

FROM THE PASTOR
JULY 2, 2023
THE THIRTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME
THE FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

St. Junipero Serra, Pray for Us

It was nearly 48 years ago, on September 14, 1975, that the first native born citizen of the United States was numbered among the saints, St. Elizabeth Ann Seton. During his apostolic visit to the United States of America in September 2015, Pope Francis canonized St. Junipero Serra, the Father of California. It was the first and only canonization to take place on the soil of the United States of America. St. Junipero Serra is the only saint whose statue is found on the rotunda of the U.S. Capitol Building in Washington DC. Who was this remarkable man?

California is rightly known as one of the most beautiful and productive lands in all the world. Its luscious fruits and wine, olives and ranches have made it world renowned. But it was not always so. At one time before the great work of evangelization by the Catholic Missionaries there were no roads, no gardens, no fields of grain, no orchards, no vineyards, no olive groves, no permanent settlements. There were no ranches, no dairies, no stables. Its inhabitants lived in grass huts and lived on rodents and grasshoppers. Such was California before the grace of the redemption and the Cross of Christ was planted there.

But into this desperate world there came the brown robe who was all but 5'2" and who walked with a limp. He had journeyed thousands of miles from Vera Cruz in Mexico to the Bay which he named in honor of the founder of his order, San Francisco. St. Junipero Serra was a son of St. Francis, and he was among the bravest of men who ever lived. No heart ever burned greater than his in his love for the native people of California. He came to teach them, correct them, protect them, and love them with a love they had never known before, the love of Christ the Redeemer. He came to bring them the sacraments and save their souls for Christ.

His goal was to create a golden trail of missions from south to north, from San Diego to San Francisco. Each mission would be 20 miles from the other – approximately a day's walk. He chose the lushest areas to found the missions, to teach the natives agriculture and husbandry. Soon they abandoned their diet of rodents and grasshoppers and dined on citrus and every other fruit, the rich oil of the queen of fruits, the olive, and drank the fruit of the vine. But above all they were fed with the Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity of Our Lord Jesus Christ in Holy Communion.

Junipero wished to create a united people in this new land, for he had no notion of race. While on the East coast of North America the Protestant colonists were enslaving and killing the Native peoples whom they called Indians, St. Junipero wrote to the Vice Roy of Mexico, begging him to send Spanish men north *and to take wives among the Indian women*. St. Junipero built the great missions of California, still visited today with their vineyards and adobe chapels. The world has never known the likes of St. Junipero Serra again.

Sadly, a beautiful statue of St. Junipero Serra which was on display in the city he founded -San Francisco – was torn down last weekend by individuals who, sadly, do not know the history of California and this wonderful saint. The Archbishop of San Francisco, accompanied by priests, deacons and faithful, went to the site to bless it and make reparation. We must pray that the desecration of the images of Our Lord, Blessed Mother, and the saints will cease. To make matters worse, the City authorities charged those who committed this crime with a misdemeanor, instead of felony which was the original charge. Archbishop Salvatore Cordileone, the Archbishop of San Francisco, said the dastardly act also constituted a hate crime. He has testified that he does not want these criminals to go to jail but wishes that the Catholic Church be respected as any other entity. We can well imagine if such a deed were perpetrated against another religious, ethnic, or racial group there would be widespread outrage in the media, and rightfully so. But sadly, anti-Catholicism has had a long history in the United States, and is in the words of an American journalist, “an ugly little secret.” In these days, it is not a secret at all and is widespread. But the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church. We must all prepare for even greater persecution.

St. Junipero Serra’s feast is kept on July 1st. May he speak good things on our behalf as he stands before the throne of God.

MASS MANNERS: May I once more ask that parishioners not chew gum in the Church, let alone put it on the bottom of the pews. Please do not eat or drink in the Church nor allow children to do so. Please to not kick the kneelers down. Such action is not only so noisy, but it also destroys our new kneelers. I always pray the kneelers will be worn out because of people’s prayers, not because they are being abused. And finally, try to keep movement throughout the Church to a minimum during the celebration of Holy Mass. If one wishes to return to one’s place in the Church, especially if it is in the front of the Church, please wait until the homily is finished. Please use the side aisles and not the central aisle.

In Jesus and Mary,
Monsignor James F. Pereda