

Did you know . . .

St. Junipero Serra

Miguel Jose Serra was born in Majorca, Serra on Nov. 24, 1713. He joined the Franciscan Order in 1730 at the age of 17, taking the name Junipero (Meaning jester of God) after a friend of St. Francis. He was ordained in 1737 and after earning a doctorate in theology, he taught as a professor for several years before volunteering for the missions in New Spain.

In 1749 he sailed for Mexico, and spent 20 years there before traveling on foot to California where he spent the rest of his life evangelizing the Indians there. When he arrived in California, he founded the mission of San Diego and tirelessly traveled the length of the state and established 9 missions and baptized thousands of Indians.

He was revered by some and reviled by others. Pope John Paul II, believing Serra lived a life of virtue and was a role model for Catholics, declared him venerable in 1985. After a miracle was occurred through Serra's intervention, Pope Paul II beatified him in 1988. In 2015, Pope Francis canonized Serra at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, DC, the first canonization to take place on North American soil.

His canonization, however, was not without controversy. Critics, including many Native Americans, "raised questions about the mission settlements in which Indian converts were incorporated, becoming virtual prisoners or indentured servants." [Blessed Among Us, p. 376]. Others defended his actions, which they say protected the Indians from harsher abuse by the secular authorities.

In his homily during the canonization of Serra, Pope Francis said. "Junípero Serra left his native land and its way of life. He was excited about blazing trails, going forth to meet many people, learning and valuing their particular customs and ways of life. He learned how to bring to birth and nurture God's life in the faces of everyone he met; he made them his brothers and sisters."

Rev. Timothy Kesicki, president of the Jesuit Conference in Washington, said many scholars acknowledge Serra's complicated legacy. But, he continued, "I don't think Pope Francis wants pristine saints, because then no one will aspire to sainthood."

St. Junipero Serra died on August 28, 1784. He is buried in the sanctuary floor of the Mission de San Carlos Borromeo in Carmel-By-The-Sea, CA.

The Apostle of California, St. Junipero Serra's, feast day is July 1.

Judy Pearson

