

# Nine-Day Novena to Blessed Junipero Serra

## Introduction

At his beatification on September 25, 1988, Fray Junipero Serra, O.F.M., S.T.D. (1713-1784), was declared by His Holiness Pope John Paul II to be a "shining example of Christian Virtue and the Missionary Spirit." The new Blessed is truly an international luminary.

He distinguished himself as an exemplary Franciscan priest, respected in academic circles, and acclaimed in the pulpit by the age of thirty-five. During the next two decades, he labored as an apostolic missionary throughout central Mexico, notably in the Sierra Gorda among the Pame Indians. During the final fifteen years of his life, he emerged as a pioneer and the Apostle of California. Dramatically he demonstrated the natural and supernatural branch of his missionary motto: "Always go forward - never turn back!" On his deathbed at Mission Carmel, Blessed Junipero Serra promised that if God granted him "eternal happiness" he would pray for "all dwellers in the missions, and for the conversion of so many whom I leave unconverted." Armed with the knowledge that he promised to continue his apostolate from Heaven, and knowing that he is indeed there as affirmed by his beatification, we are guaranteed that Blessed Junipero is truly a heroic friend and ally, able to intercede for us before God himself. As such, he is a channel of divine grace and a source of inspiration and solace.

In order that Blessed Junipero Serra be enrolled in the litany of the canonized saints, another miracle is required. Your confident prayer for that purpose is solicited sincerely and promptly. Cures and favors attributed to Serra's intercession should be reported to:

### **The Serra Cause**

Old Mission Santa Barbara  
2201 Laguna Street  
Santa Barbara, CA 93105  
805 682-4713  
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In 1988 Pope John Paul II declared Junipero Serra among the Blessed worthy of public veneration and designated July 1 as his feast day. Blessed Junipero Serra is patron and namesake of Serra Clubs, organizations founded around the world to foster vocations to the priesthood, diaconate and religious life.

### **Imprimatur:**

+ Most Reverend Sylvester D. Ryan, D.D.  
Bishop of Monterey California

### **Imprimi Potest:**

Very Reverend Finian McGinn, OFM,  
Provincial Minister

## **Nihil Obstat**

Marco Antonio Figueroa, OFM, STL

## **Novena First Day**

Junipero Serra was born on November 24, 1713 in the Spanish village of Petra on the Balearic Island of Majorca. His parents, both illiterate farmers, instructed him in the rudiments of faith and enrolled him in the local Franciscan school at age seven. At age fifteen, he entered the Franciscan Order in Palma, the capital of Majorca. In addition to his formal studies, Junipero enjoyed reading the lives of saints, wishing to follow those "who had labored for the conversion of souls." He decided to imitate them even to the point of "offering his life and shedding his blood as they had done."

However, Junipero was hindered by poor health and wrote: "I was almost always ill and so small of stature that I was unable to reach the lectern, nor could I help my fellow novices in the necessary chores of the novitiate." Only after his solemn profession into the order, at age seventeen, did his health and stature improve. Whenever he remembered and spoke of the joy that was his when he made his profession, he broke forth with these words: "All good things came to me with wisdom." (Wisdom 7:11).

## **Meditation**

*Blessed Junipero Serra, from early childhood you experienced prolonged pain and suffering, yet with youthful innocence you did not lose faith, hope or charity. You placed your trust in God and His holy purpose during your novitiate and were able to overcome untold afflictions. Obtain for me the grace to deepen my belief in what God has revealed. Strengthen my hope in Him and intensify my love of Him in heart and deed.*

## **Prayer For Our Holy Father**

God, Our Father, we ask You to look with mercy and love on the Supreme Shepherd You have chosen for us. Give him health and strength to guide and govern Your holy people. May he, through word and example, direct, sustain and encourage the people in his care, so that with them he may share everlasting life. Lord Jesus, hear our prayer through the intercession of Blessed Junipero Serra. Amen.

## **Novena Prayer**

O God, in Your ineffable mercy, You chose Blessed Junipero Serra as a means of gathering many peoples of the Americas into Your Church. Grant that through his intercession our hearts may be united in You in ever greater love, so that at all times and in all places we may show forth the image of Your Only-Begotten Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with You in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

**Litany of Blessed Junipero Serra**

God, the Father of Heaven,

*Have mercy on us.*

God, the Son, Redeemer of the World,

*Have mercy on us.*

God, the Holy Spirit,

*Have mercy on us.*

Holy Trinity, One God,

*Have mercy on us.*

Holy Mary, Mother of God,

*Pray for us.*

Mother of the Church,

*Pray for us.*

Queen of the Angels,

*Pray for us.*

Patroness of the Americas,

*Pray for us.*

Blessed Junipero Serra,

*Pray for us.*

Who opens my eyes and heart to the challenges of today,

*Pray for us.*

Prophet and penitent who saw the suffering Christ in the poor,

*Pray for us.*

Protector, lover, defender of the Indians and our faith,

*Pray for us.*

Admirer of all creation, the sea, the sky, and all the earth,

*Pray for us.*

Model of priestly service and saintly son of St. Francis,

*Pray for us.*

Beloved of God and of all those in need,

*Pray for us.*

Peacemaker in the face of violence,  
*Pray for us.*

Teacher of perseverance and trust in prayer,  
*Pray for us.*

Apostolic missionary, Pastor, and Patron of the Californias,  
*Pray for us.*

Pathfinder for those seeking true direction in their lives,  
*Pray for us.*

Patron of all Serrans,  
*Pray for us.*

God's fearless leader,  
*Pray for us.*

Who keeps my gratitude fresh each day,  
*Pray for us.*

Who accepts both success and suffering as gift,  
*Pray for us.*

Who bore his physical and emotional pain in imitation of the Crucified,  
*Pray for us.*

Who spoke the truth openly and courageously against power and injustice,  
*Pray for us.*

Whose charity and humility endured a lifetime,  
*Pray for us.*

Who proclaimed the Gospel, fed the hungry, and clothed the naked,  
*Pray for us.*

Who was always faithful, zealous and loyal,  
*Pray for us.*

Who was close to the sick and dying,  
*Pray for us.*

Who is guide to my feet in following Christ,  
*Pray for us.*

Who told us "Always go forward and never turn back,"  
*Pray for us.*

O Christ, may your compassion shine forth from the depths of our hearts and embrace all  
we meet,  
*Hear us, O Lord.*

You who fills the emptiness in our life with your presence,  
*Hear us, O Lord.*

Tender-hearted and merciful God,  
*Hear us, O Lord.*

Christ hear us.  
*Christ hear us.*

Lord Jesus, hear our prayer.  
*Lord Jesus, hear our prayer.*

### **Prayers**

Recite the Our Father, Hail Mary and Glory Be to the Father.

### **Let Us Pray:**

O Lord Jesus Christ,  
reward the apostolic zeal  
of Your Seraphic son, Blessed Junipero Serra,  
who leaving home and fatherland,  
labored for the salvation of souls  
in Spain, Mexico and California.

By Your Most Holy name  
may he be raised to the full honors of the altar.  
Through the intercession of Blessed Serra,  
look with favor on my special prayers  
which have no earthly answer.  
This we pray through Christ our Lord.  
Amen.

## **Novena Second Day**

Junipero was ordained a priest at age 24, and earned a doctorate in Sacred Theology at 28. By age 35, he held the highest ranking professorship at the University of Majorca. He

was also a brilliant orator. After one particularly inspiring sermon, it was recorded that "his sermon was worthy of being printed in letters of gold."

However, the voice of God called Junipero to be a teacher of nations. In his words: "I had no other motive but to revive in my soul those intense longings which I had since my novitiate when I read the lives of the saints. These longings had become deadened because of the preoccupation I had with studies." On feeling his reawakened call to become an apostolic missionary, he "had recourse to God in prayer, choosing as his intercessors God's Most Pure Mother and Saint Francis Solano, Apostle of South America (his favorite saint)."

After Junipero left Majorca for Mexico in 1749, he sent a farewell letter to his parents. he wrote, in part, "I wish I could give you some of the happiness that is mine; I feel that you would urge me to go ahead and never to turn back. What you consider and endure as a great sorrow will be turned into a lasting joy, for, if we are no more to see each other in this world, we will be united forever in eternal glory. That is my prayer."

## **Meditation**

*Blessed Junipero Serra, at the height of earthly honors you abandoned all to become a missionary for the greater honor and glory of God. You struggled with the decision at first, especially, pained by knowing you would never see your family again. Your deep faith and zeal for saving souls gave you the courage to go forward and renounce all security and comfort. Help me to strengthen my faith, listen for God's call, and "go ahead and never to turn back" as I do what He asks.*

**(Recite the Prayer for Our Holy Father, the Litany of Blessed Junipero Serra, the Our Father, Hail Mary and Glory Be to the Father, and the two prayers as given in the first day of the novena.)**

## **Novena Third Day**

On December 7, 1749, after a three-month transatlantic crossing to the New World, during which the ship was temporarily blown off course by a violent storm that threatened shipwreck, Junipero first stepped ashore on continental North America at Vera Cruz, Mexico. He chose to walk the 275-mile stretch of El Camino Real to Mexico City's San Fernando Apostolic College. Along the way, mosquito or chigger bites infected his lower left leg. Recurrent inflammations, eventually developing into an ulcerated, possibly cancerous growth, would afflict him for the rest of his life.

From the pulpit, he would move his listeners to sorrow and penance for their sins by strong admonishments in imitation of his patron Saint Francis Solano, to whom he was devoted.

## Meditation

*Blessed Junipero Serra, you tackled many obstacles and made untold sacrifices. In addition to those naturally placed in your path, you willingly assumed additional burdens. If you, so holy a man, gladly bore such severe penances for your sins and the salvation of souls, how much more should I, in my constant struggle with temptation, undertake as I struggle to be more selfless and do more for others!*

**(Recite the Prayer for Our Holy Father, the Litany of Blessed Junipero Serra, the Our Father, Hail Mary and Glory Be to the Father, and the two prayers as given in the first day of the novena.)**

## Novena Fourth Day

Junipero's missionary career began in the rugged, mountainous Sierra Gorda region north of Mexico City. He spent eight years (1750-1758) among the Pame Indians and served as president of the five-mission chain. He quickly mastered their difficult language, instructed them in Christianity by composing a native catechism, songs and paraliturgical celebrations, and helped them become skilled at various trades.

During one of his preaching assignments in a remote region east of the Sierra Gorda, Junipero imbibed tainted altar wine during Mass and passed out. He recovered despite refusing a purgative, and later commented: "It was not because I disbelieved in its ineffectiveness, nor because I had any horror of it, for in other circumstances I would have taken it. But I had just received the Bread of Angels, which by the power of consecration ceased to be bread and was changed into the Body of my Lord Jesus Christ. How could you ask me to take so nauseating a drink, after tasting the Divine Morsel?"

Junipero survived several brushes with death during his life and was assisted by Divine Providence on a number of occasions. Once while traveling in Mexico, he and a fellow missionary were offered shelter by a "venerable man with his wife and child." The next day they learned there was no one living in that area, in fact there was no house or ranch for many leagues. Junipero believed that "it had been Divine Providence that had granted them the favor of hospitality, and that undoubtedly those persons who were within the house were Jesus, Mary and Joseph. They pondered not only the neatness and cleanliness of the house, despite its poverty, and the affectionate tenderness with which they dispensed their hospitality, but also on the extraordinary inner consolation which they had

felt in their hearts. They gave God, Our Lord, the thanks He deserved for the special favor they had received.

## Meditation

*Blessed Junipero Serra, for you all-consuming love of Our Lord, to the point of risking your life on several occasions, you were afforded miraculous occasions and divine favor. Help me to develop a more intimate and devoted love of Jesus, the Word of God Incarnate. His Mother Mary, and all the saints, so that I, too, may gain the gift of divine grace.*

**(Recite the Prayer for Our Holy Father, the Litany of Blessed Junipero Serra, the Our Father, Hail Mary and Glory Be to the Father, and the two prayers as given in the first day of the novena.)**

## Novena Fifth Day

At age 53 Junipero ventured to Lower California as newly-appointed president of the peninsula's fifteen missions. He soon learned of Spain's forthcoming temporal and spiritual settlement of Upper California. He volunteered and was appointed president. During the 95-day, 750-mile journey north by land from Loreto to San Diego Bay, Junipero experienced great pain. He wrote, "I had much trouble in standing on my feet because the left foot was much inflamed, and the swelling reached halfway up my leg, which was covered with sores." Refusing all advice to turn back, Junipero said, "Even if I die on the road, I will not turn back. Although I would be buried here, I shall gladly remain among these people (unbaptized Indians), if it be the will of God." As a final alternative to being carried on a stretcher, Junipero asked the muleteer to prepare a poultice for his leg, and by the next day he was walking and able to say Mass.

Junipero arrived at San Diego on July 1, 1769, and on July 14 he established Presidio-Mission San Diego de Alcalá, California's first Christian settlement. Soon after, an Indian attack threatened Junipero's life, and he later wrote, "I held a picture of our Blessed and Spotless Queen in one hand and her Divine Crucified Son in the other, when arrows were raining everywhere. My thoughts were that with such defense either I would not have to die, or that I would die well, great sinner that I am."

## Meditation

*Blessed Junipero Serra, when your health was in jeopardy, when the future looked bleak, you never wavered. You bore "crosses" and continued "harvesting souls" from among your "tender mission plants." As you said, "What becomes of the ox that does not plough,*



*and without plowing, and there be a harvest?" Help me to learn from your example and remember that "God keeps His promise. He will not let you be tested beyond your strength (Corinthians 10:13)."*

**(Recite the Prayer for Our Holy Father, the Litany of Blessed Junipero Serra, the Our Father, Hail Mary and Glory Be to the Father, and the two prayers as given in the first day of the novena.)**

## **Novena Sixth Day**

Blessed Junipero truly believed in the power of novenas. While he was stationed at San Diego, scurvy killed many of the soldiers, provisions were running perilously low, and the supply ship had not returned from Mexico with replenishments. The dire situation forced a decision to abandon San Diego and California if the ship did not arrive soon. The limit was set at March 20, 1770, one day after the Solemnity of Saint Joseph.

All of these conversations and preparations were as so many arrows that pierced Junipero's fervent heart. True to his motto, "Always go forward; never turn back," he wrote that he and fellow priest, Juan Crespi, would remain even if the settlement were abandoned, relying on Almighty God's providence."

With the participation of all the soldiers and sailors, Junipero began a nine-day novena of prayers to Saint Joseph. On March 19, the ninth day of the Novena and the feast of Saint Joseph, and with everything ready for departure from San Diego, a ship was seen on the southern horizon at 3 p.m. Junipero's heart was filled with "singular joy and happiness" and he "ceaselessly thanked God." Showing his gratitude to the saint, he sang a High Mass in his honor with the greatest solemnity. This holy devotion he continued on the nineteenth of each month, up to the very last month of his life.

With replenished supplies and a new sense of purpose, the expedition decided not to abandon San Diego. They continued north to Monterey and established the second presidio-mission, San Carlos Borromeo, on June 3, 1770. This would become Junipero's permanent California home, mission headquarters, and eventually his burial site.

## **Meditation**

*Blessed Junipero Serra, you understood the power and grace of prayer, especially when it is channeled into a novena. As Our Lord said, "Ask and you shall receive; seek and you shall find; knock and it shall be opened to you (Luke 11:9)". You knew that he would not forsake you in your hour of need. As Saint Joseph was your special intercessor, you are mine, and are able to intercede for me before God, as long as I heed Our Lord's*

*admonition: "You will receive all that you pray for, provided you have faith (Matthew 21:22)."*

**(Recite the Prayer for Our Holy Father, the Litany of Blessed Junipero Serra, the Our Father, Hail Mary and Glory Be to the Father, and the two prayers as given in the first day of the novena.)**

## **Novena Seventh Day**

After Junipero's first complete tour of the fledgling California mission chain in 1772, he saw that provisions were irregular, Indian affairs were poorly managed, and many other changes needed to be made. He decided to travel to Mexico City to personally appeal to the Viceroy. This arduous two-year journey twice brought him to the gates of death.

While in Mexico he was described as "a lion, giving in only to fever, for none of the ailments that constantly afflicted him, especially shortness of breath, chest pains, and sores on his legs and feet, have ever kept him from his apostolic duties."

Junipero presented his petitions to Viceroy Bucareli in a now famous 32-point Representation. This was California's first "Bill of Rights," which succinctly outlined the province's needs and offered concrete solutions to its problems. All his requests were granted.

Junipero made the long journey back to California and noted that "It is the place for me to live in and I hope to God that it is where I shall die." With renewed vigor upon his return, baptisms at Mission Carmel increased dramatically. Junipero wrote, "To hear the Indian children pray, to hear them sing, to see how they run up to the Father, all of this gladdens the heart and impels one gratefully to give praise to God."

## **Meditation**

*Blessed Junipero Serra, you may have lived with spiritual eyes raised to Heaven, but you knew that your primary goal of glorifying God through the conversion of souls could not be obtained without temporal feet planted firmly on earth. You risked your life to travel to Mexico and then witnessed great success in the flowering of California. Help me to effect change where possible, accept limits when necessary, and never to forget that God is the source of, and reason for, everything I do.*

**(Recite the Prayer for Our Holy Father, the Litany of Blessed Junipero Serra, the Our Father, Hail Mary and Glory Be to the Father, and the two prayers as given in the first day of the novena.)**

## Novena Eighth Day

After devoting his life to a dynamic apostolic ministry among the California Indians, Junipero slowed considerably by mid-1784 and prepared to die. By late August, the royal surgeon was unable to alleviate his old lung trouble, and along with his age, strenuous lifestyle, and ulcerated leg, he was diagnosed with a "worn-out body."

On August 27, Junipero received Viaticum, his last Holy Communion. He walked the few hundred yards from his cell to the sanctuary of mission Carmel's Church, where he knelt and began to sing, *Tantum ergo, Sacramentum, veneremur cernui* (Down in adoration falling, Lo, the Sacred Host we hail) with tears in his eyes and with the sonorous voice he always used. As if nothing were the matter, affecting all so deeply that they could not follow him in the singing. His friend Fray Francisco Palou administered the Holy Viaticum and when the service was finished he remained in the same posture on his knees, thanking the Lord.

On August 28, Junipero promised visitors that "If the Lord in His infinite mercy grants me that eternal happiness which I do not deserve because of my faults, I shall pray for all dwellers in these missions and for the conversion of so many people whom I leave unconverted." He prayed alone in his cell until 1 p.m., then prepared for a *siesta* by removing his mantle, laying down on his rough bed of boards and clasping his crucifix to his breast. Shortly before 2 p.m. Francisco Palou entered Junipero's cell and "found him asleep in the Lord, without giving any sign or trace of agony."

So ended Junipero Serra's life at 70 years, nine months and two days. He had been a Franciscan for almost 54 years, a priest for 45 and an apostolic missionary for 35 years. In California alone, where he spent the last 15 years of his life, he had founded nine missions, baptized more than 6000 Indians and confirmed more than five thousand.

### Meditation

*Blessed Junipero Serra, your long and bloodless martyrdom ended in a holy and peaceful death. Your promise to pray for us in Heaven gives me great comfort for I know you are protecting me. Pray for me, that I too may leave this world with God's grace and confidence, worthy to share in the gift of Christ's Resurrection. May our souls, and all the souls of the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace.*

**(Recite the Prayer for Our Holy Father, the Litany of Blessed Junipero Serra, the Our Father, Hail Mary and Glory Be to the Father, and the two prayers as given in the first day of the novena.)**

## Novena Ninth Day

Native peoples and settlers kept Junipero's saintly memory alive after his death. Streams of visitors have paid their respects at his Mission Carmel grave, including Pope John Paul II on September 17th, 1987. The Canonization Cause of Junipero Serra was introduced to the Vatican in 1935, and on May 9, 1985 he was elevated to the rank of Venerable, that is, having led a life of heroic virtue and thereby worthy of veneration. To move to the next step of beatification and the title Blessed, a miracle must have taken place through Venerable Junipero Serra's intercession before God.

In 1960, when Sister Mary Boniface Dyrda, O.S.F. was near death she prayed the novena to Venerable Junipero Serra. Sister Mary Boniface was a member of the Franciscan Sisters of Our Lady of Perpetual Help for 58 years and died in January, 2000.

After praying to Servant of God Junipero Serra and reciting the novena, she was miraculously cured of lupus disease. In her words, "When I was taken to the hospital to die, our chaplain suggested that we make a novena in honor of Father Serra. There was quite a sudden change. I was able to sit up in bed. I experienced a steady improvement and after another week I was dismissed. Thanks be to God and to Father Serra!"

This cure was unanimously verified by the Vatican's Congregation for the Causes of Saints, and accepted by His Holiness as a miracle in 1987. Pope John Paul II proclaimed Fray Junipero Serra Blessed at S. Peter's Basilica on Sunday September 25, 1988. In order that Blessed Junipero Serra be proclaimed a saint, another miracle must be obtained through his intercession. The efforts to bring him recognition as a canonized saint have been singularly blessed. Some of the causes we might pray for today include: a cure for cancer or AIDS, unity among nations, for the health of the Church through an increase in vocations, and your own personal intentions.

## Meditation

*Blessed Junipero Serra, you served God with humble confidence on earth and because "whoever humbles himself shall be exalted" (Matthew 23:12), you now enjoy His beatific vision. We thank God for raising you to the rank of Blessed so that more people will be drawn near and imitate you, seek your powerful help, and in doing so, humble themselves, that they may one day be exalted with you in eternal glory.*

**(Recite the Prayer for Our Holy Father, the Litany of Blessed Junipero Serra, the Our Father, Hail Mary and Glory Be to the Father, and the two prayers as given in the first day of the novena.)**