



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY
TO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA AND CANADA

MEETING WITH THE FAITHFUL

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

Basilica of the Mission of San Carlos in Carmel
Thursday, 17 September 1987

Dear Bishop Shubsda,
Dear Brothers and Sisters,

1. Come today as a pilgrim to this Mission of San Carlos, which so powerfully evokes the heroic spirit and heroic deeds of Fray Junípero Serra and which enshrines his mortal remains. This serene and beautiful place is truly *the historical and spiritual heart of California*. All the missions of El Camino Real bear witness to the challenges and heroism of an earlier time, but not a time forgotten or without significance for the California of today and the Church of today.

These buildings and the men who gave them life, especially their spiritual father, Junípero Serra, are reminders of an age of discovery and exploration. The missions are the result of a conscious moral decision made by people of faith in a situation that presented many human possibilities, both good and bad, with respect to the future of this land and its native peoples. It was a decision rooted in a love of God and neighbour. It was *a decision to proclaim the Gospel* of Jesus Christ at the dawn of a new age, which was extremely important for both the European settlers and the Native Americans.

2. Very often, at crucial moments in human affairs, God raises up men and women whom he

thrusts into roles of decisive importance for the future development of both society and the Church. Although their story unfolds within the ordinary circumstances of daily life, they become larger than life within the perspective of history. We rejoice all the more when their achievement is coupled with a holiness of life that can truly be called heroic. So it is with Junípero Serra, who in the providence of God was destined to be *the Apostle of California*, and to have a permanent influence over the spiritual patrimony of this land and its people, whatever their religion might be. This apostolic awareness is captured in the words ascribed to him: "In California is my life and there, God willing, I hope to die". Through Christ's Paschal Mystery, that death has become a seed in the soil of this state that continues to bear fruit "thirty - or sixty - or a hundred-fold" (*Matth.* 13, 9).

Father Serra was a man *convinced of the Church's mission*, conferred upon her by Christ himself, to evangelize the world, to "make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (*Ibid.* 28, 19). The way in which he fulfilled that mission corresponds faithfully to the Church's vision today of what evangelization means: "... the Church evangelizes when she seeks to convert, solely through the divine power of the message she proclaims, both the personal and collective consciences of people, the activities in which they engage, and the lives and concrete milieux which are theirs" Pauli VI *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 18).

He not only brought the Gospel to the Native Americans, but as one who lived the Gospel he also became their *defender and champion*. At the age of sixty he journeyed from Carmel to Mexico City to intervene with the Viceroy on their behalf – a journey which twice brought him close to death – and presented his now famous *Representación* with its "bill of rights", which had as their aim the betterment of every phase of missionary activity in California, particularly the spiritual and physical well-being of its Native Americans.

3. Father Serra and his fellow missionaries shared the conviction found everywhere in the New Testament that the Gospel is a matter of life and salvation. They believed that in offering to people Jesus Christ, they were doing *something of immense value*, importance and dignity. What other explanation can there be for the hardships that they freely and gladly endured, like Saint Paul and all the other great missionaries before them: difficult and dangerous travel, illness and isolation, an ascetical life-style, arduous labour, and also, like Saint Paul, that "concern for all the churches" (*2Cor.* 11, 28) which Junípero Serra, in particular, experienced as *Presidente* of the California missions in the face of every vicissitude, disappointment and opposition.

Dear brothers and sisters: like Father Serra and his Franciscan brethren, we too are *called to be evangelizers*, to share actively in the Church's mission of making disciples of all people. The way in which we fulfil that mission will be different from theirs. But their lives speak to us still because of their sure faith that the Gospel is true, and because of their passionate belief in the value of bringing that saving truth to others at great personal cost. Much to be envied are those who can give their lives for something greater than themselves in loving service to others. This, more than

words or deeds alone, is what draws people to Christ.

This *single-mindedness* is not reserved for great missionaries in exotic places. It must be at the heart of each priest's ministry and the evangelical witness of every religious. It is the key to their personal sense of well-being, happiness and fulfilment in what they are and what they do. This single-mindedness is also essential to the Christian witness of the Catholic laity. The covenant of love between two people in marriage and the successful sharing of faith with children require the effort of a lifetime. If couples cease believing in their marriage as a sacrament before God, or treat religion as anything less than a matter of salvation, then the Christian witness they might have given to the world is lost. Those who are unmarried must also be steadfast in fulfilling their duties in life if they are to bring Christ to the world in which they live.

"In him who is the source of my strength I have strength for everything" (*Phil.* 4, 13). These words of the great missionary, Saint Paul, remind us that *our strength is not our own*. Even in the martyrs and saints, as the liturgy reminds us, it is "(God's) power shining through our human weakness" (*Praefatio Martyrum*). It is the strength that inspired Father Serra's motto: "always forward, never back". It is the strength that one senses in this place of prayer so filled with his presence. It is the strength that can make each one of us, dear brothers and sisters, missionaries of Jesus Christ, witnesses of his message, doers of his word.

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