

Junipero Serra

A Study Guide

Rediscovering Blessed Junipero Serra
Feast Day -- July 1

(Read the Opening Prayer and Scripture out loud)

Opening Prayer

Almighty God, in every age you have chosen servants to proclaim your word to the ends of the earth. Hear our prayer for Blessed Junipero Serra, who responded to your call to serve in the missions and who made a tremendous difference in the lives of so many people through his tireless preaching of the gospel. May his work and legacy inspire us. Grant this through Christ our Lord. Amen

Scripture

“The eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had ordered them. When they saw him, they worshiped, but they doubted. Then Jesus approached and said to them, All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age.” (*Matthew 28:16-20*)

(Take time for silent reflection, then read the Introduction out loud.)

Introduction

The Serra Organization is based on the accomplishments of Blessed Junipero Serra, who tirelessly preached the gospel and served the people with zeal and love, relying on God’s mercy. This program explores those characteristics that make Blessed Serra so unique and provides us with the opportunity to see how they can be part of our lives.

(Introduce a speaker or the facilitator can read the following paragraphs with pauses in between.)

Historical Tradition

Miquel Serra was born into a humble family in a farming village on the Mediterranean Island of Majorca. His parents sent him to a nearby Franciscan school where his teachers quickly recognized his intellectual abilities. Within a year he became a novice in the Franciscan order, taking the name of Junipero after the beloved friend of Saint Francis. Shortly thereafter he was ordained a priest.

Years of formation in the Franciscan way of life and academic studies in philosophy and theology followed with Serra being named professor of philosophy. He was well known as a bright and articulate scholar, a moving preacher and a clear precise writer. Dedicated to the gospel and a tireless worker, Father Serra responded to the call of the Franciscan missionaries to preach the Gospel to the New World.

In 1749 Father Serra was sent to the missionary territories in the American West Coast where he is credited with being responsible for the foundation and spread of the Catholic Church, and establishing a system of nine missions in what is now the state of California. Blessed Junipero Serra was a zealous missionary devoted to spreading the Gospel message. He not only brought the Gospel message to the Native Americans, but as one who lived the Gospel, he also became their defender.

As a missionary in the Franciscan order of the Catholic Church and a political entity advocating for the rights of others, Father Junipero Serra was a driving force in the colonization of the state of California. Through his missionary activity, he and the other friars converted thousands of Native Americans and trained many in the European methods of agriculture, animal husbandry, and crafts.

Since 1934 Junipero Serra has been a candidate for canonization as a saint by the Roman Catholic Church. Pope John Paul II remarked that Serra is an exemplary model of a selfless evangelizer, a shining example of Christian virtue and the missionary spirit.

(The facilitator can read the Discussion Questions out loud for general or small group discussion.)

Discussion Questions

Blessed Junipero Serra was a man of faith.

At life's crossroads Junipero Serra traded in a professorial lifestyle that promised him a beloved homeland, associations of his youth, a cloister and community, books and university, honor and a secure future. He chose instead a missionary lifestyle that required him to say farewell to his home and life and embrace uncertainty and instability. He moved forward and did not dwell on his losses.

Which paths have I chosen at the many crossroads that have been part of my life?

Blessed Junipero Serra was a preacher.

If history were something static, the world would hardly be in need of missionary activity. However, the Gospel needs to be preached and interpreted in every age. As history unfolds, every generation is called to embrace the same challenge as Blessed Junipero Serra, and define for themselves how they will proclaim God's message to the world. **How are we as a church responding to the idea of conversion in our hearts and our world?**

Blessed Junipero was a missionary at heart.

The Missionary is one who responds to the privilege of participating in the Mission of God by offering himself to work for, and give witness to the salvation of the world. Fidelity is the quality of response that is necessary for a missionary to be daily converted to his personal calling. **How necessary do you think missionaries are today?**

Blessed Junipero Serra is just like us.

He was a visionary man who persevered in his mission despite adversity, controversy, and hardships. **How do we as Serrans persevere in our vision to foster vocations to the priesthood and religious life? How do we further Catholicism by encouraging one another to fulfill our Christian vocation to service through education about our faith?**

Closing Reflection

The missionary vocation has been the motivating force behind the Franciscan life. Blessed Junipero Serra embraced this spirit and led a missionary's life. As Serrans who follow Serra we are called to lead a life open to wherever God may call us.

Bibliography

DeNevi, Don and Moholy, Noel Francis. *Junipero Serra: The Illustrated Story of the Founder of California's Missions*. Harper and Row, 1985.

Sullivan, Marion. *Westward the Bells: A Biography of Junipero Serra*. Saint Paul Books and Media, 1988.

Serra International Videos

- Father Serra and the American West
- The Founding Father of the West