after a few years it became clear that his fragile health could not support the frequent travel required by this post. Working in a more stable setting like a parish seemed more advisable. Therefore he spent the last ten years of his life in the Assumptionist-run parish in the Parisian suburb of les Essarts (Seine-Maritime), from 1964 to 1974. Embracing the spirit and directives of the Second Vatican Council he had little difficulty in developing a close collaboration with the laity in the administration of the parish and became one of the first pastors to create a lay finance committee to oversee this dimension of parish life. Aware of the ever-growing Assumptionist missionary efforts in the world, he sent whatever financial compensation he received as a veteran and survivor of the war to them.

### **The last days**

On August 21, 1974, Fr. Delory was supposed to leave les Essarts for a few days of R&R with his family but he never made it. He was taken by emergency to a local hospital where he died that night.

*"You will show me the path to life, abounding joy in your presence, the delights at your right hand forever" (Ps 16:11).*