

Documentation

Be Not Afraid, I Have Risen

by James Su
translated by Peter Barry, M.M.

Brothers and Sisters in the Lord:

May the compassionate love of God the Father, the grace of Christ, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

Persecution is now staring us in the face. Some illegal and schismatic events have taken place in the Baoding Diocese which cause us much pain, and which trouble my conscience. Some officials are forcing Catholics to apostatize, and forcing students to write letters abandoning their faith. Moreover, incidents of beating people, cursing, imposing fines and tearing down houses have taken place.

In light of the above mentioned situation, I feel that we must recall and examine the preconditions for everything that we have done.

1. To believe in religion is not against the law because as Article 36 of the Constitution reads: "Citizens of the People's Republic of China enjoy freedom of religious belief." It must also be especially pointed out that the Constitution further states: "No state organ, public organization or individual may compel citizens to believe in, or not to believe in, any religion; nor may they discriminate against citizens who believe in, or do not believe in any religion".

2. The Roman Catholic Church which we believe in is the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church, possessing a long history and orthodox doctrine. From beginning to end, this church maintains communion with the Pope. Our bishops have all been consecrated in accordance with Canon 1382 of the Code of Canon Law; that is, they are real shepherds who have entered the sheepfold through the "main" gate; they are not "thieves and robbers" who have climbed in another way. (Jn. 10:1-2) For a clergyman, Catholic or citizen not to belong to the

civil organization known as the “Patriotic Association” should not invite censure because Article 35 of the Constitution reads; “Citizens of the People’s Republic of China enjoy freedom of speech, of the press, of assembly, of association, or procession and of demonstration.” Since one is free to join or not join the Patriotic Association, and since it is a civil group organized by only some of the Catholics, it is not qualified to represent the highest authority in the church and issue orders to the whole church. It has even less authority to go through its “Catholics Representative Conference” to appoint or to remove bishops in each diocese. I think that, because some Catholics do not participate in the Patriotic Association, it is quite unreasonable for concerned authorities, to call the church to which these Catholics resolutely adhered “underground” or “illegal,” and to attempt to destroy it. This forces those “illegal” Catholics to have no other recourse but to practice their religion in private homes or under the open skies.

3. Let’s discuss for a moment the problem of pilgrimages to Donglu: In 1908, the parish of Donglu received permission from Bishop Jarlin of Beijing to recite in the church the short prayer: “Heavenly Mother, Queen of Donglu pray for us.”

In 1929, pilgrimages were already being carried out on a large scale. Bishops and priests from each diocese in north China frequented the place. Archbishop Costantini, the first Apostolic Delegate to China supported it.

The first public pilgrimage was held on May 7, 1929. Bishop Montaigne announced a special indulgence for each pilgrimage group that came.

In 1932, responding to a request of Bishop Joseph Zhu of Baoding, Pope Pius XI formally allowed Donglu to be a place of pilgrimage to Our Lady, Queen of China. He also granted the gaining of plenary indulgences and other indulgences. From that time the practice of having a pilgrimage during the month of Mary, increased year after year. The practice stopped for a short time during the July 7 Incident of 1937 and the Cultural Revolution of 1966.

In 1978, after the 3rd Plenum of the 11th Central Committee, under the guidance of the government’s “open door” policy, pilgrimages started up again and grew larger every year. This was the case until 1996, when pilgrimages were forbidden.

Throughout history the pilgrimages at Donglu have been strictly religious activities. No unlawful activities have ever taken place there. The Catholics come to Donglu of their own accord. No one invites them, or orders them to go. They only want to express their love for Mary, Queen of China. Therefore, the pilgrimages are definitely not like some people imagine them to be: a political demonstration, an attempt to seize power, or an obstacle to social stability. For self-denying clergy and Catholics seeking eternal life, this world is only a temporary resting place. The Lord has already told them that his kingdom is not of this world.

Faced with the present concrete situation, the diocese makes the following requests:

1. That the clergy firm up the Catholics' faith, especially the weak ones. For those who have fallen, console them immediately, lift them up, and quickly bring them back to the bosom of Christ.
2. As for those who have publicly declared their apostasy, or those Catholics or students who have written letters of apostasy, you must repent of your faults, and through prayer and penance quickly return to the flock of Christ. You behaved out of ignorance; God will forgive you.
3. To those parents who forced their children to write letters of apostasy you must squarely face your evil behaviour and quickly repent. You have not carried out your duty as parents to the best of your ability. You have only thought about your children's education and future; you have forgotten about their souls. You should know this passage from the Gospels: "What will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, but suffers the loss of his own soul?" (Mt. 16:26) Some parents say that people do not permit parents to give religious instruction to their children below the age of 18. I think that this "do not permit" is quite unreasonable. If one wants to really preserve the "tabula rosa" of the mind of a young person, it is not enough not to speak about "faith." You should also not talk about "faith is not permitted." In the history of the development of mankind, first there was the family, then there was the nation. Since this is the case, before the nation appeared, wasn't education of the children a God-given duty that parents could not shirk? Because children have not yet matured nor are they able to live independently, they are naturally an indivisible part of their parents. The parents have the right to

educate and raise this part of themselves. For the nation to seize this right to educate which originally belonged to the parents is unreasonable. It is not beneficial either to the children or the nation.

4. I encourage you, brothers and sisters, in the Lord, to courageously pass on to your children what you know to be the true and accurate Gospel of Christ. Teach them to study the important doctrines and teach them to pray. If they cannot pray in public, then pray in private. Small groups of 3 or 4 persons can pray. You can pray while walking, sitting, performing activities, in the fields or on the road. In summary do not be afraid, because Jesus has conquered the world. You must bear the cross courageously and happily. Go to Calvary and receive the victory of our Saviour's resurrection. You are to listen to what God has arranged, and not complain against God and exalt man. "For the foolishness of God is wiser than men and the weakness of God is stronger than man." (1 Cor. 1:25). You should encourage one another, especially the weak ones who have fallen down. Do not ridicule or attack them. Rather help them through love to return to the bosom of our loving Mother as soon as possible. Pray for those wrong doing officials, ask God to bless and forgive them, "for they know not what they do". (Lk 23-34)

We believe that the future of the church is bright because Jesus said: "Behold I am with you all days, even to the consummation of the world." (Mt. 28:20) "Blessed are they who suffer persecution for justice sake, for the kingdom of heaven is theirs." (Mt. 5:10) Whoever opposes God will be destroyed. If the God of history who conquered sin and death, and Christ who loves us dearly, stand on our side, who can overcome us? Finally, may the Mother of Donglu take pity on us, and may St. Joseph, patron of China, protect us.

Saints Peter and Paul, pray for us.

A Bishop in Baoding

Your servant: James Su

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