



*He planted the Faith on the Pacific
shores and he has been called*

California's Favorite Son

From the Columbian

When the delegates to the conventions, and their friends, arrive in California, they are bound to make the acquaintance of Padre Junipero Serra, O.F.M., the Founder and first President of the California Missions. That zealous Franciscan is regarded as California's greatest pioneer and most esteemed citizen. His spirit lives on, not alone in the Franciscan brethren who are his spiritual successors, but likewise in the remnants that remain as testimonials to his untiring labors, as well as in the monuments that have been erected to honor his name and to perpetuate his memory.

It is a far cry from 1771, when San Gabriel was founded, to 1952, when the Knights of Columbus convene in Los Angeles; there is startling contrast between the crude Indian villages and the fabulous suburbs of the modern metropolis. Such impressions are revised, however, when the tourist and the resident alike come to know intimately this Mallorcan juniper, who, though small of stature, was a giant by every other rule of measure. Did he not ever stand for progress? Was he not al-

ways laboring for expansion and development? Was not his life-long missionary motto already formulated in the farewell letter to his parents: "Always go forward and never turn back!" His personal reaction to the Bay of San Francisco, when first he stood above the Golden Gate, reflected the same apostolic impatience: "If we are to go farther, we must to boats"; for he envisioned missions as far as north Alaska.

Serra was Christ's planner and God's plottor in planting the Cross along what was, a hundred and seventy years ago, only rugged coastline and barren wilderness. Were he to tread *el camino real* anew from San Diego to San Gabriel, I feel he would prove the same divine schemer he had been in 1774. After completing the herculean task of leading Juan Bautista de Anza across the Mojave desert to San Gabriel, Fray Francisco Garcés, O.F.M., had continued on to San Diego to visit the revered Padre Presidente. The Apostle and the Knight-Errant of California then walked together from the Mother of the Missions to the Pride of the chain.

Their conversation is unrecorded, but the burden of their hearts is known and the zeal of their lives remains an inspiration. Garcés, familiar with the Arizona missions, and Serra, Father of those in California, must have mapped the strategy—a missionary pincer movement—for the future missions to be established along the King's Highway. They must likewise have envisioned further *camínes*, moving eastward; for, little more than a year later, Fray Francisco Garcés was destined to penetrate San Joaquin valley for the first time and to indicate a location near the modern city of Bakersfield as a site suitable for a mission.

Perhaps it is because Serra would feel so at home in modern California, and discover so many outlets for his boundless energy in our twentieth century, that we in our turn feel so at home with him and his eighteenth century world. Certainly he fits into modern civilization, which will not allow his memory to fade. That day he tramped from San Diego to San Gabriel, he had been in California only five years, during which time he had erected as many missions. When Garcés returned to California two years later, guiding the second Anza expedition across the desert for the founding of San Francisco de Asis, Fray Junípero was in the south clearing the site and blessing the ground for San Juan Capistrano. Two more missions, Santa Clara and San Buenaventura, and the royal presidio chapel of Santa Barbara, the aging Padre was to found before the angel of

death hovered over his pallet at his beloved Carmelo in 1784.

A decade and a half venerable "el Viejo," as he was affectionately known to his Indian charges, lived and labored in California. He established nine of the twenty-one missions, which under his prudent administration developed into thriving communities. At each visit to those growing centers he noted with pious pride the number of baptized Indians, until the registers listed 5,800. During his several painful journeys from San Francisco to San Diego, his priestly heart overflowed with gratitude as he brought 5,307 of those neophyte converts to supernatural maturity by administering to them the sacrament of Confirmation. The Cross he had planted securely and Christ he had enthroned in real churches, demonstrating unto the end that "as long as life lasts. . . I will do all I can do to propagate our holy Faith."

Fifteen years constitute little more than the fifth part of a life that is counted in seventy years and one. Fully to appreciate the zeal and evaluate the fruits of the most memorable decade and a half of Serra's life, we must recall the antecedents. The future Colonizer of California was born in Petra, Mallorca, November 24, 1713. In the neighboring city of Palma, at the age of seventeen, Miguel José's name was changed to Juniper, when he received the habit of Saint Francis, girded himself with the white cord and donned the familiar open sandals. During the course of his studies for the priesthood,

Serra revealed the exceptional mental ability which won for him the doctorate in Sacred Theology. After he had been ordained a priest, Serra was chosen to occupy the chair of Scotistic Theology in the Lullian University of Palma. His learning in the lecture hall and his eloquence in the pulpit combined to earn him insular renown. Successful in his work and happy amid his surroundings, Padre Junipero appeared destined to ecclesiastical preferment on the Balearic Island that was his homeland.

Behind the scholarly mien and under the exemplary religious observance, however, there was a restlessness that increased rather than diminished with the passing years. The setting went back some nineteen years to the days when he had first donned the habit of the Poverello. His favorite reading then had been the lives of Franciscan saints and among these he cherished most the biographies of the missionary heroes. The fire thus kindled was steadily fed by the stories and rumors that drifted across the Atlantic during that heyday of Spain's far-flung empire. The missionaries going to the Indies and those returning from the fields afar had ever captured his imagination and enkindled his zeal.

The perplexed professor discerned the clear call of God's loving Providence when his friend and former pupil, Fray Francisco Palóu, revealed to him the kindred desire of sailing to New Spain. Preparations were hastily made and arrangements quickly handled so that they could embark

on the ninety-nine day voyage on August 30, 1749. Upon docking at Vera Cruz, on December seventh, Serra insisted on walking the three hundred miles to the shrine of our Lady of Guadalupe. It was on this pilgrimage that his leg was injured. The wound was to harbor a persistent pain and be a continual penance for some thirty-five years.

In Mexico City, the youthful missionary entered the Apostolic College of San Fernando, where he received the proximate preparation for his actual labors among the natives. During his brief six months in that renowned monastery, the former professor edified the community by the promptness and regularity of his religious life. Shortly, he was assigned to the mountainous Sierra Gorda region. Up tortuous footpaths he trudged, a song in his heart that at long last his cherished desire was realized: "... the office of apostolic missionary... is so high an honor that I could wish for nothing more... There is my life, and there with the help of God, I hope to die."

Serra's Dream of Martyrdom

The idealized picture, enhanced by the report that there were a thousand Christians in the region, gave way to stark realism when the Friar learnt that not an Indian had made his Easter duty. Methodically, the firebrand set about his task of bringing home the faith to these simple, unappreciative children. He dramatized the feasts of the liturgical year, he led their songs and gradually they came to realize the beautiful depth

and the dizzying heights of God's love. Eight full years he labored selflessly in that remote region. When he was summoned from the mountain fastnesses, in 1759, he could report to his superiors that not a single native remained unbaptized in the district, which now boasted five missions, ambitious in size and of sturdy yet ornate construction.

If his heart had sung as he first wended his way to Santiago de Jalpan, his feet were winged with expectancy as he departed. Two Franciscans had recently been killed in Texas. Serra was being summoned to replace one of them. For the second time in his life, it seemed as though his dream of martyrdom might find fulfillment. Gladly, therefore, he parted from the little flock with which he had become enamored. As he stretched out his eager arms to clutch the crown of death for Christ, it was snatched from his reach. His appointment had been reconsidered and he was now commissioned to preach missions to the faithful in Mexico.

Again, it was a strenuous apostolate: travel that was perilous and uncomfortable, arduous preaching that sapped his energy, private interviews to settle knotty problems and lengthy hours in the confessional, dispensing God's tireless mercy. It was arduous work, but then the holy Padre was once to write that he had stricken the word "rest" from his vocabulary for the duration of his earthly existence.

Even heaven accepted the Friar's surrender of rest and leisure; for now,

at the age of fifty-five, after seventeen laborious years of service in New Spain, his responsibilities were increased. In 1767, the King of Spain banished the Jesuits from his domains; other religious orders were to take over the administration of their enterprises. The thirteen missions of Baja (Lower) California were assigned to the Franciscans of San Fernando College. The presidency over the territory and the fifteen missionaries was confided to Padre Junipero Serra.

Scarcely had the greying Franciscan taken over this administration, when his life's great ambition, that of opening a new territory, found unexpected opportunity: Don José de Galvez invited Serra to join him in planning the occupation of Alta (Upper) California. Although Spain had been interested for some two hundred and twenty-five years in the area covered by the modern state of California, there had been no compelling incentive to prompt the colonizing of that land. Now, however, because the Russian Bear was stalking across the top of the world threatening to found fur settlements along the western slope of North America, Charles III commanded his viceroy to act. Taking the key points that had been indicated by Juan Rodríguez Cabrillo in 1542 and, by Sebastian Vizcaino in 1602, Serra and Gálvez decided upon three initial missions: San Diego de Alcalá, San Carlos de Borromeo at Monterey, and a third midway between the two ports.

The plans were diligently drawn,

the supplies were carefully gathered and the first expeditions to occupy Upper California set out by land and sea in 1769. Sanguine expectations were abruptly chilled at the rendezvous in San Diego, where it was learned that the sea expedition had met all but disaster during the voyage. Portolá's trek to Monterey encountered disappointment, when the explorers failed to recognize the bay that had so thrilled Vizcaino. Meanwhile, the supply ship, San Antonio, had not put into San Diego. The occupation, begun amid such enthusiasm, appeared doomed to dismal failure, as the discouraged commander announced that the project would have to be abandoned and the colonists must return to Mexico. Serra was determined that this opportunity to win California to Christ would not slip through his fingers. He begged Portolá to allow time for a novena to Saint Joseph, in order that Providence might save the expedition which had already cost so much in lives and energy. On March 19, 1769, San Antonio hove into sight and California's occupation was guaranteed a Spanish culture and a Catholic civilization.

The next fourteen years proved strenuous but rewarding. A rugged wilderness was transformed into habitable territory, with ever expanding plans so that eventually the sentinels along *el camino real* would stand a day's journey apart. Is it surprising that when Serra met Garcés in 1784, these kindred souls should already

envison the second chain of missions eastwards?

Yes, Junipero Serra would be at home in the California of 1952. The speeding traffic might startle him; the senseless preoccupation for the riches of this world might perplex him, but there would be so much with which he is familiar that he would adjust his mentality to the twentieth century. The missions, some founded with his own hands, others the fruition of his far-reaching plans, would bring tears to his soulful eyes. The litany his heart had sung, and which he began to transcribe, is still inscribed on the scroll which is the modern state of California. The sea and the mountains, the birds and the flowers, which had afforded him true Franciscan joy and at-home-ness in the universe, are still here in their varied beauty and harmony. The Indians have dwindled in numbers, but their traditions are the harvest of Serra's sowing.

The principal apostolate now is among the natives who have supplanted the aborigines: millions of Americans to be held in Christ's loving embrace; millions more who know not the Liege-Lord, Whom this romantic soul served so chivalrously. Serra would look around, thank God for the opportunity at hand and begin where he had left off; for his own prophetic words would ring in his ears: "There the crosses remain, but there is not one to explain their meaning to these poor people, but I hope in God that this will be done in time."

Many Memorials To His Name

El Viejo, however, would be embarrassed to find himself in such constant demand. He had once written: "...there is no reason why my name should be mentioned, except for the blunders I may have committed in doing the work." But today, he would hear his name mentioned reverently by every child who has reached the fourth grade of grammar school. He would read the familiar word SERRA, emblazoned from one end of the Golden State to the other: streets bear his name, and buildings are identified by his title; high schools, theaters and a retreat house are dedicated to his memory; his picture is found in public buildings and class rooms, his likeness has been woven into stained-glass windows, while statues stand in public parks and on thoroughfares teeming with traffic. He would no doubt be interested in the modern growth of the United States and be overjoyed to learn that the State of his apostolate was the thirty-first to enter the Union. He would be speechless, however, to discover that his grateful fellow citizens in California had chosen him as one of their two favorite sons to stand in Statuary Hall of the Nation's Capitol.

The humble, self-effacing Friar would receive his greatest shock in picturesque Santa Barbara. He would be impatient to visit that Queen of all the Missions; for he had employed all his powers of persuasion and exerted all his influence, urging its

foundation. His joy would be full when he learned that here the corridors have felt uninterruptedly the familiar tread of sandaled feet and that in this, California's first cathedral, the sanctuary lamp has never burnt out. Here is the mother house whence developed the Franciscan Province of California—which he had prophesied—dedicated to his beloved Santa Bárbara. He would explore every nook and cranny with joy until, with something of terror, he opened the files labeled "Junipero Serra documents" and entered the special office, designated "Serra Cause." He would drop into a chair and with unwilling ears would learn of the diligent labor and careful scholarship that his Franciscan brethren have expended to bring him to the honors of the altar. He would shake his head incredulously as he was informed that for ten years and longer, the lengthy preparation of the most complicated legal process has been going on in order that some day Christ's Vicar may trace around his head the halo of a canonized Saint.

That blessed day of Serra's glorification can best be hastened by incessant prayer that God may deign to effect the signs and wonders which will indubitably point out California's Apostle as a Saint in glory. The ever increasing number of favors, attributed to Junipero's intercession, are encouraging indications that persevering prayer is being answered.