

Highway to Holiness

'Let us make good use of our time. Our steps must conform to God's call on our lives; let us work out our salvation with fear and trembling and with burning love and zeal for the salvation of our neighbors.' St. Junipero Serra

I write this from Mission San Gabriel, perhaps the most excellent of the Franciscan churches founded by Father Serra who introduced Christianity to California in the mid-eighteenth century. He endured unfathomable hardships to blaze a highway of holiness from San Diego to San Francisco: he did so by planting a series of outposts, like stations in a relay that could sustain evangelization and discipleship of the native peoples of California up and down the west coast.

Mission San Gabriel, not far from one of our most fruitful Living Waters groups at HROCK Church in Pasadena and closer still to our excellent regional leader Brian Barlow and family, was especially strategic for this 'highway'. Its fruitfulness supplied many of the needs of the other 11 missions; its success consoled Serra during the last 25 years of his good hard life.

I find a small niche on the side of the original chapel of Mission San Gabriel, the oldest standing building in Southern California, and marveled that Mass has been held in this sanctuary every day since 1771. From my roost I can see grapevines and orange trees which the Spanish padres introduced to CA in the ground of this mission, thus laying the base for the state's rich agricultural future.

I reflect on Serra's life as I await a prayer gathering with our Living Waters leaders from Southern California. We shall pray for the defeat of AB2943, still pending in the state senate. We shall welcome Brian and Pastor Gwen from HROCK back from Sacramento where they have spent the day testifying of transformation before leaders who are unsure; these two are heroes, like many today who Jesus is summoning to declare His highway of holiness throughout California.

Of course we shall pray that the bill will die. Most importantly, we pray that the Church rise and shine in glorious unity—each faith community a station in a relay that restores dignity to the fractured.

Like Serra and his padres, our hope is sure and we shall not back down. Serra traveled 24000 miles over land and sea with an ulcerated foot in the last decades of his life to plant the cross in CA. We shall do the same. We like Him shall try to look more for Jesus' interests than for our own (Phil. 2:21).

Serra's greatest 'cross' was the state—government authority driven by greed and pride that continually thwarted his spiritual plans. He especially hated the mistreatment of his charges--the native peoples—by Spanish soldiers who abused them and so defiled God's will for them. Native uprisings against Serra and the padres were provoked by military abuses, not religious ones. He

grieved then; we grieve now for the abuse that AB2943 inflicts upon the most vulnerable.

Like Serra, we shall not lose sight of the prize, which is the saving of many lives. We fight for wounded lives to have a fighting chance to know the Healer, the One who unites us with the good of our gendered selves and guides us lovingly as we return to the Father in our disordered affections and choose to walk the highway to holiness, seeking through grace to unite our thoughts with God's best for us.

Amid his multiple afflictions, Serra wrote: 'All things are sweet to a lover.' He was espoused to Jesus and like the leader of his order, St. Francis, he kept his eyes and heart fixed on Christ Crucified. I enter now into the old sanctuary and am most drawn to the beautiful image of Francis above the altar gazing with affection upon the small crucifix in his hands. All for love! We can do all things through love, drawing continually from its Source.

Nothing shall stop us. Jesus invites each one of us to become and to declare the way He makes for every willing soul to discover their place among the beloved. Serra died happy, surrounded by the saints. He poured out his life to forge a highway of holiness on which the first Californians—over 6000 persons—were baptized and confirmed as Christians. We follow him today in the Spirit of St. Francis, the Holy Spirit who makes all things sweet for those who walk in Christ.

'And a highway will be there, it shall be called the Way of Holiness...' (IS 35:8)