



Archbishop Cordileone calls for prosecution of “small, violent mob” who desecrated St. Junipero Serra statue on Mission Church property

Most Rev. Salvatore J. Cordileone

October 13, 2020

On Monday, October 12, 2020, a peaceful protest was held at St. Rafael Mission Church in San Rafael, at the site of a statue of St. Junipero Serra. The peaceful protest became violent, resulting in the desecration and vandalism of the statue. Archbishop Cordileone released the following statement in reaction to this incident:

“Once again, this time at St. Raphael Parish, a statue of St. Junípero Serra was mindlessly defaced and toppled by a small, violent mob. This kind of behavior has no place in any civilized society. While the police have thankfully arrested five of the perpetrators, what happens next is crucial, for if these are treated as small property crimes, it misses the point: the symbols of our faith are now under attack not only on public property, but now on our own property and even inside of our churches. We cannot allow a small unelected group of lawbreakers to decide what sacred symbols we Catholics or other believers may display and use to foster our faith. This must stop.

“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.

“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.”

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