



## Diocese of Monterey

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### Letter to the People of God of the Church of Monterey

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Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

In these recent days, several pastors of our Mission parishes have repositioned some statues of St. Junípero Serra. This was done to protect them from possible desecration by violence.

It is unclear exactly what groups are attacking these and other Serra statues throughout the state. Some indeed represent those with strong feelings regarding the treatment of indigenous peoples by European colonizers. The Church cannot support such violence imposed on any group, nor can it support the violent destruction of sacred symbols of any faith community.

With regard to today, the Church stands with all the victims of our times. No greater spokesman can be found for the poor, the marginalized, the victimized immigrant, the victims of war, etc., than Pope Francis. We see such spirit in the work of Catholic Charities and Catholic Relief Services. Many Catholic theologians write and reflect on the ‘victims of history’ and the importance of ‘remembering’ their history and ‘giving voice’ to even the dead who are victims of injustice, and their narrative. We do so precisely through the lens of the memory of Jesus and his suffering and death. The theological reflections of our Church motivate us to work for human dignity, justice and charity for all peoples today – especially the victimized and marginalized.

With regard to the times of St. Serra, it is important to state what an esteemed historian and scholar, Professor Robert Senkewicz stated: It is not legitimate to make Serra a stand-in for the entire 65 years of mission experience in California. In canonizing St. Serra, the Catholic Church did not intend to bless all that happened in the missions from their beginning to the end. Pope Francis and Pope Benedict XVI have reminded us that the saints are not people who have never made mistakes or sinned, but rather are people, even in their imperfect humanity, who allowed the Light of God to penetrate their hearts and shared it with others. After exhaustive investigation it is clear St. Serra made heroic sacrifices to protect the indigenous people of California from their Spanish conquerors and soldiers. He sacrificed a successful life in Spain to travel halfway around the world to live the rest of his life among people he had never seen but genuinely loved. He did this and endured many hardships expressly for purposes of sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We feel scholarship in fact supports the Church’s views on Fr. Serra.

In some Lenten sermons, Serra indicated his preferred missionary strategy quoting Psalm 33: “Taste and see that the Lord is good.” This was his goal. During these troubled times let us be beacons of the goodness of God, like Fr. Serra, and bring Light where there is often darkness.

In Christ,

Most Reverend Daniel E. Garcia  
Bishop of Monterey