

A prayer for Pasadena

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By Ann Noonan published in Pasadena Weekly

A Chinese government Rose Parade float would be un-American

I read with great interest Joe Piasecki's article, "Roses are Red," in a recent edition of the Pasadena Weekly. His piece shared concerns felt by many throughout the United States about the Avery Dennison float representing the Beijing Olympics in the 2008 Rose Parade.

Mr. Piasecki and his paper should win an award. His article has offered hope to many human rights advocates and freedom fighters that the voices of those who suffer in China are not being ignored for the sake of profit.

We are hopeful that the Avery float will not turn a blind eye toward the people who suffer tremendously in today's China.

Governmental and nongovernmental organizations annually document the crackdown on basic human rights in China. Roman Catholic bishops, priests, nuns and laypeople are routinely arrested, tortured, monitored and harassed because of their devotion to the sacraments and to the pope.

It is strange for me to write to a California paper about the way Catholics suffer as martyrs in China shortly after LA Archbishop Cardinal Roger Mahony settled a lawsuit alleging sexual misconduct for \$600 million.

However, to put a face on the persecution of Catholics in China, please consider Monsignor Julius Jia Zhiguo, a 73-year-old priest who serves as bishop in China's Underground Catholic Church in Zhengding, in Hebei province.

Monsignor Jia has spent more than 20 years in prison because he dares to practice his Roman Catholic faith. He was arrested again on June 5 and re-released on June 22. Monsignor Jia has repeatedly been arrested by China's police so they can continue to try to force him to submit to the authority of the Patriotic Organization. He won't. We should pray for him.

The Chinese Patriotic Catholic Organization is China's version of Catholicism. The Chinese Communist Party selects the leaders — "the clergy." The Patriotic Organization forbids all followers to demonstrate loyalty to the pope.

Unlike the Roman Catholic Church, the Patriotic Organization forbids the baptism of anyone under 18 years old, and abides by China's oppressive laws.

These laws deny mothers the right to get pregnant and bear their children without government approval, force women who are pregnant without permission to be detained and undergo forced abortion and sterilization, and even force sterilization of fathers of unplanned children. Children born without permission are often denied the right to education. Children in catechism classes in China have been arrested, and nuns teaching them have been arrested and tortured.

Christian ministers, especially evangelicals, are also persecuted in China. So are Tibetans (See Letters on page 6), Falun Gong practitioners and Uygher Muslims. All have suffered to a much worse degree since Sept. 11.

Labor rights organizers and democracy seekers are arrested in China; journalists, Internet users and freedom fighters are monitored and arrested; organ harvesting from executed prisoners and slave labor performed by prisoners and children are commonplace.

But it doesn't end there. Environmental laws and worker safety are ignored. China has the highest number of death penalty cases in the world. And on and on.

I was so glad to read in another publication a quote by Pasadena Councilman Victor Gordo regarding the persecuted Falun Gong practitioners in China. He said, "My mom used to say, 'Tell me who your friends are, and I'll tell you who you are.' I don't want anyone to get the idea we, or our friends, are accepting or approving of taking away the human rights of anyone in the world."

Good for him! Mr. Gordo has offered hope to us that politics might not be his priority. What a hero he could be to encourage his colleagues in the City Council to stand strong on this matter!

We all agree that the Olympics offer a chance for nations to put aside their differences and join together to celebrate sportsmanship and competition. It enriches humanity.

However, it would be nothing less than un-American for a United States parade like the Rose Parade to celebrate a nation like China and ignore its horrific realities.

China is one of the worst human rights violators on record. It continues to persecute Roman Catholics and other Christians and people of faith, as well as deliberately refusing to abide by its own promise to improve human rights conditions before the Olympics.

This parade float by Avery Dennison has a chance to offer hope to the people who suffer. Why not dedicate it to the Monsignor Jias of China or anyone else who struggles for freedom, rather than celebrating China's governmental oppressors and their corporate sponsor?

Thank you to the Pasadena Weekly for championing this story. And to those who do pray, please keep in mind those who suffer for their Roman Catholic faith.