



DIOCESE OF SACRAMENTO

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OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

July 5, 2020

Statement of Bishop Jaime Soto on Tearing Down of St. Junipero Serra Statue in Capitol Park

On Saturday evening, the statue of St. Junipero Serra was defaced and torn down from its place in Capitol Park. The group's actions may have been meant to draw attention to the sorrowful, angry memories over California's past, but this act of vandalism does little to build the future.


There is no question that California's indigenous people endured great suffering during the colonial period and then later faced the horror of government-sanctioned genocide under the nascent State of California. This legacy is heartbreaking. Yet, it is also true that while Fr. Serra worked under this colonial system, he denounced its evils and worked to protect the dignity of native peoples. His holiness as a missionary should not be measured by his own failures to stop the exploitation or even his own personal faults. Holiness, in the end, is more a result of God's grace and our willingness to cooperate with His mercy. Archbishop Gomez's letter of July 1st illustrates some of the Franciscan friar's efforts to do so: <https://angelusnews.com/voices/letter-to-the-faithful-for-the-memorial-of-st-junipero-serra/>

Understanding the efforts of Fr. Serra to bring light into the bitter, bleak darkness of colonial ambition is the difficult task of history. So is the present arduous work to chart the future with hope. The strenuous labor of overcoming the plague of racism should not be toppled by nocturnal looting. Dialogue should not abdicate to vandalism. Nor should these unnerving episodes distract us from the duties of justice and charity upon which a better California can be built.

On this Fourth of July weekend, we are reminded that our common cause is to be a living monument to those words carved into the American soul, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness."

All monuments are imperfect as are our efforts to live up to America's founding ideals. The primary task is to build up our community, not tear it down.

Respectfully,



+Jaime Soto
Bishop of Sacramento