

Jesus wants his disciples to bring the message of salvation to everyone regardless of nation, race, or tribe. “Jesus did not provide a short list of who is, or is not, worthy of receiving his message and his presence... Jesus said: Go out and tell the good news to everyone. Go out and in my name embrace life as it is, and not as you think it should be. Go out to the highways and byways, go out to tell the good news fearlessly, without prejudice, without superiority, without condescension, to all ... Go out with the ointment which soothes wounds and heals hearts.”ⁱ

Following the simple and austere life of Saint Francis of Assisi, Franciscan Friar Junipero Serra gave up a promising academic career to become a missionary in the territory of New Spain in the 18th century. Serra was filled with the joy of the Gospel as he brought the Catholic faith to the Natives of Mexico and what is now modern-day California. “Serra writes excitedly about how he had finally found his life’s calling, and that he would give his life to these people and their salvation.”ⁱⁱ

“While working among the Pame Indians, he learned their language and translated the catechism for their understanding. Working in Mexico, he gained a reputation as a preacher deeply devoted to penance and mortification.... Soon after his arrival in the New World, he sustained a spider bite to his leg that would leave him permanently injured. However, he was still known to walk everywhere whenever possible.”ⁱⁱⁱ

When cultures from very different world views meet, there is often exploitation by the more powerful group. Serra found that the Spanish soldiers often failed to show the Native Americans the proper respect due to them. “Serra specifically advocated for the rights of Native peoples, at one point drafting a 33 point ‘bill of rights’ for the Native Americans living in the mission settlements and walking all the way from California to Mexico City to present it to the viceroy.”^{iv}

With the help of the Native community, Father Serra helped to build 9 mission churches. His motto was “Keep moving forward! For him, this was the way to continue experiencing the joy of the Gospel, to keep his heart from growing numb.... He kept moving forward, because the Lord was waiting. He kept going, because his brothers and sisters were waiting. He kept going forward to the end of his life.”^v

When looking back at prior periods of history, we are often influenced by standards of today and find fault with bygone eras. Serra “was absolutely determined to engage the salvation of indigenous communities. And while for some that may be seen as an intrusion, for Serra in his time, that was seen as one of the most benevolent things one could do— to give one’s life over to others, and that’s what he did.” In his time, Serra was well respected by the native peoples whom he had worked with. Many “wept openly at his funeral.”^{vi}

In our own troubled world, the Good News is still very relevant. In a world overflowing with noise masquerading as information, the missionary call is still very much needed. “Go out and tell the good news to everyone.”

ⁱ vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2015/documents/papa-francesco_20150923_usa-omelia-washington-dc

ⁱⁱ catholicnewsagency.com/news/44937/who-is-st-junipero-serra-anyway

ⁱⁱⁱ catholicnewsagency.com/saint/st-junipero-serra-735

^{iv} Ibid.

^v vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2015/documents/papa-francesco_20150923_usa-omelia-washington-dc

^{vi} catholicnewsagency.com/saint/st-junipero-serra-735