



**St. Junípero Serra**

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1713–1784 • Spain

Junípero Serra joined the Franciscan friars at the young age of seventeen and later became a priest. He was so intelligent that everyone thought he was going to be an important teacher in Spain. But in his heart, there was something else that he wanted to do: he wanted to be a missionary. There were stories about missionaries teaching the Good News of Jesus to those who had never heard of Him. He thought of all those peoples in the New World—those of North and South America—who had never heard of Jesus and had never been baptized. He wanted to bring the love of Jesus to them.

Fr. Junípero sailed with a group of Franciscans to Mexico. He landed at Veracruz and needed to travel nearly 250 miles to get to Mexico City. The city officials in Veracruz gave the Franciscans horses to make the journey. But Junípero Serra would not take a horse. He chose to go on foot, carrying only a prayer book, to offer his long trip as a sacrifice to God.

On the road, a mosquito bit Junípero Serra's foot, which then became infected. This infection made his journey very hard, and his foot would bother him for the rest of his life. Finally, he reached Mexico City and there preached to the Native Americans for sixteen years.

Fr. Junípero Serra knew that God wanted him to preach the Good News about Jesus even farther west. He traveled to California (this time Fr. Junípero rode on a horse) and founded the Spanish missions. The missions were congregations where the Franciscans told the Native Americans about the Good News that God loved them and that Jesus died for them to save them from their sins.

Not all the Native Americans liked having the Franciscans telling them what to do. And sometimes the Spanish soldiers at the missions did not treat the Native Americans well. Fr. Junípero Serra always defended the Native Americans from the soldiers. Everything he did was out of love. He preached the Faith to the Native Americans because he wanted them to be in heaven with Jesus forever.

Fr. Junípero founded nine missions all over California and spread the Gospel to many who had never heard of Jesus before. He served his beloved Native Americans until he died a holy death.

St. Junípero Serra, help me to do everything out of love for God!