

# The witness of Jimmy Lai



“While Jimmy might be stuck in prison, his soul remains free.”

It’s a grave reality that people around the world are casually watching the [Olympic Games](#) in China. They are being held on the backs of [persecuted religious minorities](#) and at the expense of the truth. Jimmy Lai is in prison for simply telling that truth courageously, from his publications in Hong Kong. Everyone who knows the Olympics are happening in China should know his name and story.

He was honored at the National Catholic Prayer Breakfast in Washington, D.C., this past fall. He obviously couldn’t receive the award in person, but William McGurn, Wall Street Journal columnist and former presidential speechwriter, did on his behalf. McGurn’s real credential, besides being a good man and husband and father, is that he is Jimmy Lai’s godfather – Lai converted and was baptized a Catholic in 1997, just before the British government returned Hong Kong to China. It was a sign of hope, McGurn remembered.

“Jimmy believes we were [created for truth](#) and that it is our job to speak the truth, especially when no one else will, at whatever the cost,” his godfather said. “How else could a man so willingly exchange the comfortable life of a Hong Kong multimillionaire for the prison cell of a Chinese dissident?”

When he was arrested, he was put in handcuffs and chains, presumably to humiliate him. But, as McGurn made clear, they were actually “badges of honor. ... [In Hong Kong,] every man,

woman, and child knows that Jimmy chose those handcuffs and chains.”

Lai, an entrepreneur, was not surprised by his arrest. Few paying attention were. He could have escaped to one of his apartments in other countries. But that’s not the man he is.

McGurn describes Jimmy’s wife, Teresa, as “perhaps the strongest, most faithful Catholic I have ever met.” He says, “She knew when she married Jimmy that this day might come.” She is loyal to him and has told him, “I will walk this path with you every step of the way.” And she adds: “But you must pick up your cross. You must embrace it. And you must try to be a saint, because that is what we are all called to be, even in prison.”

It’s amazing how people taken out of comfort and security can see things all the more clearly. Our [suffering](#) is about purification and redemption. The persecuted often see that quite clearly. As we whine about some of our inconveniences and challenges (surely, I’m not alone?), if we look to them, we may just see the way we are called to live as Christians.

Jimmy and Teresa Lai are overwhelmed by the people the world over praying for them. If this is your first time hearing about him, when you pray, this is what they ask: that you pray for all the people whose names we don’t know who are in similar situations, imprisoned for telling the truth, for opposing communism and its lies about the human person.

McGurn also testifies: “This strong, proud man does exactly what his wife says. Because each trusts the other absolutely, the way two people in a Catholic marriage should. It is a terrible, awesome, humble thing to witness.” His life in prison is religious in its way, inspired by the rule of St. Benedict – work and prayer. He reads theology and asks questions of Cardinal Joseph Zen, himself a hero to truth, when he comes to visit.

In his remarks, McGurn likened Lai to the Russian dissident Alexander Solzhenitsyn, who once wrote: "Bless you, prison. Bless you for being in my life. For there, lying upon the rotting prison straw, I came to realize that the object of life is not prosperity, as we are made to believe, but the maturity of the human soul."

God bless people of true courage.

McGurn reports that baptisms are happening in prison because of Jimmy Lai's presence and witness. Most expect that Jimmy Lai will die in prison. For God. For country. For truth. God be with him – and all the people unjustly imprisoned whose names we will likely never know.

And if you spent a single moment aware of the Olympics in China, please share something with someone about Jimmy Lai.

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