

**Homily Outline for Serra Club of Madison County 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Mass**  
**Feast of Ss. Simon & Jude, Apostles**  
**St. Ambrose Church**  
**Godfrey, Illinois**  
**October 28, 2020**

**† Most Reverend Thomas John Paprocki**  
**Bishop of Springfield in Illinois**

I. History of Serra Club of Madison County Illinois per Deacon Bill Kessler

- A. An unplanned encounter in a patient's room at Saint Anthony's Health Center some 15 years ago when Bob and Jeanne Walters, Fr. John Titus and Deacon Bill Kessler were together ostensibly for a friendly visit. Out of the visit came the beginnings of what would become the Serra Club of Madison County.
- B. Bob and Jeanne had long desired that, like the Belleville Serra Club, that our Diocese would also have a group that could come together and pray for, encourage and work for vocations to the priesthood and consecrated life.
- C. Out of that meeting and others that would follow, the members of various local parishes gathered in prayer to first get to know each other and to accept the reality that there was a vocation crisis. Some of them had 3 or 4 priests and religious sisters staffing their School; others had but one very busy priest.
- D. Eventually they came to understand that they were all part of the larger Church and that we were called to encourage young people to consider serving God in priesthood or consecrated life.
- E. With monthly Mass initially at Saint Anthony Hospital, then Saint Clare, and now St. Ambrose, the Serra Club of Madison County has become a faith community that celebrated being called to do this important work of the Church, supporting the seminarians of our Diocese, the Sisters of St. Francis of the Martyr St. George, the Oblates of the Virgin Mary, the Oblates of Mary Immaculate and FOCUS Missionaries.
- F. About 5 years ago, Deacon Bill, as Spiritual Director, made preparation for an annual Day of Recollection for our members. To date we have had 5 such days just before Holy Week. Fr. Tom Donovan has kindly led these days of spiritual renewal with multiple reflections, Mass, and the Sacrament of Reconciliation.
- G. These Recollection days are fully subscribed and serve as an invitation to others to come and learn of the work of Serra, which has resulted in some new members.
- H. In addition, the Serra Club of Madison County has held vocations sessions at most of the parish schools and at Marquette and Fr. McGivney High Schools. Priests, sisters, novices, postulants, and deacons have shared their stories of serving Our Lord in His Church.

- I. The Serra Club of Madison County makes annual contributions to various religious institutes and to our diocese for our seminarian education, for which I am truly grateful.
- J. Convinced that the Fr. Tolton story was a powerful vocation story, through the efforts of the local parishes and Marquette High School, the play telling the life of Father Tolton was provided and was celebrated during Catholic Schools week last year.
- K. Some of the initial membership have been called home to God, but the gift of their labors continues in the 25 members of our Serra Club.

## II. Serra International

- A. Serrans are Catholic lay men and women who vigorously respond to the call to promote and support vocations to the ministerial priesthood and consecrated life in the Catholic Church.
- B. Since Serra International's founding in 1935 in Seattle, over 1,100 Serra clubs have been chartered in 46 countries around the world. Today, Serra's global lay vocations apostolate is made strong by over 20,000 members.
- C. Members of Serra are lay Catholic men and women of all ages and backgrounds who ensure the future of our Church by creating a "culture of vocations."
- D. Their mission is three-fold:
  - 1. Promote and support vocations to the ministerial priesthood of the Catholic Church as a particular vocation of service and support priests in their sacred ministry;
  - 2. Encourage and promote vocations to the consecrated life in the Catholic Church; and
  - 3. Assist members to recognize and respond, each in his own life, to God's call to holiness in Jesus Christ, through the Holy Spirit.
- E. What is a "culture of vocations"?
  - 1. A culture of vocations is an attitude and social environment which uplifts and promotes vocations to the Catholic priesthood and religious life.
  - 2. A culture of vocations aims to enforce the idea that while the priesthood and religious life are holy and mysterious callings from God, they are as valuable, vibrant and celebrated lifestyle choices as any other career or profession.
- F. How do Serra clubs support and encourage this culture? Serran vocation activities broadly fall into the following categories:
  - 1. Awareness: Serrans coordinate events and programs that raise community awareness of the gifts of religious life.
  - 2. Affirmation: In ways big and small, Serrans affirm the lives and works of those who have already answered the call to religious life.

3. Invitation: Serrans are not afraid to ask: "Have you ever considered a calling to the religious life?"
4. Prayer: St. Pope John Paul II said, "Prayer moves the heart of God." The foundation of all Serran efforts is prayer for vocations.

### III. Who was our Patron, Saint Junípero Serra?

- A. Not only because of his place in American history as the founder of a chain of missions in Mexico and California, but also because of his life of priestly zeal and heroic virtue, Father Junípero Serra, OFM, was chosen as the patron of our apostolate.
- B. This gifted Franciscan friar had occupied the Duns Scotus chair of philosophy in Mallorca, Spain, until he felt the call to commit himself further to the service of Christ as a missionary in the New World. Departing from Cadiz, Spain, in 1748, he made the perilous crossing of the Atlantic Ocean in a small ship, landing at Veracruz on the southern shore of the Gulf of Mexico. From there, he journeyed on foot to Mexico City, where tradition has it that he prayed at the church built over the famous site where the Virgin of Guadalupe appeared to St. Juan Diego in 1531.
- C. Junípero Serra was transferred to the Sierra Gorda region at his own request, and was appointed President of the Sierra Gorda missions in 1751.
- D. After nine years, he was asked to undertake his missionary work on the Pacific coast of the North American continent, much of the time suffering with an ulcerated leg.
- E. Fr. Serra and his fellow Franciscan friars eventually established a chain of missions in Alta California and worked tirelessly to bring Christ to the indigenous peoples.
- F. After a lengthy period of missionary activity, Fr. Serra died in 1784 at the San Carlos Borromeo de Carmelo Mission, in Carmel, California, U.S.A. his favorite mission.
- G. Despite the fact that, during his time as a missionary, Father Serra had very little involvement with promoting priestly vocations, today it can only be considered providential that a holy priest who demonstrated such zeal for the salvation of souls would be chosen as the patron of Serra International's global vocations apostolate, considering that the primary focus of its work is fostering and promoting vocations to the holy priesthood and to supporting the sacred ministry of priests, those who spend and consume themselves for the salvation of souls.
- H. Father Junípero Serra attained sainthood when he was canonized by His Holiness Pope Francis on Sept. 23, 2015, in Washington, D.C.

- IV. Archbishop Cordileone of San Francisco calls for prosecution of “small, violent mob” who desecrated statue of St. *Junípero* Serra statue on Mission Church Property.
- A. “There is no question that the indigenous peoples of our continent suffered under Europeans who came here and their descendants, especially after the mission era ended and California entered into the United States. But Fr. Serra is the wrong symbol of those who wish to address or redress this grievance. Fr. Serra and his fellow Franciscans renounced all worldly pursuits to give their lives to serving the native peoples and so protected them from the abuses of their fellow Spaniards. To look to Fr. Serra as the icon of oppression of the Indians is akin to doing the same with Abraham Lincoln and the institution of slavery in the United States.
  - B. “Yes, there are deep, lingering scars from this oppression that need to be healed, but vilifying a great man who sacrificed to protect the rights of the oppressed is not how we achieve this. Recognition of the truth must necessarily precede healing and reconciliation. Attacking the symbols of faith of millions of Catholics, who are as diverse in ethnicity as any faith in America, is counterproductive. It’s also simply wrong.”
- V. Archbishop Jose Gomez of Los Angeles
- A. “The real St. Junípero fought a colonial system where natives were regarded as 'barbarians' and 'savages,' whose only value was to serve the appetites of the white man. For St. Junípero, this colonial ideology was a blasphemy against the God who has 'created (all men and women) and redeemed them with the most precious blood of his Son.'
  - B. “He lived and worked alongside native peoples and spent his whole career defending their humanity and protesting crimes and indignities committed against them.”
  - C. “For St. Junipero, the natives were not just powerless victims of colonial brutality. In his letters, he describes their 'gentleness and peaceful dispositions,' he celebrates their creativity and knowledge; he remembers little acts of kindness and generosity, even the sweet sound of their voices as they sang.
  - D. “He learned their languages and their ancient customs and ways. St. Junipero came not to conquer; he came to be a brother. 'We have all come here and remained here for the sole purpose of their well-being and salvation,' he once wrote. ‘And I believe everyone realizes we love them.’”
- VI. We learn about vocation work from today’s Feast of the Apostles Simon & Jude.
- A. Jesus prayed before He called them.
  - B. They developed a deep friendship with the Lord.
  - C. They labored in obscurity.

VII. May God give us this grace. Amen.