



The Holy See

EUCCHARISTIC CELEBRATION AT THE PONTIFICAL NORTH AMERICAN COLLEGE

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS

Janiculum Hill, Rome

Saturday, 2 May 2015

[Multimedia]

“I have set you to be a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth” (Acts 13:47; cf. Is 49:6). These words of the Lord, in the passage from the Acts of the Apostles which we have just heard, show us the missionary nature of the Church, sent by Jesus to go out and proclaim the Gospel. The disciples experienced this from the first moment when, after the persecution broke out, they left Jerusalem (cf. Acts 8: 1-3). This was true also for the many missionaries who brought the Gospel to the New World and, at the same time, defended the indigenous peoples against abuses by the colonizers. Among these missionaries was Friar Junípero; his work of evangelization reminds us of the first “12 Franciscan apostles” who were pioneers of the Christian faith in Mexico. He ushered in a new springtime of evangelization in those immense territories, extending from Florida to California, which, in the previous 200 years, had been reached by missionaries from Spain. This was long before the pilgrims of the Mayflower reached the North Atlantic coast. There are three key aspects to the life and example of Friar Junípero: his missionary zeal, his Marian devotion and his witness of holiness.

First of all, he was *a tireless missionary*. What made Friar Junípero leave his home and country, his family, university chair and Franciscan community in Mallorca to go to the ends of the earth? Certainly, it was the desire to proclaim the Gospel *ad gentes*, that heartfelt impulse which seeks to share with those farthest away the gift of encountering Christ: a gift that he had first received and experienced in all its truth and beauty. Like Paul and Barnabas, like the disciples in Antioch and in all of Judea, he was filled with joy and the Holy Spirit in spreading the word of the Lord. Such zeal

excites us, it challenges us! These missionary disciples who have encountered Jesus, the Son of God, who have come to know him through his merciful Father, moved by the grace of the Holy Spirit, went out to all the geographical, social and existential peripheries, to bear witness to charity. They challenge us! Sometimes we stop and thoughtfully examine their strengths and, above all, their weaknesses and their shortcomings. But I wonder if today we are able to respond with the same generosity and courage to the call of God, who invites us to leave everything in order to worship him, to follow him, to rediscover him in the face of the poor, to proclaim him to those who have not known Christ and, therefore, have not experienced the embrace of his mercy. Friar Junípero's witness calls upon us to get involved, personally, in the mission to the whole continent, which finds its roots in *Evangelii Gaudium*.

Secondly, Friar Junípero *entrusted his missionary activity to the Blessed Virgin Mary*. We know that before leaving for California, he wanted to consecrate his life to Our Lady of Guadalupe and to ask her for the grace to open the hearts of the colonizers and indigenous peoples, for the mission he was about to begin. In this prayer we can still see this humble brother kneeling in front of the "Mother of the true God", the *Morenita*, who brought her Son to the New World. The image of Our Lady of Guadalupe was and has been present in the 21 missions that Friar Junípero founded along the coast of California. Since then, Our Lady of Guadalupe has become, in fact, the Patroness of the whole American continent. You cannot separate her from the hearts of the American people. She represents our shared roots in this land, the shared roots of this continent. Indeed, today's mission to the continent is entrusted to her, the first, holy missionary disciple, a constant presence and companion, our source of comfort and hope. For she always hears and protects her American children.

Thirdly, brothers and sisters, let us contemplate the *witness of holiness* given by Friar Junípero. He was one of the founding fathers of the United States, a saintly example of the Church's universality and special patron of the Hispanic people of the country. In this way may all Americans rediscover their own dignity, and unite themselves ever more closely to Christ and his Church.

With the universal communion of saints and, in particular, with the assembly of American saints, may Friar Junípero Serra accompany us and intercede for us, along with the many other holy men and women who have distinguished themselves through their various charisms:

— contemplatives like Rose of Lima, Mariana of Quito and Teresita de los Andes;

— pastors who bear the scent of Christ and of his sheep, such as Toribio de Mogrovejo, Francois de Laval, and Rafael Guizar Valencia;

— humble workers in the vineyard of the Lord, like Juan Diego and Kateri Tekakwitha;

— servants of the suffering and the marginalized, like Peter Claver, Martín de Porres, Damian of Molokai, Alberto Hurtado and Rose Philippine Duchesne;

— founders of communities consecrated to the service of God and of the poorest, like Frances Cabrini, Elizabeth Ann Seton and Katharine Drexel;

— tireless missionaries, such as Friar Francisco Solano, José de Anchieta, Alonso de Barzana, Maria Antonia de Paz y Figueroa and Jose Gabriel del Rosario Brochero;

— martyrs like Roque Gonzalez, Miguel Pro and Oscar Arnulfo Romero;

and so many other saints and martyrs, whom I do not mention here, but who pray before the Lord for their brothers and sisters who are still pilgrims in those lands.

May a powerful gust of holiness sweep through all the Americas during the coming Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy! Confident in Jesus' promise, which we heard today in the Gospel, we ask God for this special outpouring of the Holy Spirit. There was so much holiness, so much holiness planted in America!

We ask the Risen Jesus, Lord of all ages, that the life of our American continent may be rooted ever more deeply in the Gospel it has received; that Christ may be ever more present in the lives of individuals, families, peoples and nations, for the greater glory of God. We pray too that this glory may be manifested in the culture of life, brotherhood, solidarity, peace and justice, with a preferential and concrete love for the poor, through the witness of Christians of various confessions and communities, together with believers of other religious traditions, and people of upright conscience and good will. Lord Jesus, we are merely your missionary disciples, your humble co-workers so that your Kingdom may come!

With this heartfelt prayer, I ask Our Lady of Guadalupe, Friar Junípero and all the American saints to lead me and guide me during my approaching apostolic journeys to South America and North America. I ask all of you to keep this intention in your prayers, and to continue to pray for me. Amen.

FINAL GREETING

I would like to thank you from my heart for your invitation and the welcome I received in the Pontifical North American College. I greet with great affection the Rector, all those who reside here, the North American priests who work in the Roman Curia, who study in Rome or who are spending their sabbatical year in this place.

I am very grateful to the cardinals and bishops who concelebrated with me and, in a special way, I would like to express my warmest gratitude for the presence of Archbishop Joseph Edward Kurtz, President of the Bishops' Conference of the United States, and Archbishop José Horacio Gómez of Los Angeles.

This encounter, in your College and around the Eucharistic table, is a beautiful and meaningful preamble to my Apostolic Journey to the United States of America.