



On the Destruction of St. Junipero Serra Statue

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What is happening to our society? A renewed national movement to heal memories and correct the injustices of racism and police brutality in our country has been hijacked by some into a movement of violence, looting and vandalism. The toppling and defacing of statues in Golden Gate Park, including that of St. Junipero Serra, have become the latest example. The memorialization of historic figures merits an honest and fair discussion as to how and to whom such honor should be given. But here, there was no such rational discussion; it was mob rule, a troubling phenomenon that seems to be repeating itself throughout the country.

Everyone who works for justice and equality joins in the outrage of those who have been and continue to be oppressed. It is especially true that followers of Jesus Christ – Christians – are called to work tirelessly for the dignity of all human beings. This is a cornerstone of our faith. Our dear city bears the name of one of history's most iconic figures of peace and goodwill: St. Francis of Assisi. For the past 800 years, the various Franciscan orders of brothers, sisters and priests that trace their inspiration back to him have been exemplary of not only serving, but identifying with, the poor and downtrodden and giving them their rightful dignity as children of God. St. Junipero Serra is no exception.

St. Serra made heroic sacrifices to protect the indigenous people of California from their Spanish conquerors, especially the soldiers. Even with his infirmed leg which caused him such pain, he walked all the way to Mexico City to obtain special faculties of governance from the Viceroy of Spain in order to discipline the military who were abusing the Indians. And then he walked back to California. And lest there be any doubt, we have a physical reminder to this day: everywhere there is a *presidio* (soldiers' barracks) associated with a mission in the chain of 21 missions that he founded, the *presidio* is miles away from the mission itself and the school. St. Junipero Serra also offered them the best thing he had: the knowledge and love of Jesus Christ, which he and his fellow Franciscan friars did through education, health care, and training in the agrarian arts.

All of this is not to deny that historical wrongs have occurred, even by people of good will, and healing of memories and reparation is much needed. But just as historical wrongs cannot be righted by keeping them hidden, neither can they be righted by re-writing the history. Anger against injustice can be a healthy response when it is that righteous indignation which moves a society forward. But as Christ himself teaches, and St. Francis modeled, love and not rage is the only answer.

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