

Bl. Junipero Serra sainthood cause just one miracle away

By Michele Jurich

Oakland, Calif., Mar 5, 2011 ([CNA](#)).- It's going to take a miracle for Blessed Father Junipero Serra, founder of the California missions, to become a saint.

And, if it were up to Andrew Galvan, curator of Old Mission Dolores, that miracle would take place right there in San Francisco. Within the walls of the mission church would be just fine.

Serra, who lived from 1713 to 1784, founded the first nine of the 21 California missions. He is buried at Mission San Carlos Borromeo in Carmel.

For Galvan, a member of the board of directors of the Junipero Serra Cause for Canonization, the journey to sainthood for the Franciscan friar has been a long one. And, for some, the fact that Galvan, who traces his heritage to a pair of native people who were baptized by missionaries and are buried in the cemetery grounds for which he is now responsible, is on Serra's side is a bit of a miracle in itself.

Galvan has assisted in the cause for sainthood since meeting Father Noel Francis Moholy at Mission San Jose in 1978. "When Father Noel found out I was a California Mission Indian descendant who liked Father Serra — gold," Galvan said.

Galvan was at the Vatican alongside Father Moholy in July 1987, as the miracle attributed to Serra — the cure of a nun suffering from lupus — was being investigated.

Galvan said when people would ask, "Isn't there a controversy about how Father Serra treated Indians?" Father Moholy would say, "Would you like to talk to my Indian adjutant?"

Galvan returned to the Vatican for the beatification on Sept. 25, 1988.

The man whose ancestry includes Ohlone, Bay Miwok, Plains Miwok, Coast Miwok and Patwin is a scholar of the missions, and notes that in many ways, the image of Serra's work with the Indians changes with scholarship.

For example, he points out how the availability of documents online and modern science helped refute one long-running contention that Serra did not have the Indians' best interests at heart. Serra's papers show he asked what was done in Spain when children were not thriving. Give them more milk to build them up, the answer came. Still, children died. Later, science would show that the

native coastal people were lactose-intolerant, something Serra could hardly have known three centuries ago.

In the cemetery at the mission, Galvan has constructed a marker to commemorate the place where Poylemja, who became Faustino at Baptism, and Jobocme, who became Obulinda, are interred. If you look at the family tree on the wall of the mission museum, you will see that they are Galvan's great-great-great-great-grandparents.

And the mission is where he also met his own protégé, Vincent Medina Jr., with whom he shares common ancestry. Medina, 24, is volunteering at the mission and is leading some tours of fourth-graders studying missions.

The man Galvan calls J. Serra is one miracle away from sainthood. And if that miracle would happen at his beloved Mission Dolores, nothing would please him more.

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