

PRAYING for OUR BROTHERS and SISTERS in CHINA

Blessed are they who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are you when they insult you and persecute you and utter every kind of
evil against you (falsely) because of Me.

Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven.

Thus they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Matthew 5:10-12



OUR LADY of CHINA
Artist: Gary Chu of Hong Kong

Almighty and eternal God, Comforter of the afflicted, and Strength of the suffering, grant that our brothers and sisters of China who share our faith, may obtain, through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary and their Holy Martyrs, peace in Your service, strength in time of trial, and grace to glorify You, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

BACKGROUND

In an open letter to Chinese Catholics Pope Benedict XVI called for unity among the faithful and offered conciliatory words to China's communist government.

But he reiterated the Vatican's longstanding demand that the Chinese church be free of state control, and emphatically described government-approved bishops as "illegitimate" unless their appointments are confirmed by Rome.

Benedict's letter includes clear overtures to the Chinese authorities, reaffirming the Vatican's desire to establish diplomatic relations, and emphasizing that Rome does not seek the overthrow of the communist system.

A spokesman for the Chinese government said: "China's stance on improving relations with the Vatican is consistent. Namely, Vatican should sever the so-called diplomatic ties with Taiwan and recognize the People's Republic of China is the sole government representing China".

The letter is a response to more than half a century of conflict, both between the church and the Chinese state, and among Chinese Catholics themselves.

When communists took control in 1948, government officials promptly closed most churches and expelled or imprisoned almost all Catholic clergy. Within a decade, Beijing established the Catholic Patriotic Association to supervise a state-run church independent of the Vatican and consecrated the first bishops without the approval of Rome.

Since then, an "underground" church of Catholics loyal to the pope has grown up alongside the "official" church, which now claims 5 million members. The total number of Catholics in China today is estimated at 12-15 million.

Benedict's letter pays tribute to the "grave sufferings" of the underground church, while urging all Catholics to seek "communion and ... fraternal understanding, avoiding judgments and mutual condemnations."

The letter even gives permission to underground Catholics to receive the sacraments from clergy "who are not in Communion with the Pope," in cases where access to Vatican-approved clergy is impossible.

"The tensions between the above-ground church and the underground church are still quite severe, especially in the countryside," Christiansen said.

Although 90 percent of bishops in the state-approved church are said to have quietly obtained Rome's confirmation of their appointments, not all have done so. Benedict also criticized the officially recognized College of Catholic Bishops of China, which supports the Patriotic Association's independence from Rome.



Let us pause and remember that we are always in the holy presence of our God. Our God is a God for all peoples in all places. He loves us with an everlasting love and watches over the persecuted, the downtrodden and the suffering. Holy is God. Holy and strong; holy and living forever. Amen.



Hail Holy Mary, Mother of our Lord Jesus the Christ,
Mother of all nations and all peoples.
You are the special heavenly Mother of the Chinese
people.
Teach us your way of total obedience to God's will.
Help us to live our lives true to our faith.
Fill our hearts with burning love for God and each other.

We call on your powerful intercession for peace,
reconciliation and unity among believers and the
conversion of the unbelievers in China and throughout
the world for Your mercy, O God, is our only hope.

Our Lady of China, Mother of Jesus, hear our petitions
and pray for us. Amen.

Artist: John Lu Hung Nen

Psalm 127

Do not abandon us, O God our Savior.

The Lord is our light and our salvation; whom do we fear?

The Lord is our life's refuge; of whom are we afraid?

When evildoers come at us to devour our flesh,

These our enemies and foes themselves stumble and fall.

Though an army encamp against us, our hearts do not fear;

Though war be waged against us, even then do we trust.

One thing we ask of the Lord; this we seek:

To dwell in the Lord's house all the days of my life,

To gaze on the Lord's beauty, to visit His temple.

For God will hide us in His shelter in time of trouble,

Will conceal us in the cover of His tent; and set us high upon a rock.

Do not abandon us, O God our Savior

Blessed be the Father of mercies
and the God of all comfort,
Who consoles us in all our afflictions.

2 Corinthians 1: 3-4

SCRIPTURE: PHILIPPIANS 1: 27-29

Conduct yourselves in a way worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that, whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear news of you, that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind struggling together for the faith of the gospel, not intimidated in any way by your opponents. This is proof to them of destruction, but of your salvation. And this is God's doing.

For to you has been granted, for the sake of Christ, not only to believe in Him but also to suffer for Him.

SCRIPTURE: MATTHEW 10: 26-33

Jesus said to His disciples: " Do not be afraid of them who persecute you. Nothing is concealed that will not be revealed, nor secret that will not be known. What I say to you in the darkness, speak in the light; what you hear whispered, proclaim on the housetops. And do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather, be afraid of the one who can destroy both soul and body in Gehenna.

Are not two sparrows sold for a small coin? Yet not one of them falls to the ground without your Father's knowledge. Even all the hairs of your head are counted. So do not be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.

Everyone who acknowledges Me before others I will acknowledge before My heavenly Father. But whoever denies Me before others, I will deny before My heavenly Father.

REFLECTION

The walls of the only official Catholic church in Ningxia's capital, Yinchuan, are made of unpainted concrete. Naked light bulbs hang from low wires strung above the pews and cheap plastic flowers decorate a watercolor painting of Jesus Christ at the altar. No fancy stained glass windows either, just dusty, unadorned glass. But the Mass attracts a loyal following of about one thousand on Sundays, in a city with 2500 Christians. The sermon this morning is about how difficult it is in today's society to admit that one is Christian. The priest says even he is sometimes afraid of being open about his faith. But he urges church members to share their faith with others, to go out and spread the gospel. As the parishioners pray, their 87-year-old bishop, Liu Jingshan, also known as John Baptist Liu, watches from the back row with satisfaction. Bishop Liu hardly ever preaches these days, now that he has passed the torch to a younger generation. Bishop Liu said that in 1966 all their churches had been torn down, their bibles had been burned, and their robes were gone. But he says he still remembered how to say mass, so he began by preaching at people's homes, and slowly, the Catholic community grew. Before 1949, there were about three million Catholics in China. Now, academics say the number has increased to at least 10 million. Richard Madsen, an expert on Chinese Christians at the University of California at San Diego, calls the increase spectacular, given the persecution and suppression of Christians during previous decades. Many of these communities really show a remarkable kind of energy, much more energy, much more devotion than you typically see in many Catholic and Protestant churches here in the United States, partly because people have had to suffer so much to maintain the faith.

PRAYERS of INTERCESSIKON

For all peoples who live under persecution for their faith;

May the Holy Spirit strengthen them in their dedication to the Lord.

That the people of China will become united in the practice of their Catholic faith;

May they become one as the Father and Son are one.

That oppression and injustice may be eradicated from our world;

May we take on the mind and heart of Jesus.

For the Holy Father united with the bishops and all the faithful;

May we continue to be salt and light for those around us.

For all who suffer heavy burdens and carry seemingly insurmountable crosses;

May the Lord walk with them and give them courage and strength.

For the entire Church around the world;

May we be faithful to the gospel of Jesus.

Our Father...

PRAYER TO OUR LADY, HELP OF CHRISTIANS

Most Holy Virgin Mary, Help of Christians,

how sweet it is to come to your feet

imploping your perpetual help.

If earthly mothers cease not to remember their children,

how can you, the most loving of all mothers forget us?

Grant then to our Chinese brothers and sisters and all who are persecuted for the faith, we implore you,

your perpetual help in all their necessities,

in every sorrow, and especially in all their temptations.

We ask for your unceasing help for all who are now suffering.

Help the weak, cure the sick, convert sinners.

Grant through your intercessions many vocations to the religious life.

Obtain for us, O Mary, Help of Christians,

that having invoked you on earth we may love and eternally thank you in heaven. Amen.

LET US PRAY

O God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, our only Savior, and the Prince of Peace: Give us grace seriously to lay to heart the great dangers our Chinese sisters and brothers are in by their unhappy divisions. Take away all hatred, prejudice, and error, and whatsoever else may hinder them from godly union and concord: that, as there is but one Body, and one Spirit, and one hope of our calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all; so they may henceforth be all of one heart, and of one soul, united in one holy bond of truth and peace, of faith and charity, and with one mind and one mouth glorify You, O Heavenly Father; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.



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Our Lady Help of Christians,
watch over our beloved Christians in China.

Saint John Baptist de La sale
and all you holy men and women who have gone before us,
help us to continually remember all who are persecuted for the faith.

Live Jesus in our hearts. Forever!