

NEWSLETTER

Gospel Reflection

Jimmy Lai is a 78-year-old British citizen who has been imprisoned for more than five years already and has spent most of that time in solitary confinement in a small cell with no natural light and in extreme heat.

Now he has been sentenced to a 20-year jail sentence which, given his age and poor health, is effectively a life sentence – and ultimately a death sentence. Convicted under Hong Kong’s draconian national security law of the crime of conspiracy to collude with foreign forces and, under a separate law, of the crime of conspiracy to publish seditious materials.

Within days of Hong Kong’s handover to China in 1997, Mr Lai was baptised into the Catholic Church by the courageous Cardinal Joseph Zen, a long-time critic of Beijing. Inspired by his wife Teresa, a devout Catholic, he grew in the faith and, during the past five years in prison, has spent most of his time in prayer, reading spiritual classics and drawing religious pictures. As I wrote in December, just after his conviction, I have one of his prison drawings of Christ on the Cross* hanging on my wall.

Over the past five years I have lit candles and said prayers in churches and cathedrals around the world, from Rome to Prague, from Seoul to Taipei, from Warsaw and Kraków to Westminster to Walsingham. I will continue to do so, every day, until Jimmy Lai is freed and reunited with his family. I call on the worldwide Church to join me.

This is part of an article by Benedict Rogers on February 10, 2026 (<https://thecatholicerald.com/article/a-life-sentence-in-all-but-name>)

** One of the Crucifixion drawings by Jimmy Lai is in the porch, along with the full article by Benedict Rogers.*

BAPTISM PREPARATION

If you wish to make preparations for your child to be Baptised you should telephone Fr Simon or see him at Mass at 10am on Sunday.

Following this there are Meetings on the first Friday of each month at 7:30pm that you will need to attend, where you will meet Mrs Gerri Doherty and Deacon Chris Wells.

St Joseph’s RC Church Woodford Lane Winsford CW7 2JS

Parish Priest- Fr Simon O’Connor

Tel: 01606 543877

Website; www.stjosephs-winsford.org.uk

email: stjosephwinsford2012@hotmail.co.uk

Deacon Chris Wells contact details:

deaconchriswells@gmail.com or Mobile No. 07751 136957

General Queries – ring the Parish Number and/or send an email to the Parish

Diocese of Shrewsbury Registered Charity No 234025



“United in conviction and united in love, with a common purpose and a common mind”
Philippians 2:2

 <div style="text-align: center;"> 29th MARCH 2026 THE PASSION OF THE LORD (CYCLE A) MASS & SERVICE TIMES </div> 		
Saturday 28th March	5:15pm	Mass - Parishioners
Sunday 29th March	10:00am 11:00am	Mass - John Dooney Cake sale
Monday 30th March	10:00am	Mass - Madelena
Tuesday 31st March	10:00am 7:00pm	Mass – Rocco. Followed by Rosary Service of Reconciliation
Wednesday 1st April	10:00am 7:00pm	Mass – J and A Stanton Stations of the Cross
Thursday 2nd April Maunder Thursday	7:30pm	Mass – Private Intention, followed by Watching until 9:30pm
Friday 3rd April Good Friday	3:00pm	Passion of the Lord
Saturday 4th April Holy Saturday	6:30pm	Easter Vigil – Hollinrake and Jennings
Sunday 5th April Easter Sunday	10:00am	Mass - Parishioners

If Fr Simon is unobtainable please leave a message and send an email to stjosephwinsford2012@hotmail.co.uk

200 CLUB DRAW

Winner: £40 Prize
This week – Irene Duffy

**WHY NOT JOIN THE 200 CLUB
AND HELP THE PARISH?**

Cake Sale

Don't forget the cake
sale after
Mass on Sunday.



Coffee morning

The coffee morning on Tuesday raised £137 for Parish funds. The Jacob's Table event also raised £50.

Thanks to everyone who supports the coffee mornings. It is through your generosity that we have been able to help our church in so many ways. Our recent purchases have been new curtains for the Parish centre, £500 material to cover all of the chairs, curtains for the church and a new fire door costing over £1000.

Over the years we have bought such a lot, all thanks to you. As the coffee morning and Christmas Bingo is the main fundraiser for the Parish, we would love to see many more people support us as it is your church and needs your help.

Our next coffee morning is on Tuesday 28th April at 10:30am, everyone is welcome.

PARISH CENTRE BOOKING ENQUIRIES

If you are interested in hiring the Parish Centre for a function, please contact Phil Martin on 07720 807162

Prayer for our Parish:

Father, pour out your Spirit upon the people of this parish
and grant us a new vision of your glory,
a new experience of your power, a new faithfulness to your word
and a new consecration to your service,
that your love may grow among us and your kingdom come,
through Christ our Lord.

.....
St Joseph pray for us

Gospel Matthew 21



When they neared Jerusalem, having arrived at Bethphage on Mount Olives, Jesus sent two disciples with these instructions:

“Go over to the village across from you. You'll find a donkey tethered there, her colt with her. Untie her and bring them to me. If anyone asks what you're doing, say, 'The Master needs them!' He will send them with you.” This is the full story of what was sketched earlier by the prophet: Tell Zion's daughter, “Look, your king's on his way, poised and ready, mounted On a donkey, on a colt, foal of a pack animal.”

The disciples went and did exactly what Jesus told them to do. They led the donkey and colt out, laid some of their clothes on them, and Jesus mounted. Nearly all the people in the crowd threw their garments down on the road, giving him a royal welcome. Others cut branches from the trees and threw them down as a welcome mat. Crowds went ahead and crowds followed, all of them calling out, “Hosanna to David's son!” “Blessed is he who comes in God's name!” “Hosanna in highest heaven!”



As he made his entrance into Jerusalem, the whole city was shaken. Unnerved, people were asking, “What's going on here? Who is this?” The parade crowd answered, “This is the prophet Jesus, the one from Nazareth in Galilee.”

“Preach the Gospel always, if necessary use words”

St Francis of Assisi

Encountering Jesus in the Gospels

How to lead groups in reflective prayer

Join us for a short online formation course building the skills and confidence needed to hold and guide groups of those who wish to deepen their relationship with Jesus, in conversation with others, through reflectively praying with gospel texts. Time: Tuesday evenings, 6.30pm-8.30pm

Dates: April 21, 28, May 5, 12, 19, 26, June 9.

<https://www.jesuitinstitute.org/events/encountering-jesus-in-the-gospels>

Diocese of Shrewsbury Lourdes Pilgrimage – YOUTH 2026

Date: 29th June – 7th August 2026

Cost: £740 (Bursary, match funding and support are available)

Age: 16 to 23

Closing Date for all applications – 31st March 2026

Why go to Lourdes?

For our young people Lourdes offers a unique opportunity to grow in faith, service, and community. The shrine, associated with the apparitions of the Virgin Mary to St Bernadette, welcomes pilgrims from around the world. Our young pilgrims volunteer to help the sick and elderly, taking part in a powerful tradition of compassion and care. Alongside this service, they experience prayer, reflection, and friendship with other young Catholics from across our Diocese, often returning home with a deeper sense of faith and a stronger commitment to serving others.

Our Lady called each one of us – now we have to answer the call.

Prisoner Outreach

Do you – like me – find carrying round small coins a waste of time? The Prisoner Outreach Organisation is a Christian network of volunteers who have been voluntarily working in HM Prisons and supplies copies of the BIBLE ALIVE booklets to prisoners. Drop your loose change into the bottle on the table in the porch and help to support this good cause.

Invitation

St Wilfred's have invited St Joseph's parishioners to join them on a coach trip to the poor Clare's convent at Ellesmere, where Mass will be celebrated. Tea and cakes after Mass, then on to Shrewsbury for some shopping therapy.

Easter Tuesday 7th April. Coach leaves St Wilfred's 9am, £15 each.

For further details phone Pat – 07999344465.

Job Vacancy

Due to retirement, a vacancy has arisen within the Diocese for a Health & Safety officer. **Salary** £32,000 - £38,000 dependant on experience. **Hours:** 25 per week, term time only, Please send CV

and covering letter to Pauline

McCulloch recruitment@dioceseofshrewsbury.org **Closing date** 10 April. Further details can be found on the Diocesan Website [Latest Vacancies - Diocese](#)

Confirmation

We will soon be looking to help prepare young people to receive the Sacrament of Confirmation. If you are aged 13 or over (Year 8 and above) and looking to learn more about Confirmation and your faith or thinking about your relationship with God and what it means, then please contact Deacon Chris before the end of April.

Dear everyone at St Joseph's,

Thank you all so much for your incredible support at the Winsford Decides event. Taking the time to attend and sit through such a long process truly meant a great deal.

Unfortunately, we weren't successful in securing funding on this occasion. However, we will not be giving up. There are still backup options available, and these will be actively pursued so that we can find another way forward.

The level of support shown by St Joseph's, and the way everyone came together, has been genuinely heart-warming. It really shows what a close and caring

community we are. I am sure Fr Simon, Deacon Chris, and the entire Parochial Council join in thanking each and every one of you for your support and encouragement.

We will keep going, and we will get there in the end. There are lots of exciting new things happening in the Parish Centre, and with these will come renewed interest in our parish, helping to bring St Joseph's back to the forefront of people's minds.

Thank you once again for standing together and for all that you do.

With sincere thanks,

Rachel

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With sincere thanks,

Rachel

When Pope Leo prays the Angelus this coming Sunday, he should pray publicly for Jimmy Lai and his family. The 20-year prison sentence imposed on one of Hong Kong's leading pro-democracy campaigners and most prominent lay Catholics is both an egregious travesty of justice, an assault on human rights and dignity, and an affront to the Church, and the Pontiff should say so.

Jimmy Lai is a 78-year-old British citizen who has been imprisoned for more than five years already and has spent most of that time in solitary confinement in a small cell with no natural light and in extreme heat. As a diabetic with a heart condition, Mr Lai's health has deteriorated significantly and he has suffered dramatic weight loss. He is permitted less than an hour a day for exercise in a confined space. Most significantly, as a devout Catholic he has been denied the right to receive the Sacrament of Holy Communion for most of the past five years.

Now he faces a 20-year jail sentence which, given his age and poor health, is effectively a life sentence – and ultimately a death sentence. Convicted under Hong Kong's draconian national security law of the crime of conspiracy to collude with foreign forces and, under a separate law, of the crime of conspiracy to publish seditious materials, Mr Lai's true crimes are – as the head of his international legal team, Caoilfhionn Gallagher KC, puts it – conspiracy to commit journalism, to talk about politics with politicians and to discuss human rights with human rights organisations. I am among those 'foreign forces' with whom he is accused of colluding and was named 95 times in the judgment issued just before Christmas last year.

Mr Lai's story is a truly remarkable one, told vividly in a documentary by the Acton Institute called "The Hong Konger" and in Mark Clifford's excellent biography, *The Troublemaker*. At the age of just 12, Mr Lai fled the famine in mainland China caused by Mao Zedong's Great Leap Forward and came to Hong Kong as a stowaway. He worked as a child labourer in a garment factory before eventually establishing his own successful retail

business, and then moved into the hotel, retail and publishing sectors.

The Tiananmen Massacre in 1989 was a turning point for Mr Lai, as he witnessed the Chinese regime gunning down peaceful student protesters. He resolved to challenge the Chinese Communist Party's repression, founding first *Next* magazine and then *Apple Daily*, the most popular Chinese-language pro-democracy newspaper in Hong Kong – shut down by the Chinese regime in 2021. He became one of Hong Kong's most vocal champions of democracy and human rights and a thorn in the side of the Beijing dictatorship, although always advocating non-violent, peaceful protest.

Within days of Hong Kong's handover to China in 1997, Mr Lai was baptised into the Catholic Church by the courageous Cardinal Joseph Zen, a long-time critic of Beijing. Inspired by his wife Teresa, a devout Catholic, he grew in the faith and, during the past five years in prison, has spent most of his time in prayer, reading spiritual classics and drawing religious pictures. As I wrote in December, just after his conviction, I have one of his prison drawings of Christ on the Cross hanging on my wall. Politicians around the world condemned the sentence within hours of it being handed down. The British Foreign Secretary, Yvette Cooper, said Mr Lai had been sentenced "for exercising his right to freedom of expression, following a politically motivated prosecution" and called on the Hong Kong authorities to "end his appalling ordeal and release him on humanitarian grounds, so that he may be reunited with his family". She promised to "rapidly engage further" on his case. The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Volker Türk, similarly "deplored" the jail sentence and called for Mr Lai's immediate release. "Jimmy Lai is a publisher sentenced to 20 years in prison for exercising rights protected under international law," he said. "This verdict needs to be promptly quashed as incompatible with international law."

Much more must be done to seek Mr Lai's release. Britain has a special responsibility to press Beijing to grant him clemency on

medical grounds, and it should coordinate efforts with like-minded allies. Prime Minister Keir Starmer missed the opportunity to use leverage to seek Mr Lai's freedom on his recent visit to China, although he said he "brought up" the case. President Donald Trump must make it a priority to deliver on his previous repeated promises to free Mr Lai when he visits Beijing in April. Mr Lai's case must feature prominently in every official engagement with China, until it becomes an inconvenience to Xi Jinping to continue to hold him in jail. But among the voices of world leaders, the Vatican's is so far missing. Pope Leo – who met Mr Lai's wife and daughter last October – should speak out, as should Catholic clergy around the world. In Masses this week and this coming Sunday, prayers should be said for Jimmy Lai and his family. Vigils should be held. And the Holy Father should use the earliest opportunity – whether the Angelus next Sunday or another appropriate occasion – to pray publicly for Mr Lai and call for his release on humanitarian grounds. If ever there was a political prisoner deserving of the Vatican's support, it is Mr Lai. Last Sunday I was in Washington, DC, and I went to Mass at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception. After Mass, I prayed beside a beautiful image of Our Lady of China and lit a candle for my friend Jimmy Lai. Over the past five years I have lit candles and said prayers in churches and cathedrals around the world, from Rome to Prague, from Seoul to Taipei, from Warsaw and Kraków to Westminster to Walsingham. I will continue to do so, every day, until Jimmy Lai is freed and reunited with his family. I call on the worldwide Church to join me.

Benedict Rogers is a human rights activist and writer, Senior Director at Fortify Rights, co-founder and Chair of Hong Kong Watch, and author of The China Nexus: Thirty Years In and Around the Chinese Communist Party's Tyranny.

This article can be found at <https://thecatholiceraid.com/article/a-life-sentence-in-all-but-name>