

# The Marvelous Stories & Miracles of the Missions

**Little Known Histories of the  
First Missions of California & Texas**

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## Fray Luís Jayme: First Martyr of California

Marian T. Horvat, Ph.D.



Fray Luís Melchor Jayme (1740-1775)

Fray Junípero Serra and Fray Luís Melchor Jayme, two Franciscans: One known by many, the other unknown and unrecognized; *the first*, the Father Founder of the California Missions; *the second*, the Protomartyr of California.

Fray Luís Melchor Jayme (1740-1775) and his superior Fray Junípero Serra (1713-1784) had many similarities. Both hailed from the Island of Majorca in Spain and were the sons of farmers. Both were drawn early to the religious life and joined the Franciscan Order. Both became great scholars and taught philosophy at the *Convento de San Francisco*, the Majorcan motherhouse. Both had a great devotion to Ven. Mary of Agreda and avidly read her [letter-plea for missionaries](#) to the New World.

From the College of San Fernando in Mexico City, both Friars came to evangelize the natives of Alta California. At age 55, Fray Junípero, named President of the California Missions, led the [Holy Expedition of 1769](#), which conquered for Spain the long coast of Alta, California. In the next 15 years he founded the first nine of the 21 missions.<sup>1</sup> In 1771, the 31-year-old Fray Luís Jayme set out to become pastor of Mission San Diego de Alcalá, California's first Mission, which would be his first and last assignment.

Both Friars ardently longed to give their lives as martyrs for the conversion of the native Indians. That burning flame would die with Frey Junípero at age 70 on his meager cot in Mission San Carlos Borromeo. It was Fray Jayme who won the martyr's crown at age 35 in the year 1775 at Mission

<sup>1</sup> The nine missions founded by Frey Junípero Serra: 1. (1769) Mission San Diego de Alcalá; 2. (1770) Mission San Carlos Borromeo de Carmelo; 3. (1771) Mission San Antonio de Padua; 4. (1771) Mission San Gabriel; 5. (1772) Mission San Luis Obispo de Tolosa; 6. (1776) Mission San Francisco de Asís (Mission Dolores); 7. (1776) Mission San Juan Capistrano; 8. (1777) Mission Santa Clara de Asís; 9. (1782) Mission San Buenaventura.

San Diego, where he was brutally massacred by rebellious Indians stirred up by pagan shamans, who had a special hatred for the priests.

### Fray Jayme's first assignment

The Yuman peoples of San Diego, where Fray Luís and his assistant Fray Vincente Fuster were stationed in 1771, were the most treacherous and untrustworthy of all the coastal tribes. Notwithstanding, Friar Luís was well received by the Mission natives; he had a facility for language and had soon mastered the local Kumeyaay tongue and compiled a polyglot Catholic catechism.



The early San Diego Mission rebuilt after the attack;  
below, the *Presidio* looking at the San Diego Bay



His gentle nature and kindly demeanor won the trust of the natives as he greeted each one with his customary salutation “*Amar a Dios, hijos!*” (Love God, my children!). By 1775, 400 Indians had already been baptized, which raised the fury of the jealous pagan shamans (witchdoctors), who were seeking an opportunity to be free of the missionary presence.

In 1774, Fray Luís Jayme, realizing that the water was scarce at the *Presidio* (fort) and the influence of the soldiers disastrous to the new converts, had received permission from Fr. Junípero to move the Mission church quarters seven miles west to its present-day site. The hastily constructed Mission was particularly vulnerable to attack because, although it was only about seven miles from the *Presidio*, it lacked the usual protection of a palisade wall, essential

for defense in case of an Indian attack.

Because the Mission was still too poor to house and feed all the converted Indians at the mission itself, many neophytes had to live in the nearby *rancherías* (native villages) with the still pagan families. In this less than ideal situation, many of these neophyteconverts resumed their bad customs and pagan practices.

### Trouble brewing at San Diego Mission

After many exasperating delays, it had finally been decided to found Mission San Juan Capistrano – a halfway point between Mission San Diego and Mission San Gabriel. In October 1775,

a party of missionaries and soldiers under the command of Lieutenant José Francisco Ortega set out to raise the Cross and begin the construction of the chapel and dwellings for the 7<sup>th</sup> Mission of Alta California.

Lt. Ortega left behind only a Corporal commanding three soldiers to guard Mission San Diego. With them were two youths, the son and the nephew of Ortega, two blacksmiths, a carpenter, and the two Padres, Fray Jayme and Fray Fuster. There were, then, only 13 Spaniards residing at the Mission, two of whom were boys, and one of the blacksmiths was sick and confined to bed.



The raising of the Cross at the new mission site in San Juan Capistrano

On October 3, the vigil of the feast of St. Francis, a festive air permeated the Mission, where 60 Indians would receive Baptism, a ceremony that incited the fury of Satan and his minions, the witchdoctors. These shamans, who were keenly aware that their influence was rapidly diminishing due to the apostolic zeal of the missionaries, were seeking an opportunity to be rid of their enemy. Two of the native chiefs, Carlos and Francisco, had recently been punished for a theft. Playing on their resentment and anger, the jealous shamans encouraged the disgruntled chiefs to leave the Mission and enter a plot of revolt.

On that vigil night of October 3, the two neophyte chiefs, joined by five other Indians of rank, stealthily slipped away from the Mission. Then, throughout that month they went from one pagan village to another, stirring up anger among the different Yuman tribes with lies and false accusations. For example, a large group of the Las Choyas joined the revolt because the Christians there had been reprehended for participating in a pagan dance, and the rebel chiefs fanned their still hot resentment for the punishment they had received.

In passing, let us note a well-known fact at play here: Revolution never comes from the people. It is plotted by secret forces and directed by disgruntled leaders, who stir up resentments and play on the passions of the people.

The plan was to attack the Mission first to kill the missionaries and the handful of soldiers left to guard it, and then proceed to the *Presidio*, where a part of the rebellious warriors were stationed to stop the soldiers, should they come to the aid of the Mission during the attack.

### **The attack on the Mission**

At about 1:30 on the night of the full moon of November 4, 1775, around 600-800 native warriors from some 40 *rancherías* silently crept into the Mission compound. They first surrounded

the houses of the Christian Indians, threatening them with death should they try to warn the others. Then they plundered the church and sacristy, removing the statues and breaking open chests to snatch the coveted cassocks and stoles.

Where were the guards? In his account of the arson and massacre, Fray Fuster clearly states that “the sentinels were sound asleep.” Only when the natives, whooping and shouting, set fire to the church and nearby buildings did the commotion and crackling of flames awaken the two missionaries and the guards.

Upon seeing the danger, Fray Fuster ran to the soldier’s barracks where the guards were already firing their muskets. The carpenter Urcelino, who was sleeping in the barracks, had taken a musket to assist in the defense, but he was shortly pierced by an arrow. He cried out: “Aye! Indian who has killed me, may God forgive you!” He died five days later in a good state of soul, always pronouncing his pardon of the attacker and leaving his earthly goods to the San Diego Indians.



The enraged Indians dragged the Padre to the creek bed & brutally killed him

rows into his body, eight of which were mortal, and then pulverized his face and body with clubs and stones. They left the now unrecognizable body in the water bed.

The attack on the Mission continued through the night. At the *Presidio* the guards were also sleeping and, despite the loud cries and blazing fire, failed to awake or come to the aid of the beleaguered band at the Mission.

In his report of the assault, Fray Fuster noted the strange sleep that had overtaken the sentinel at the military post: “Without doubt, the sentinel had been sleeping, since he neither had seen the great fire, although from the *Presidio* the Mission buildings are visible, nor had even heard the

Instead of running to the barracks, Fray Luís Jayme had calmly directed his steps toward the band of enraged Indians to try to halt the attack. He greeted them with his customary salutation, “*Amar a Dios, hijos.*” But the howling natives fell upon him “like wolves upon a lamb,” as Padre Palou later wrote in his account of that night.<sup>2</sup>

They seized the Padre, dragged him to the nearby creek bed, and stripped off his garments and the relic of a Saint he wore around his neck. They shot 18 ar-

<sup>2</sup> Francisco Palau, *Life and Apostolic Labors of the Ven. Father Junipero Serra*, George Wharton James, 1913, p. 173.

gunshots so often breaking the silence of the night, although at the Mission one could hear the salute which was fired every morning at the *Presidio*.”<sup>3</sup>



Fr. Fuster called out to Our Lady for protection

First one, than another of the soldiers were wounded and put out of action. The fire was raging in the barracks, and the small group took shelter in the only partially destroyed Padres' house. Here they continued the desperate stand, while Fray Fuster ran to Fray Jayme's sleeping quarters to try to find him. He entered through the flames and found his bed empty and escaped before the burning timbers above him fell.

The flames soon forced them to flee again, this time to the partially burned adobe kitchen structure. Before the Spaniards had succeeded in barricading this opening with chests and a huge copper kettle, every man had been wounded. But Corporal Rocha continued a steady firing, with the blacksmith and wounded soldiers rapidly loading and reloading muskets passed to him.

Fray Fuster implored mercy through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin to allow them to be victorious, and promised to fast on nine Saturdays and celebrate nine holy Masses in her honor should she grant this favor.

The soldiers there also offered to fast and hear the Masses offered.

Fray Fuster recorded: "And it seems the Holy Mother sensibly heard our supplications, for many times I took burning firebrands right off the top of the powder bag."<sup>4</sup> Further, during this last stand behind the makeshift adobe walls, although the natives were only a short distance from the beleaguered group, not one of the arrows or stones touched them.<sup>5</sup>

In early dawn, a well-aimed shot from a musket suddenly sent the horde fleeing in panic, and the light of day finally appeared over the burned out Mission San Diego. The survivors rejoiced and

<sup>3</sup> Fr. Zephyrin Engelhardt, OFM, *San Diego Mission*, San Francisco: James H. Barry Co, 1920, p. 64.

<sup>4</sup> Maynard Griger, *The Life and Times of Junipero Serra*, vol. II, Washington: Academy of American Franciscan History, 1959, p. 64.

<sup>5</sup> Fr. Zephyrin Engelhardt, *San Diego Mission*, p. 66.

thanked Our Lord and His Blessed Mother for protecting their lives in the battle where they were so vastly outnumbered.

Early in the morning of November 5, Fray Fuster sent out some Indians to seek Fray Jayme. The body of the 35-year-old missionary was recovered in the dry bed of the nearby creek and borne back to the Mission. He was naked except for his drawers, and his body was pitted like a sieve from the savage blows given him. His face was so disfigured that he could only be recognized by the whiteness of his flesh under a thick crust of congealed blood and the faint remains of a tonsure.

The reaction of the Franciscan *Presidente* to the news of his confrere's death demonstrates the spirit of these early missionaries to the New World. Instead of tears and lamentations, Fray Junípero said: "Thanks be to God; now that the terrain has been irrigated by blood, the conversion of the San Diego Indians will succeed."<sup>6</sup>

That proved a prophetic statement, for this was the sole uprising, and with the years Mission San Diego, called the Mother of the Missions, came to be one of the most stable and prosperous in the Mission chain. In 1776, Padre Serra returned to the site and rebuilt the Mission, this time with a strong defensive wall. By 1797, more than 1,400 Indians had been baptized, and 55,000 acres were cultivated with vineyards, grain, fruit trees and vegetables. The Mission's livestock counted 20,000 sheep, 10,000 cattle and more than 1,000 horses and mules.

By 1834 – when the Missions were secularized and confiscated by the Mexican government – the number of baptisms at that Mission had reached 6,522.

### **An extraordinary discovery**

In his account of the massacre, Fray Serra records something extraordinary that all observed when the mangled body was found: "When he was discovered the next day, **there was not a sound spot on his body, save the consecrated hands.** These God had preserved ... in order that it might be known how zealously and nobly he had labored for the Indians who should repay him



The statue in San Juan, Majorca atop the city hall honoring the California Martyr

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 68

with such cruelty, and how he had toiled for the purpose of saving their souls and rescuing them from the gates of Hell.

“Nor do we doubt that he shed his blood willingly, in order to irrigate the vineyard of the Lord, which he had cultivated amid such hardships, and which, because of such copious irrigation, will



The martyr's remains are buried in the sanctuary;  
a candle burns continuously on the site to honor his memory



yield fruit in season by converting the remainder of the pagans who as yet persist in their wild life. This we hope from the Lord through the intercession of the venerable deceased (Fray Luís Jayme), whose soul I do not doubt is now enjoying God.”<sup>7</sup>

Fray Serra later wrote that the character and manners of Fray Jayme had never ceased to be the subject of universal praise in life and in death.<sup>8</sup>

The Fray's mangled body was taken to the *Presidio* chapel, where it was given temporary burial. When the new Mission church was completed, his body was exhumed and interred in its sanctuary. There it rested until November 12, 1813, when it was transferred to a third church. Today the remains of Fray Luís Jayme repose nearest the statue of the Blessed Virgin in a vault between the main altar and the side altar of Mission San Diego Church. One of the white stones on the cross on the floor bears his name, and a candle burns continuously there in memory of California's first Martyr.

### **An unknown hero who merits recognition**

Many pilgrims have remarked on the peace and silence that pervades the Californian Missions, portals backward in time to a more simple and stable world. An especially profound sense of transcendence rests on a site with a white stone Cross on the north site of San Diego Mission

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 64.

<sup>8</sup> M. Griger, *The Life and Times of Junípero Serra*, p. 114.

grounds, the place where California's first Martyr was taken and then dragged away to be cruelly massacred during that Indian uprising on November 5, 1775.<sup>9</sup>



The place outside the Mission grounds near the back parking lot marks where Fray Jayme was martyred

There is a sign with an inscription giving a brief history of Padre Luis Jayme, the Protomartyr of California.<sup>10</sup> But his name is relatively unknown, his intercession rarely invoked. His remains are buried in San Diego Basilica, but most Catholics pass by this holy place without recognizing his name or significance.

The village where he was born in Majorca [has paid him greater honor](#) than the paltry notice given him in the land where he shed his blood. In San Juan, Majorca, a large stone statue of the Martyr sets above the Town Centre; a monument was constructed to commemorate the bicentennial of his martyrdom, and a large painting was commissioned for the sacristy of St. John's Church where he was baptized.

Yet, from Heaven, Padre Luis Jayme regards with special attention the Missions of California, the land he evangelized and irrigated with his blood. It seems only natural that we should call upon him in these dismal days to strengthen our faith and make

<sup>9</sup> The cross commemorating California's first martyr Padre Luís Jayme is on San Diego Mission Road. [See map here.](#)

<sup>10</sup> The [inscription reads](#): Born Melchor Jayme on October 18, 1740, in the farming village of San Juan, Majorca, Spain. In 1760, he was received into the Franciscan Order and chose "Luis" as his religious name. Padre Jayme became pastor of Mission San Diego in 1771 and was instrumental in moving the Mission inland from the Presidio to the present site in August of 1774. By December of that year, a number of adobe and thatch buildings were constructed. Crops were planted and many natives joined the Mission life and were baptized as Christians.

Progress was being made until the early morning hours of November 5, 1775, when hundreds of natives from remote villages set fire to the Mission Buildings, pillaged the church and cruelly murdered Padre Jayme as he met them with his usual greeting, "*¡Amar a Dios, hijos!* - Love God, my children!"

Fray Jayme became California's first Christian martyr because of his self-sacrifice, devotion, faith and love. His remains are buried in the sanctuary of the church at Mission San Diego de Alcalá.

us intransigent against the attacks of the enemy, both within and outside the walls of the Holy Church.

Let us, then, come to know him better and tell others of his heroic life so that we might all have recourse to him in our fight to restore Christian Civilization in these neo-pagan days.



In Fray Jayme's town in San Juan, Majorca, two memorials honor the martyr: a statue atop the town's City Hall & a painting in St. John the Baptist Church

\*



*Mission San Carlos Borromeo*

**The Shining Cross Prepares the Indians  
to Accept the Gospel**

Fr. Francisco Palou

Francisco Palou was a Franciscan friar who worked closely with Fr. Junípero Serra in the missionary apostolate in California, helping with the administration of the Alta California missions and recording their early history. He completed a biography of Junípero Serra three years after Serra's death in 1784.

This excerpt from Palou's biography records one of the prodigies worked by God to open the Indians to the truths of the Catholic Faith. In this selection he records the words from the diary of Fr. Juan Crespi reporting the second land expedition to the Port of Monterey in 1770.

In 1602, explorer Sebastián Vizcaíno sailed into Monterey Bay and named it Puerto Monte-Rey. He dropped anchor on the bay in what is now Monterey and held Mass ashore under an oak tree, which he described in detail in his records.

After founding the first Mission San Diego de Alcalá, Commander Gaspar de Portolà, who had been named Governor of Alta California, accompanied by the Franciscan Fr. Juan Crespi and some soldiers and muleteers, trekked north overland from San Diego searching for Vizcaíno's Puerto Monte-Rey so that they might establish the second Mission. They left San Diego on July 14, 1769.



But the party did not find the Vizcino's enclosed "fine harbor." In December 1769, Portolà's provisions were nearly exhausted so he decided to return to San Diego. On the day of departure his men erected a cross on a little hill on the shore near Carmel, and buried beneath it a bottle with a small account of the facts of the this expedition should the vessels San

Antonio or San José pass along the coast and sight it. Today this marker is known as the Portolà-Crespi Cross.

The discouraged band returned to San Diego on January 24, 1770. Thanks to the perseverance of Fr. Serra, a new start was made in April to try once again to discover the elusive Bay. This time the expedition reached Monterey and jubilantly recognized the Bay described by the Portuguese explorer [Sebastian Viscano more than a century and a half earlier](#). The formal claiming of the land in the name of Our Lord Jesus Christ and His Catholic Majesty the King of Spain took place on June 3, 1770.

Shortly afterward Gov. Portola and Fr. Crespi set out to see what had happened to the first cross they had planted at Carmel. In his biography on Fr. Junípero, Fr. Palou records the report of Fr. Juan Crespi inscribed in his journal:

After marching about three leagues we arrived at one o'clock in the afternoon at the lagoons of salt water by the Point of Pines, toward the northeast, where on the first expedition (of 1769), a Cross had been erected.

Before making camp, the Governor, one of the soldiers and I went to inspect this Cross that had been planted earlier in order to find out if there was any sign of the arrival of the ship there. But it appeared no ship had landed there.



The Cross planted by the expedition shone at night with a brilliant light whose rays reached to the Heaven

However, we beheld the Cross surrounded on all sides by arrows and sticks with many feathered crests, which had been placed there by the pagans. There was also a string of sardines still somewhat fresh hanging from a branch by the side of the Cross; on another was a piece of meat, and at the foot of the cross there was a little pile of mussels.

All this excited great wonderment but since none could explain it, judgment was suspended.

As soon as the new converts who had been baptized could sufficiently make themselves understood in Spanish, they gave us this explanation on several occasions. They said that the first time they saw any of our people

they noticed that all of them wore on their breast a very resplendent cross. Then, when the Spaniards went away, they left behind them that large Cross by the beach.

At first the Indians were filled with such fear that they did not dare to approach so sacred an emblem. For they saw that, after the sun had set and the shades of night had come on, the Cross was shining with the bright rays of a great Light which seemed to them to keep growing until it reached up to the very Heavens.

But when they drew near it by day, these strange appearances were absent, and it was in its natural size. Thus they approached it and tried to win its favor so that it might not do them any harm. For this purpose they had brought to it and made their offerings of meat, fish and mussels.

When to their surprise it did not consume what they offered, they placed before it the offering of the arrows and the feathered crests as a sign that they wished to make peace with the Holy Cross and with the people who had put it there.

This strange declaration was repeated by several of the Indians (as I have said) on different occasions, and again in the year 1774 when the Venerable Father President Serra returned from Mexico. They told him the same story that they had told me the previous year without the slightest variation.

All of this the Servant of God communicated to His Excellency, the Viceroy, for his edification, in order to increase his fervor and to encourage him at the same time in carrying out the plans of this spiritual enterprise.

As a result of this prodigy and of many others which the Lord wrought, the conversion of the pagans has continued with all peacefulness and without the conflict of arms. Blessed be God to Whom be all glory and praise.

\*

Note: Today this cross is called the Portola-Crespi Cross, because it was planted on the overland expedition headed by Captain Gasper de Portola and Fray Juan Crespi in 1769.

The Portola-Crespi Cross and can be reached by two different hikes. **The beach route** is from the Carmel River State Beach at the intersection of Scenic and Carmelo. It is about a one mile round trip and fairly level except for the small climb to reach the site of the Cross.





The second route is from **Carmel Meadows**, which is used when the Carmel River makes it difficult to cross from the beach side. Head south on Highway 1 toward Big Sur. In less than a mile turn right onto Ribera Road in Carmel Meadows. Then in half a mile turn right onto Calla La Cruz which dead ends.

Park here and look for the entrance to a paved path that leads past a hillside of highly invasive and heavily packed ice plant intermixed with poison oak. The trail will wrap to the left and come to an "intersection" where continuing straight will take you to the rocks over

Middle Beach. Or turn right at the rock marker and continue on up the hill to the Cross.

More pictures of the hike route can be found [on this website](#).

\*

*Mission San Carlos Borromeo*

## **The Midnight Mass at Carmel**

Richard E. White

Richard D. White was born in Ireland in 1843 and came to San Francisco as a young man. A gentleman of extensive reading and culture, he became enthused about the stories and legends of the days of cavaliers and padres, and rendered many into poems, published in a small tome entitled *The Cross of Monterey* in 1882.

“The Midnight Mass at Carmel” records a legend popular among the natives of the area, and was first published in *The Monitor* in 1906 (Vol. 61, No. 18, February 10, 1906).

Of the mission church San Carlos,  
 Buildd by Carmelo’s Bay,  
 There remains an ivied ruin  
 That is crumbling fast away.  
 In its tower the owl finds shelter,  
 In its sanctuary grow  
 Rankest weeds above the earth mounds,  
 And the dead find rest below.

Still, by peasants at Carmelo,  
 Tales are told and songs are sung  
 Of Junípero the Padre  
 In the sweet Castilian tongue:  
 Telling how each year he rises  
 From his grave the Mass to say,  
 In the midnight, 'mid the ruins,  
 On the eve of Carlos’ day.<sup>11</sup>

And they tell, when aged and feeble,  
 Feeling that his end was nigh,  
 To the Mission of San Carlos  
 Padre Serra came to die;  
 And he lay upon a litter  
 That the Franciscan friars bore,  
 And he bade them rest a moment  
 At the cloister’s open door.

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<sup>11</sup> Referring to St. Charles Borromeo, patron of Mission San Carlos Borreméo de Carmelo. His feast day is November 4.

Then he gazed upon the landscape  
 That in beauty lay unrolled,  
 And he blessed the land as Francis  
 Blessed Assisi's town of old;  
 And he spoke: "A hundred Masses  
 I will say that still may rest  
 God's kindest smile forever  
 On the land that I have blessed."

Ere a Mass was celebrated  
 Good Junípero had died,  
 And they laid him in the chancel,  
 On the altar's gospel side.  
 But each year the Padre rises  
 From his grave the Mass to say,  
 In the midnight, 'mid the ruins,  
 On the eve of Carlos' day.

Then the sad souls, long years buried,  
 From their lowly graves arise,  
 And, as if doom's trump had sounded,  
 Each assumes his mortal guise;  
 And they come from San Juan's Mission,  
 From St. Francis by the bay,  
 From the Mission san Diego,  
 And the Mission San Jose.

And they came from Santa Clara,  
 And from Santa Cruz as well,  
 From the Mission of Sonoma,  
 And the Mission San Rafael.  
 From each mission Campo Santo  
 They arise and swell the line  
 That along Camino Real  
 Journey to Carmelo's shrine.

With their gaudy painted banners,  
 And their flambeaux burning bright,  
 In a long procession come they  
 Through the darkness and the night;  
 Singing hymns and swinging censers,  
 Shadowy forms - they onward pass  
 To the ivy-covered ruins,  
 To be present at the Mass.

And the grandsire, and the granddame  
 And their children march along,  
 And they know not one another  
 In that weird, unearthly throng.  
 And the youth end gentle maiden,  
 They who loved in days of yore,  
 Walk together now as strangers,  
 For the dead love nevermore.

In the church now all are gathered,  
 And not long have they to wait;  
 From his grave the Padre rises,  
 Midnight Mass to celebrate.  
 First he blesses all assembled.  
 Soldiers, Indians, acolytes;  
 Then he bows before the altar,  
 And begins the mystic rites.

When the Padre sings the Sanctus,  
 And the Host is raised on high,  
 Then the bells up in the belfry,  
 Swung by spirits, make reply;  
 And the drums roll, and the soldier  
 In the air a volley fire,  
 While the *Salutaris* rises  
 Grandly from the phantom choir.

“*Ite, Missa est,*” is spoken,  
 At the dawning of the day,  
 And the pageant strangely passes  
 From the ruins sere and gray;  
 And Junípero the Padre  
 Lying down, resumes his sleep,  
 And the tar-weeds, rank and noisome,  
 O’er his grave luxuriant creep.

And the lights upon the altar  
 And the torches cease to burn,  
 And the vestments and the banners  
 Into dust and ashes turn;  
 And the ghostly congregation  
 Cross themselves, and one by one,  
 Into thin air swiftly vanish,  
 And the Midnight Mass Is done.

*Envoy:*

Ye who doubt what here is spoken,  
And who would its truth gainsay,  
Go end watch beside the ruins  
On the eve of Carlos' day.  
And the sad souls when you see them,  
In a long procession pass,  
Be my warrant of this legend  
Of Carmelo's Midnight Mass.



*Mission San Gabriel Arcángel*

## **Our Lady Quells an Indian Uprising at Mission San Gabriel**

Fr. Francisco Palou

Fr. Francisco Palou worked closely with Fr. Junípero Serra during the establishment of the first chain of the Californian Missions in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. This excerpt from [Palou's biography](#) relates the history of the painting of *Mater Dolorosa* that quelled an Indian uprising at the founding of Mission San Gabriel Arcángel in Los Angeles.

On August 6, 1771, Fr. Junípero Serra sent out Fr. Pedro Cambon and Fr. Angel Somera, with a guard of 10 soldiers and the muleteers with the pack train of provisions from San Diego with the order to found the new *Mission San Gabriel Arcángel*, the 4th in the chain of 21. The following report is from the biography on Padre Junípero written by one of his closest companion friars Fr. Francisco Palou.

They traveled in a northerly direction, following the route of the first Holy Expedition of 1769 led by Governor Portolá.

After traveling about 40 leagues (120 miles) they arrived at the *Rio de los Temblores* (River of the Earthquakes) which had been so named since the days of the First Expedition. Later the soldiers began to call that river Rio de Santa Ana because they had recently celebrated St. Anne's Day, and it is known as the Santa Ana River to this day.

When the group was deciding on the choice of a site, a numerous band of pagans, all armed and led by two chiefs, made its appearance.

With blood-curdling war cries, they attempted to impede the mission's founding.

The Fathers greatly feared that a battle was imminent that would surely result in the death of not a few. Then one of them brought forth a canvas on which was painted the image of *La Dolorosa* (Our Lady of Sorrows) and held it up in view of the barbarians.

No sooner was this done than that fierce band were conquered by that beautiful image. They threw down their bows and arrows, and the two chiefs came running hastily forward. The two chiefs placed at the feet of the Sovereign Queen the beads and trinkets they wore about their



Mission San Gabriel with its Moorish capped buttresses, founded on September 8, 1771

necks as gifts of their great esteem. Thereby they showed they wanted to be at peace with our company.



The Indians saw the image, threw down their weapons & offered her beads & trinkets

natives flocked to see it.

Since they could not come into the enclosure, excluded by the stockade, they called the Fathers, and the women even stuck their breasts in between the posts of the enclosure safeguarding the image of the Blessed Virgin and Child [the life-size statue of Our Lady of Bethlehem], signifying in this vivid manner that they came to give milk to that tender and beautiful Child in possession of the Fathers.

Now then, the sight of the image of Our Lady of Sorrows produced a wonderful change on the Tongva Indians surrounding the Mission of San Gabriel. They came time and again to visit the Friars, nor could they find sufficient means to show their happiness that the Fathers had come to live among them. The Friars tried to reciprocate with expressions of good will and with gifts. Thus were the Tongva Indians conquered by that beautiful image of Our Lady displayed to them by the Spaniards.

They also called together the Indians of the nearby villages; thus an ever-growing number of men, women and children came to see the Most Holy Virgin. They came bearing various seeds, which they placed at the feet of the Most Blessed Lady, thinking she would consume them as other humans did.

[The date this image of Our Lady was unfurled to halt the Tongva attack on the missionaries was August 15, 1771, the Feast of the Assumption.]

Something similar happened with the pagan women at the Mission of San Diego after its inhabitants had been pacified. The Indians were shown another image of the Virgin Mary [the statue of Our Lady of Bethlehem] with the Infant Jesus in her arms that remained in the San Diego Mission one year until the founding of the Monterey Mission. The news spread to near-by villages and the

The Fathers proceeded to explore the whole wide plain and began the Mission in the place which they considered most suitable, using the same ceremonies used in the founding of the other Missions.

The first Mass was celebrated under a little shelter made of branches on the feast of the Nativity of Our Lady, the 8<sup>th</sup> of September, 1771. On the next day work was begun on the Chapel which was to serve as a provisional Church, and also a house for the Fathers and another for the troops, all made of palings and surrounded by a stockade as a precaution against possible attacks.

The greater part of the wood for the constructions was cut down and dragged in by the Indians themselves, who also helped in the construction of the small houses. For this reason, the Fathers were encouraged to hope for a great success, and that the pagans would not delay in embracing the sweet yoke of the law of the Gospel.

Two years after the founding of the Mission, there were already 73 baptized, Palou goes on to report. And when the Ven. Father Serra died, the mission counted 1,019 neophytes.



This painting of *La Dolorosa* was mentioned three times in the early Mission records. The story above was taken from Fr. Palou's biography of Fr. Serra. Fray Junipero Serra himself wrote about the painting that was placed in the Mission and was a favorite of the locals, especially the women who would visit her daily and bring gifts.

The last account was by Pedro Fages, the first Lieutenant Governor of the "Californias" who was not cooperative with the Franciscan missionaries. His account records his annoyance at the number of natives who would bring

gifts to *Mater Dolorosa* and seek her out daily.

Today *La Dolorosa* is displayed in front of and slightly to the left of the old High Altar and *reredos* in the Mission's Sanctuary. This painting survived the mysterious July 11, 2020 fire that ravished the Mission building because it had been removed from the San Gabriel church before the fire for restoration work.

Excerpt from Francisco Palou's *Life and Apostolic Labors of the Venerable Father Junípero Serra*, Trans. by Maynard J. Geiger, Washington D.C., 1955.



*Mission San Juan Capistrano*

## The Legend of the Unwilling Statue

Charles F. Saunders & Fr. John O'Sullivan

In his book *Capistrano Nights*, Charles Francis Saunders recorded the memories of Fr. John O'Sullivan, who came to San Juan Capistrano Missions in 1910 and determined to restore the old Mission that had fallen into ruin after the secularization of the Mission by the Mexican government in 1833. In this selection he tells how a statue of Our Lady left, but then returned to Mission San Juan Capistrano.

There is a curious tradition of the Mission, Fr. John O'Sullivan told me one day, which may be called the *Legend of the Unwilling Statue*. I have it recorded here in my notebook. It is short. Let me read it to you.

And so he read:

Many years ago, so the tradition runs, after the secularization and while there was no priest living at San Juan, the ruined mission was under the care of the Fathers at San Gabriel, who came and went at intervals.

Now it occurred on one occasion to the *padre* at San Gabriel that it might be better if the statue of the Blessed Virgin in the Mission at San Juan Capistrano were taken to the safer quarters of Mission San Gabriel, and so he sent for it.

There was a deal of sorrow in our little *pueblo* as the statue was borne away, quite a crowd following it in tears and lamentations.

Now, on their arrival at San Gabriel, a strange thing happened. When they attempted to put the statue in its place, it would not stand up.



The statue began its journey at San Juan Capistrano, *above*, & made its way to San Gabriel Mission, *below*, but Our Lady insisted on her return...



Do what they might, it continually toppled over. Thereupon the San Gabriel priest, sensible man that he was, told the people to take it back to San Juan Capistrano, for it was evident beyond the shadow of a doubt that the Virgin was unwilling to have her statue removed from the original place.

So back went the statue.

And now, another marvel. Whereas when the people were carrying the statue from San Juan, it was so heavy that the carriers could hardly bear up under the weight of it. But on the return it was so light that the carriers could run with it.

You can Imagine the rejoicing of the San Juan Capistrano people, who turned out *en masse* when they heard that she was coming back, and went to meet her as far as *Los Alisos*, nine miles up *El Camino Real*, as they call San Juan's main street.

Fr. Sullivan noted: "I found a special interest in this story as a Californian variant of one that the traveler encounters in one form or another throughout Christendom."

Indeed, in the Middle Ages, it was common for a statue to return to – or even refuse to leave – the site where it desired to be venerated. There is truly something marvelous in that Our Lady chose to act this way again in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century in the New World.

Why? She wanted to increase and reward the faith of those first Catholic natives of California. It is a sign of the predilection of Heaven for these then-favored people and land.

But what has happened to that miraculous statue? It is not certain. Perhaps in the Mission archives a researcher one day will come upon an entry explaining where the statue went during the sad days of Secularization in the 1830s, when the Missions were dissolved and the churches dismantled, followed by a rapid fall into ruins.

In Mission San Carlos Borromeo, for example, the historic [statue of Our Lady of Bethlehem](#) was duly recorded in the annals



A statue of Our Lady in the side chapel of Mission San Juan Capistrano. Was this the miraculous statue?

as being preserved in the home of Doña Maria Ignacia Dutra, while the Christ Child in her arms remained in storage at the Presidio Chapel. However, there seems to be no living or written history of this miraculous statue of Our Lady in San Juan Capistrano. Today there is a very beautiful statue of the Immaculate Conception on the right hand side altar of Serra Chapel, to the right of the restored *retablo* in the Sanctuary. Could this be the miraculous image?

There is no answer to this question yet. What happened to the Unwilling Statue is unknown, lost in the mysterious mists of a time that can still seem to stand still in the beautiful California Missions.



Fr. John O'Sullivan (1874-1933) made the dream of restoring San Juan Capistrano Mission a reality



*Mission San Juan Capistrano*

## How the Bells of Capistrano Rang for Matilda

Charles F. Saunders & Fr. John O'Sullivan

In *Capistrano Nights*, Charles Francis Saunders records here one of the legends told to him by Fr. John O'Sullivan. Fr. O'Sullivan kept notebooks of the stories told to him by the local people who kept the living history of the old blessed Mission days, passed down from one generation to another. In this selection he relates the story of the Indian girl Matilda and how her good reputation was restored by Heaven.

Father asked me [Charles Saunders] into his rustic room to finish the evening with him, and he told me a curious story connected with the church in the old days. Starting a cheerful blaze in the little fireplace and pulling chairs up to it, he took a notebook from a drawer and opening it said:

“Here is the story of the Indian girl Matilda just as I wrote it down several years ago when it was fresh in my mind, and you shall have it as I heard it.”

### An interruption by Crisanta

From my seat in the corridor I saw old Crisanta coming toward the Mission, eyeing as she came the newly erected monument to Father Serra, and pausing every few steps to view some part of the building.

“Let me interrupt the story here,” said the Father, “to say, apropos of this old Indian Crisanta, that she once told Don Juan Aguilar that when she was a very little child both her parents died, and she lived alone in the mountains near Pala with her sister. They were like wild creatures, only going to their hut to sleep and roaming about the mountains all day in search of roots for food. When anyone came near them they would run off and hide.

“Juan’s grandfather, Don Blas Aguilar, when looking up some cattle in the mountains, caught sight of the little Crisanta one day running wild, and thinking to take her back with him to San Juan Capistrano to find a home for her, he put after her on his horse, but had to lasso her in order to catch her. [The adobe house of Don Blas Aguilar still exists today as a museum.]



The restored chair and fireplace in Mission San Juan Capistrano



Blas Aguilar & his wife Maria Antonio

And so he brought her here to the Mission and placed her with the Forsters. Well, to get on with the story ...”

But Crisanta came up to us and after a few commonplace remarks, she gave us the present of a little sack of corn.

“Crisanta,” I asked, “do you remember about the Mission many years ago?”

“*Y como no* – and why not?” she answered, a little impatiently. “Did I not come here from Pala when I was 8-years old and live in the Mission?”

As we walked about ... we passed around a heap of stones serving as a buttress to the east wall of the old church and arrived at two small windows. At the first window, the one nearest the altar, Crisanta looked around and said simply, “Just here, outside the window, they buried Matilda.”

“Who was Matilda?” I asked, “and why did they bury her here?”

“Matilda,” she replied, “was a young girl, the aunt of Acu, and she lived just across the road at the corner, there where that high poplar tree is, on the other side of the cemetery. She used to help the *Padre*, doing the washing and ironing of the altar linens.

“One morning while he was saying Mass, he saw her peeping in at him through this little window, and he turned his head several times to look at her, and some of the women in front also saw her. So that day, when the *Padre* met her in the kitchen, he scolded her for looking in at the little window while he said Mass, but she said she had not looked in at all.

“In a few days the *Padre* and the women saw her again peeping in the window, and her brother-in-law saw her outside walking near the church.

“He said to himself, ‘I’ll scare her.’ So, when she came out toward the front where there were horses and wagons, he ran toward her to give her a good scare, but suddenly she disappeared. Then, he went straight over to her house to find out what was the matter. He found Matilda in the house, ironing, and she said she had not been out.



The ruins as Fr. John O'Sullivan found them

“Another time the same brother-in-law saw her coming away from the little window, and when he went toward her she disappeared again. It was her spirit, *Padre*, her *sombra*, which was walking about while she still lived, but it was a sign that she was going to die. And, in a few days she did, and the bells of the mission rang of themselves.

“Then, the *Padre* said she should be buried beside the window where she had peeped in during Mass; and so it was.”

“Afterwards,” remarked the Father as he laid down the notebook, “I learned that the story of Matilda is well-known in San Juan, and is told with some details

that Crisanta had not mentioned. One day the old Indian Acu spoke of her:

“It is true, *Padre*,” said he, “that Matilda was my aunt. She lived near the Mission in a house that stood over by that big tree at the corner of the lane. She was a very good girl, but some people had spoken ill things of her. They accused her of indiscreet action, and those accusations made her so sad that she became sad and sick even to death for, simple girl, she had no way to defend herself.

“You see it was this way: The day she died the bells were ringing. But that day the people were expecting the Bishop, and a Portuguese *hombre* who lived beyond the Trabuco (River) heard the bells and came down to find out if the Bishop had arrived.

“But it was not the bells of the Mission at all that had sounded. It was the bells in Heaven ringing to welcome the girl. Truly, *Padre*, it was Heaven witnessing to the goodness of the girl and rebuking those who had slandered her.

“After that nobody ever said a word against her name.’ ...

“And that,” remarked the Father, “is the story of Matilda of San Juan Capistrano.”



The bells all rang at her death to declare her innocence



*Mission San Juan Capistrano*

**Prayers, Songs & Wakes of Old San Juan Capistrano**

Charles F. Saunders & Fr. John O'Sullivan

Charles Saunders recounts songs and customs that had continued into the early 20<sup>th</sup> century in the old mission town San Juan Capistrano, as told to him Fr. John O'Sullivan.

Once Fr. O'Sullivan was asked if the famous description of how the people sang the *Dawn Hymn* in Helen Hunt Jackson's novel *Ramona* was based on an actual custom.

In the book *Capistrano Night: Tales of a California Mission*, author Charles F. Saunders records the following account told to him by Fr. O'Sullivan:

Surely, that was one of the loveliest practices of Spanish California, the singing of *El Alba*, as they called the hymn, which is a sweet and simple invocation to the Virgin Mary.

Doña Balbineda, who was born here in the Mission building, says that her mother remembered how the rough voices of the soldiers in the *cuartel*, or guardhouse, could be heard joining in it just as day broke. And Doña Maria has told me that when she was a little girl on her father's ranch, it was the practice of the family to sing it every weekday morning, *muy temprano*, very early, as she expressed it.

At the first sign of light, her father's voice resounded through the house, calling "*Levántase, muchachos, y asíéntense á resar*" - Rise, children, and sit up to pray!

Thereupon all the family would sit up in bed and repeat the *Angelus*: "*El ángel del Señor anunció a María.*" And as soon as this was concluded, *el Alba* was started. There was no getting out of it. If any did not awake, they were



At daybreak the Angelus bells rang and all would arise to say the prayer and sing *El Alba*

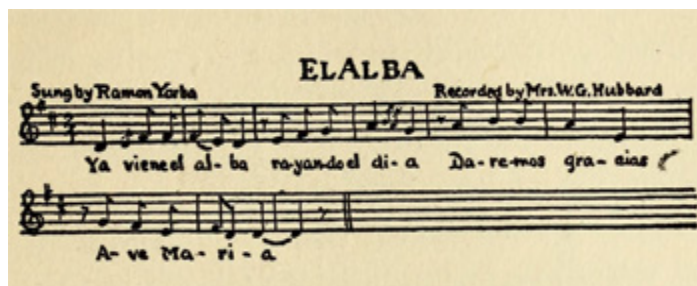
made to awake. And the little María, who was the baby of the family, would thrust her head back into the pillow as soon as the prayer and song were ended for another nap.

There are versions of the *Alba* with as many as a dozen stanzas or even more, but Doña María's family used only three. She has given these to me just as she sang them when a child:

*Ya viene el alba, rayando el dia,  
Digamos todos, Ave María!*

*Nació María, para consuelo  
De pecadores, y luz del Cielo.*

*Viva Jesús, Viva María,  
Viva tambien, la luz de dia!*



Now comes the dawn breaking is day.  
Let us all say, Hail, Mary!

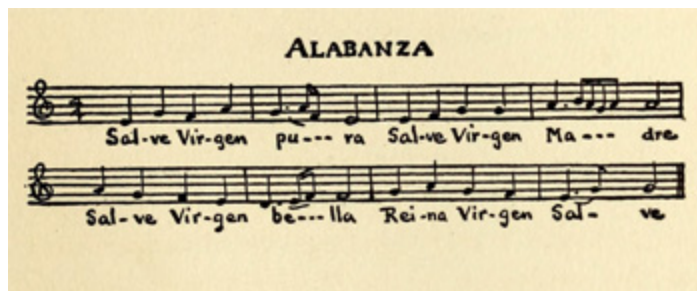
Mary was born, for the consolation  
Of sinners and as the light of Heaven.

Praised be Jesus, praised be Mary,  
Praised be also, the light of day!

On Sundays there was substituted for the *alba* an *alabanza*, or "praise" to the Virgin, sung in many stanzas, of which this is the first:

*Salve Virgen pura, salve Virgen Madre.  
Salve, Virgen bella, Reina Virgen salve!*

Hail, Virgin immaculate, Hail, Virgin  
Mother,  
Hail, Virgin beautiful. Queen Virgin,  
hail!



While the Father was telling me of these matters and humming the airs of the hymns, I noticed that his faithful *ama de llaves*, or housekeeper, was hovering about the doorway. At the conclusion of the *Alabanza* she called to him softly.

He went out to her and after a moment returned, saying with an apologetic smile: "I have not been very well today, and Cándida thinks I am overdoing my strength by sitting up longer. She may be right so, if you will excuse me, I think it will be best for me to retire, and I will see you again tomorrow. Meantime you may find entertainment in looking through these *libritos*" – handing me several notebooks from the desk – "and so, if you don't mind, *adios, hasta mañana!*"

Thus left to myself, I spent an hour or two culling out tidbits. Some of these on old customs carried on the spirit in which the evening had begun, and I will share them with you.

### **Night & morning prayers**

Here is a prayer of the children, a Spanish counterpart of our “Now I lay me now to sleep.” It is credited to Doña María. “I always liked,” she says, “to see them on their little knees, their little hands put together (*las manitas puestas*).”

*Con Dios me acuesto, con Dios me levanto,  
Con la gracia de Díos y la del Espíritu  
Santo.*

*Quien bendició el câliz, la noche y la cena  
Bendiga mi cama y a quien duerme en ella.*

*A mi casa de canto a canto, que no llegue  
cosa mala,  
Mas que Díos y el Espíritu Santo.*

With God I lie down, With God I arise.  
With the Grace of God and the Holy Ghost.

He who blessed the chalice, the night and  
the supper,  
Bless my bed and the one sleeps in it.

To my home from edge to edge, let no evil  
come,  
Only God and the Holy Ghost.

And in the morning was this version:

*Con Diós me acuesto, con Diós me levanto,  
Con la gracia de Diós y el Espíritu Santo.*

*La Virgen me tape con su velo y con su  
manto,  
Sin que nadie me tienta, solo Diós y el  
Espíritu Santo.*

With God I lie down, with God I arise.  
With the grace of God and the Holy Ghost.

May the Virgin cover me with her veil and  
mantle,  
So no one may tempt me, only God and the  
Holy Ghost.

### **Grace before & after meals**

There were many forms of grace before and after meals. I like the inclusiveness of this one:

*Gracias te doy, O gran Señor, por el sus-  
tento que me das aunque yo no lo merezco, y  
que las ánimas del Purgatorio descansan en  
paz. Amen.*

I give thee thanks, O great Lord, for the food  
thou givest me even though I do not merit it,  
and may the souls in Purgatory rest in peace.  
Amen.

### **The song of the wakes**

Of dramatic interest I found the *Song of the Wakes*, sung at the *velorios* or wakes over the body of the dead – a custom still observed at San Juan (in the 1920s).

The room in which the coffin rests is cleared of furniture, the walls adorned with holy pictures, flowers, drapery of old laces and so on, and around the edges of the room chairs are placed for the mourners. These are invariably occupied by women, the men congregating about the door and mostly outside, where a blazing fire is kept up all night, for Capistrano nights even in summer are quite cool.



The serious atmosphere of the Mexican wake in old San Juan  
Capistrano

All night long the mourners remain, joining from time to time in reciting the Rosary as well as singing the song that follows below, until finally at the first appearance of light in the east, *El Alba*, the Dawn Hymn [*El Alba*] is begun. The vividness of the Spanish original is but poorly reflected, I am afraid, in my literal translation.

### ***Cancion en los Velorios - Song at the Wakes***

I. *Orillas de un ojo de agua  
Estaba un ángel llorando,  
De ver que se condenaba  
El alma que tenía á su cargo.*

II. *La Virgen le dice al ángel:  
No llores, ángel varon,  
Que yo pediré a mi Hijo  
Que esta alma alcance perdon.*

III. *Hijo querido llamado,  
Hijo de mi corazón,  
Por la leche que mamastes  
Que esta alma alcance perdón.*

IV. *Madre querida llamada,  
Madre de mi corazón,  
Como quieres que perdone  
Si en tanto nos ofendió?*

V. *Hijo querido llamado,  
Hijo de mi corazón,*

I. On the bank of a spring  
Was an angel weeping,  
To see forever damned  
The soul he had in his care.

II. Says the Virgin to the angel:  
Weep not, manly angel,  
I will obtain from my Son  
For this soul a pardon.

III. O beloved Son.  
Son of my heart,  
By the milk of my breasts  
Let this soul receive pardon.

IV. O dearest Mother,  
Mother of my heart,  
Why askest thou pardon  
For one who has offended us so much?

V. O my beloved Son,  
Son of my heart,

*Pastoreando sus ovejas  
Un Rosario me rezó,*

VI. *Madre querida llamada,  
Madre de mi corazón,  
Si tanto quieres est' alma,  
Pues sacala de ese ardor.*

VII. *La Virgen como piadosa  
Al infierno se arrojó,  
Con su santo 'scapulario  
De la mano lo sacó.*

VIII. *Sale el diablo envenenado  
Para los cielos tiró:  
Señor, el alma que me has dado  
Tu Madre me la quitó.*

IX. *Quítate de aquí, Lucifer,  
Tu no eres mas de un traidó,  
Pues lo que mi Madre hiciera  
Por bien hecho lo doy Yo.*

X. *Los angeles en el cielo  
Toditos à un loor:  
El Señor nos de la gloria  
Como se la dió al pastor.*

XI. *El Rosario de Maria  
No lo dejes de rezar.  
Es el primer escalón  
Que al cielo hemos de llegar.*

Shepherding his sheep,  
A Rosary he prayed to me.

VI. O dearest Mother,  
Mother of my heart,  
Since thou lovest this soul so much,  
Pluck it from the flame.

VII. The Virgin filled with pity  
Descended to hell,  
With her holy scapular  
She pulled him out by the hand.

VIII. The venomous devil went out  
And drew near to heaven:  
'Lord, the soul Thou didst give me,  
Thy mother has taken from me.'

IX. Away from here, Lucifer,  
You are nothing but a traitor,  
Whatever my mother has done,  
I will consider it well done.

X. The angels in heaven  
All with one praise:  
May the Lord give us glory  
As He gave it to the shepherd!"

XI. The Rosary of Mary  
Fail not to pray,  
It is the first step we must take  
To reach Heaven

The song is rich in the good Catholic doctrine: how the Judgment is hard, but the intercession of Our Lady can sway the balance on the scales and save a soul condemned to Hell. Thus the importance of praying the Rosary, "the first step we must take to reach Heaven."





*Mission San Antonio de Padua & Mission Santa Cruz*

## **Did Ven. Mary of Agreda Bilocate to California?**

### **Legends of a Flying Friar and Nun**

Marian T. Horvat, Ph.D.

It is well known that Ven. Mary of Jesus of Ágreda (1601-1665) bilocated more than 500 times between the years to 1620 to 1631 visiting Indians in New Mexico, Arizona and Texas. The Conceptionist nun with her distinctive sky blue cape, who never left her Convent in Spain where she was Abbess, has come down to us in History as the “[Lady in Blue](#),” as the Indians called her.<sup>12</sup>

But did Ven. Mary of Agreda ever visit California? That was a question a good friend posed to me on our recent pilgrimage to visit Our Lady of Bethlehem in Mission San Carlos Borromeo in beautiful Carmel-on-the-Sea, California.

Upon our return from the pilgrimage, I delved into study and found two amazing legends that could allow one to affirm that there were, indeed, bilocations of Franciscans to California that prepared the Indians here for the grand work of Fr. Junípero Serra (1713-1784), who established the first nine missions of Alta California in those fecund last 15 years of his life.<sup>13</sup>

*The first* was recorded by his missionary companion Fr. Francisco Palou in the monumental biography he wrote shortly after Fr. Serra’s death. In it, he relates the story of the old In-



[Our Lady of Bethlehem](#), a life-size statue that came with Fr. Serra to California in 1769

<sup>12</sup> These bilocations are not legends: The case has been well studied, documented and confirmed by Church authorities in both the time of Ven. Mary of Agreda and afterwards. Margaret Galitzin, *Ven. Mary of Agreda in America*, TIA, 2011, p. 24.

<sup>13</sup> The missions established under the Presidency of Fr. Serra were San Diego de Alcalá (1769), San Carlos Borromeo (1770), San Antonio de Padua (1771), San Gabriel Arcángel (1771), San Luis Obispo de Tolosa (1772), San Francisco de Asis (1776), San Juan Capistrano (1776), Santa Clara de Asis (1777), and San Buenaventura (1782). He was also present at the founding of the Presidio of Santa Barbara (1782).

dian woman Agueda, who told the first missionaries of San Antonio de Padua that two men dressed like Franciscans had come from the skies to visit the Indians in the days of her father.<sup>14</sup>

The *second legend*, recorded by historian Frances Rand Smith in her narrative on the Mission of Santa Cruz<sup>15</sup> touches more directly on our topic since it could well place Mother Maria de Agreda herself in northern California.

### **Fr. Serra peals the bells on an oak tree**

It was the year 1771, one year after the founding of Mission San Carlos Borromeo in Monterey. Fr. Serra, Fr. Buenaventura Sitjar, Fr. Miguel Pieras and a small expedition of soldiers, sailors and native Indians set out to establish the site for Mission San Antonio de Padua.

After examining the area, they determined that the third Mission should be raised for the glory of God and Spain on a plain in a valley adjoining a river, which they named the San Antonio.

No sooner had the site been chosen than Fr. Serra commanded that the church bells destined for that mission should be unloaded and hung from a nearby oak tree. Then Fr. Serra himself shouted out to the empty plain: “Come, you pagans, come! Come to the Holy Church! Come, come to receive the Faith of Jesus Christ!”



The distinctive oaks in the Valley of the Oaks in Central California

Seeing this spectacle, Fray Miguel Pieras, asked him why he tired himself out so since the church was not yet to be built nor was a single pagan anywhere in sight. “It is a waste of time,” he noted. Fray Junípero replied, “Father, allow my overflowing heart to express itself. Would that this bell were heard throughout the world, as the Ven. Sor Maria de Ágreda desired, or at least that it were heard by every pagan who inhabits this sierra.”<sup>16</sup>

After this they constructed, blessed and raised a large cross on that very spot. On a makeshift altar the first Mass in honor of St. Anthony, the Mission’s patron, was said on that July 14, the feast of the Seraphic Doctor St. Bonaventure.

<sup>14</sup> *Palou’s Life of Fray Junípero Serra*, trans. By Maynard J, Geiger, OFM, Washington DC: Academy of American Franciscan History, 1955.

<sup>15</sup> “Early Indian Legend” in *The Mission of San Antonio de Padua*, Stanford, London: 1932, pp. 82-99.

<sup>16</sup> *Palou’s Life of Fray Junípero Serra*, p. 110-111.

As if in response to the call of the bells, one pagan appeared and remained present throughout the Mass. Fr. Serra noted this triumph in his sermon: “Here we behold what was not seen at any mission so far founded: that at the first Mass the first fruits of paganism were present. Nor will he fail to communicate to the other pagans what he has seen here.”

And, indeed, so it happened. That very day many other Indians from the area approached the friars, showing them signs of esteem and making gifts of pine nuts and acorns along with other wild seeds.

### **The old Indian woman Agueda**

What was the cause of this welcome and confidence shown? Later, after the friars had learned the language, they began to catechize and baptize the Indians. Among those first neophytes was a woman named Agueda. She was “so ancient that in appearance she seemed to be about 100 years old,” Fray Palou relates.<sup>17</sup>

She came and directly asked the fathers to baptize her. Surprised, they asked her why she wanted to be a Christian. She told them that when she was very young her parents told of a man who came to their lands dressed in the same habit that the missionaries wore. But “he did not walk through the land, but flew.”<sup>18</sup>

A Franciscan friar came to them but ‘he did not walk through the land, but flew.’

He told them the same things the missionaries were now preaching, she said. Remembering this, she felt a great desire to become a Christian.

Unwilling to give credence to the single testimony of an old woman, the friars made inquiries among the other neophytes of the area. Unanimously they affirmed that this was exactly what their ancestors had told them, and that it was handed down as a tradition among them.



A Franciscan friar came to them but ‘he did not walk through the land, but flew’

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.* p.112.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

When Fr. Palou heard this story from the fathers, he immediately remembered a Letter written in 1631 by Mother Mary of Agreda to the Franciscan Missionaries who had begun the spiritual conquest of New Mexico. In it, she affirms that at that very time, their holy Father, St. Francis, had sent to these nations of the north two holy men of the Order to preach the Faith of Jesus Christ, and that after having made many converts they suffered martyrdom.

“On estimating the time when they made their visit,” Palou writes, “I concluded It might have been one of these holy men of whom the convert Agueda had spoken.”<sup>19</sup>

Who was this Franciscan who came to the Indians in this region along the San Antonio River in California’s Valley of the Oaks in present-day Monterey County? The question still has no answer.

However, the oral history of the native Indians clearly points to the existence of a “flying” friar who visited their area and prepared the way for the peaceful welcome of Fr. Serra’s friars 142 years after Ven. Mary of Agreda penned her historic Letter. Certainly the time span before his appearance could cover the two generations of Agueda and her father, given the old age of the daughter.

One can ask if it is a “coincidence” that the old woman’s name Agueda so closely resembles Agreda, a town in Spain on the borders of Navarre and Aragon? The missionaries would have realized the similarity of two names and perhaps surmised that the flying friar came from a monastery in the town of Ven. Mary of Agreda.

### **The teaching *Madre* at Mission Santa Cruz**

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, historian Frances Rand Smith heard about the old Indian woman Agueda and became curious if there were any other bilocation stories among the Missions of California.

She found that a similar story had been passed from generation to generation among the Indians of Mission Santa Cruz, the 12<sup>th</sup> California Mission founded in central Californian coast in 1791 by Fr. Fermin de Lasuén, the successor of Fr. Junípero Serra. There was one significant difference, however: The Franciscan missionary who had appeared there among the Indians to instruct them was a woman.



*La Misión de la Exaltación de la Santa Cruz* (The Mission of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross), or Mission Santa Cruz

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 113.

A letter written by Fr. Juan B. Comellas, who was presbyter at the restored Santa Cruz Mission church from 1854 to 1856, relates an early legend about a flying nun that he copied from a book in the archives of that Mission.<sup>20</sup>

### **The ‘*Madre*’ missionary: Was she Ven. Mary of Agreda?**

The document notes that the Indians of the region had preserved the tradition from their forefathers that in the past a woman from a far off country had come to their region. An old Indian man of Santa Cruz said that she was called “*the Padre with the Mamas,*” because she appeared to them dressed as a Padre but was clearly a woman with a feminine bosom.

She preached to the Indians and told them that within a short time white men would come to them to show them the way to Heaven and help them to leave their state of darkness and ignorance.

This Franciscan *Madre* told them they ought not to fear these men for they would do them no harm, and that they should believe what the fathers would tell them. That tradition, the old Indian continued, contributed to incline his forefathers to accept the preaching of the Friars and to embrace Christianity without repugnance.



It seems the ‘*madre*’ missionary could be Ven. María de Ágreda

Fr. Comellas continues: “We do believe that said woman was the Venerable Mother Maria de Jesús de Ágreda.”<sup>21</sup>

It is a rich nugget of history from the past that opens the door to the real possibility that Mother Mary of Agreda made bilocations to California and prepared the Indians here for the day when the Friars would come.

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<sup>20</sup> From an article by Alexander S. Taylor titled “The Indianology of California,” in Francis Rand Smith, *The Mission of San Antonio de Padua*, p. 87

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

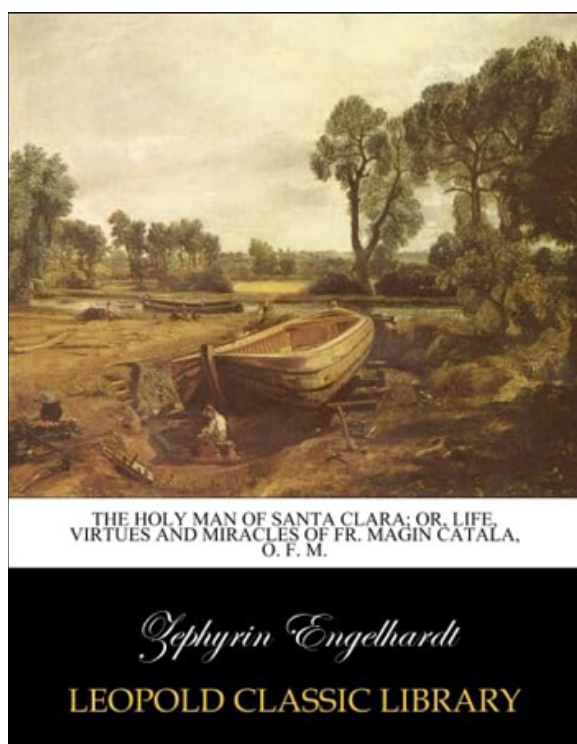


*Mission Santa Clara de Asis*

## Fr. Magín Catalá: The Wonder-Worker of California

Tesa Becica

Review of *The Holy Man of Santa Clara or Life, Virtue, and Miracles of Fr. Magín Catalá*, by Zephyrin Engelhardt, O.F.M. San Francisco, 1909, 228 pp.



Purchase [here](#)

This is a very easy to read book about the virtually forgotten priest and miracle worker who served at Santa Clara Mission for 32 years. It is hard to understand why the name of Fr. Magín Catalá (1761-1830) is almost unknown in California and even throughout the United States.

The Church herself has acknowledged his holiness. In 1884, the Archbishop of San Francisco instructed the canonical process of beatification of Catalá, In 1908, the Congregation of the Causes of Saints instituted the beatification process, but it has languished ever since, despite a wealth of documented testimonials of miracles worked, prophecies fulfilled, and bilocations witnessed by this Franciscan monk, which always had the testimony of more than one individual.

The Franciscan author, Fr. Zephyrin Engelhardt, known as “The Father of Mission History,” was named Vice-Postulator for the cause of Fr.

Magín, and in 1909 he published this work, meticulously documenting every fact and miracle. After finishing the last page, the reader is certain that Fr. Magín was a holy man and wonder-worker.

### His life

Fr. Magín Catalá was born in January of 1761 in Spain. Practically nothing is known of his childhood except for Baptism and Confirmation records. He entered a Franciscan monastery at age 16 and was elevated to the priesthood around 1785, then sailed for the New World in 1786. He spent some time in Mexico City and Nootka Sound before finally reaching the longed-for destination of California.



No photo exists of Fr. Magín, who wanted to be hidden & unknown. Above, a sketch of him teaching the Indians in his customary place

The first record of him in Santa Clara dates from 1794, 17 years after Fr. Serra founded the Mission. There he settled cared for the Mission parish of more than 1,400 natives and inhabitants of nearby San José. Except for the first 14 months, his only assistant was Fr. José Viadér. It is as if Fr. Magín wanted to be unknown and forgotten. He never wrote any letters and asked Fr. Viadér to conduct all the Mission correspondence, Fr. Magín countersigning if necessary, so we have no personal written records of him.

Fr. Magín added many additional fasts and sacrifices to the obligatory requirements, and very soon contracted chronic inflammatory rheumatism, which afflicted him for the rest of his life. Given his constantly declining health, he could have been relieved of his position to retire at the mother college in Mexico City. Twice he requested this and was granted permission, but then opted to remain at his post. He could not leave the Indians who loved and respected him so much.

During his last four years, he could no longer walk or stand unaided, and was thus unable to administer Baptism or assist at funerals. Notwithstanding the physical pain, he would sit before the Communion rail in the Sanctuary to preach and teach the Indians who gathered around him.

### The practice of virtue

Like the Curé of Ars, he preached strongly against gambling, immodest dancing, and extravagance in dress. (p. 70). The Holy Man of Santa Clara would have been shocked at some of the Masses of our late Pontiffs where [Aztec costumes](#) and indigenous attire have been welcomed. When the natives of his time appeared at the church in feathers, ribbons and other gaudy decorations on their heads, Fr. Magín would not allow them to enter the sacred edifice until they had removed all such ornaments. (p. 81)

He followed the vow of poverty in an exemplary way, sleeping on the bare floor, or at most upon a hide or blanket, without undressing. An adobe brick served for a pillow. (p. 130) Since the fathers regarded themselves merely as stewards of the Mission goods and finances, safeguarding them for the use and eventual ownership of the



Fr. Zephyrin Englehardt, 'The Father of Mission History' & vice-postulator for Fr. Magín's cause

Indians, even his stipend, gifts and personal donations went into the common fund for the Indians. The calumnies being spread today are vicious attempts to malign their goodness. (p. 131)

Another Black Legend pretends the female neophytes in the care of the missions were locked up against their wills and were unable to move about freely. In fact the adolescent girls and single women without a home willingly lived in a house apart from the Indian village in order to preserve their chastity. In the daytime they were at liberty, when not occupied, to visit their parents in the adjoining village (pp 102-103).

### Miracles & prophecies

Fr. Magín performed many miracles during his lifetime. One time innumerable locust, or *chapulas*, descended and devoured everything green in Santa Clara Valley. Fr. Magín directed the afflicted people to enter the Church with some caught locusts. After he said some prayers, he ordered the little creatures released. As soon as they were set at liberty, all the locusts rose in a body and plunged into the sea.



The swarm of locusts left *en masse* after Fr. Magín's prayer

Fr. Zephyrin reports: On the next day the beach for three or four miles was covered with dead locusts to a depth of about three feet. The people again sowed their seeds and obtained a good crop.” (pp 146-147)



Fr. Magín was often seen levitating before this crucifix at a side altar in Mission Santa Clara Church

When women in labor were in desperate cases, they would send pleas for help to Fr. Magín. He would send a straw hat or girdle he sometimes wore; it would be applied and the result was always happy. (p. 110)

Many times his prophecies would occur during a sermon: He would abruptly interrupt it asking, “Let us recite an Our Father and a Hail Mary” for a person soon to meet a violent death, or unexpected accident, etc. The people came to quiver when they heard those words for the event would always follow as predicted.

Fr. Magín had an extraordinary devotion for the Crucified Redeemer and would often be found praying at the foot of the great Crucifix in the church, which can still be seen there today. There are multiple testimonies of witnesses

who saw Fr. Magín in levitation [before this Crucifix](#), raised up high in the air on a level with the Cross.

At the end of his life when he could only preach while seated in a chair before the Sanctuary railing due to his health, he prophesied the apostasy that would occur in California, warning insistently of this. He said:

“People from almost all the nations of the earth will come to this coast. Another flag will come from the East and the people that follow it will have a different language and religion. These people will take possession of the country and lands. On account of their sins, the Californians will lose their lands and become poor, and many of their children’s children will give up their own religion.

“The Indians will be dispersed and not know what to do and they will be like sheep running wild. Heretics will erect church buildings, to replace the true temples of God.” (pp 123-124) How the Holy Man of Santa Clara would recoil to see the Prelates of our day who sanction the separation of Church and State and teach that all religions are equal in God’s eyes.



80% of San Francisco was destroyed in the 1906 earthquake, predicted by Fr. Magín

He also predicted that a large city would rise on the bay of San Francisco, but when the prosperity of the city would be at its height, it would be destroyed by earthquake and fire. When the earthquake of 1906 destroyed San Francisco, many persons recalled this warning. (p . 125)

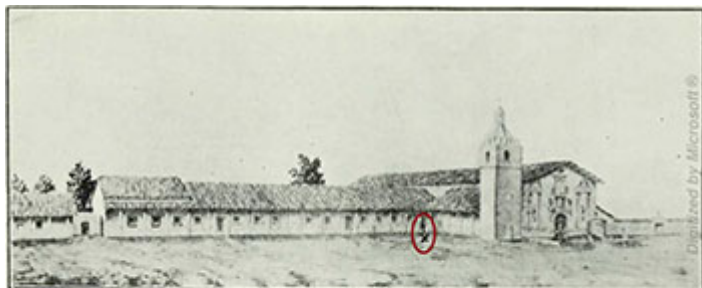
Fr. Magín was an exorcist and knew how to discern the presence of the evil one. Once, Fr. Zephyrin recounts that “the Indians of a certain *Rancheria* were practicing witchcraft. All at once Father

appeared among the wicked men, who astounded at his presence scattered in every direction. Yet it was shown that he had not left the mission at all.” (p. 177) This is but one of many instances of the reports of his being in two places at one time, the gift of bilocation which he had.

### **Grief & miracles after his death**

Revisionists of California Mission history paint the Franciscan priests as oppressors, practitioners of genocide, and cruel beyond belief. If that were true, why at the death of Fr. Magín (on November 29, 1830, as he had predicted) did immense crowds of people flock to the Mission, weeping and crying out “The saint has left us!?”

When the interment commenced, the crush of anguished mourners was frightful. The Indians tried to prevent the burial, most attempted to grab a relic or memento, even cutting pieces of his



MISSION OF SANTA CLARA AT FR. MAGÍN'S TIME.  
(The arrow points to the room occupied by the servant of God.)

The room of Fr. Magín at Santa Clara Mission, *below*, the Indians at work under the direction of the Franciscans



habit so he was nearly naked. His crucifix and sandals were taken and no one could induce the Indians to give up their precious relics.

Many cures were reported after placing a relic of the saintly *Padre* on the ill person. One midwife of over 40 years testified that “when the outcome looked desperate, I would apply a relic of Fr. Magín. I have never lost a mother or child.” (p 186)

In particular he was invoked for the finding of lost articles or animals. He was truly the “St. Anthony” of the Indians, who would promise him a Rosary or a Mass said “in the honor of Fr. Magín” for granting the favor, which he generally did.

I would recommend this book to any person who has an interest in History,

especially that of California and the Missions. I myself was greatly edified by this Holy Man of Santa Clara, and frequently seek his intercession on behalf of California.

Let us pray for the restoration of California for God’s glory, seeking the intercession of Our Lady of Bethlehem, Fr. Junípero Serra, and Fr. Magín Catalá!

*Viva Cristo Rey!*



*Mission Santa Clara de Asis***The Catalá Crucifix**

Elaine Jordan

Excerpt from *The Holy Man of Santa Clara* by Zephyrin Englehardt, O.F.M. (San Francisco: James H Barry Co, 1906), pp. 190-194.

One of the lesser known missionaries of the California Missions who deserves greater attention is Fr. Magin Catalá. Born in Montblanc in Catalonia, Spain, in 1761, he entered the Franciscans at age 16 and was ordained in 1785. Soon after, he volunteered to enter the mission fields in America.



Fr. Catala's crucifix at a side altar in the Church of the Mission Santa Clara

For 36 years he labored with Fr. Jose Viader at the Santa Clara de Assis Indian mission, one of the chain of 21 missions in California established in this period. In his time, he was renowned for his many miracles and prophecies, as well as the exorcisms he performed. The Indians aptly called him 'The Holy Man of Santa Clara.'

Today you can still see the miraculous Catalá Crucifix before which he prayed for hours, frequently remaining there the whole night in prayer to his Lord on the Cross. The life size crucifix sets above a side altar in the restored Mission Church, which has become part of the campus of the University of Santa Clara, run by the Jesuits. In a metal casket close beside the Altar of the Crucifix, Fr. Catalá's remains are preserved.

Several Indians heard the image of Our Lord speaking to his faithful servant from that Cross over the altar. Once, Our Lord leaned forward before the whole congregation to commend him during his preaching. On other occasions, eye-witnesses testified that the image of Christ leaned down from the crucifix to

embrace the brown-robed Franciscan and to lift him above the ground.

In his book titled *Holy Man of Santa Clara*, Fr. Zephyrin Englehardt relates, "One day during Holy Week while kneeling before the Great Crucifix in the Church of Santa Clara, Jose Antonio Alviso and several other persons present heard Fr. Magin sigh aloud, "When, oh my God, shall I

see Thy glory? How much longer shall my banishment last in this valley of tears?' “Suddenly Alviso heard Our Lord from the Cross answer, ‘Soon you shall see God in glory.’”

### Levitations

It was common talk among the Indians that these prayer vigils of Padre Magin were not without marvelous occurrences. Often the children would peep through the keyhole or the cracks in the front door of the Church in order to watch the holy man at prayer before the Altar of the Great Crucifix to see if they could see him raised up in the air.



The main nave of the restored Santa Clara Mission Church; *below*, the exterior



In the process for his beatification made in 1884, six witnesses testified to seeing Fr. Catalá levitate, rising in the air to pray directly before the Crucified Christ. Thus Petra Pacheco Soto related that one day, when Fr. Viader could not find him, he was told that Fr. Catalá as usual was in the Church before the Crucifix. A messenger going to the Church discovered him raised up high in the air on the level of the Cross. The Savior had unfastened His hands from the Cross and was resting them on the shoulders of the holy man. This testimony was corroborated by Rufino Saiz, Berta Guadalupe, Antonia Flores and Encarnacion Soto.

Another Indian of good character, Ignacio Alviso, stated that once when he went to call Fr. Magin Catalá for supper, he saw the holy man raised in the air embracing the Crucified Lord. When the holy friar noticed that he had been observed, he forbade Alviso to communicate to anyone what he had seen.

The Indian Egidio, who was with Fr. Magin in his last hours, testified that he had also seen the priest levitate and the Crucified Savior place His unfastened hands upon his shoulders. Rita Garcia testified that her grandmother, one of the colonists at the mission, used to often tell this story: A boy came running to her exclaiming, “Come see, the Father is kneeling in the air, and he does not fall.” She replied, “Take care! Do not go about telling lies! How can that be?”

The boy, seeing that she did not believe him, made the Sign of the Cross with his finger and then kissed it, thus indicating that he swore that he was telling the truth.

This is just one of the many, many reports of parishioners of Santa Clara Mission who saw the Holy Man levitate before the crucifix.

*Mission Santa Clara de Asis*

## **Fr. Magín Catalá, the Finder of Lost Items**

Fr. Zephyrin Englehardt

After the death of Fr. Magín Catalá, the Holy Man of Santa Clara, in 1830, the faithful among the Californians began to appeal to him to discover their lost things. In a short time he had become a kind of St. Anthony of Padua for the simple people, bringing to light lost animals, money and innumerable items.

The Vice-Postulator for his cause, Fr. Zephyrin Englehardt, collected a multitude of stories of lost items found by appealing to the Holy Man. The favor attributed to his intercession reported below is particularly interesting and clearly demonstrates the confidence of the people in appealing to Fr. Catalá.

As a side note, it is interesting to see how seriously mail delivery was taken in early America: Losing the mail pouch was an offense punished by hanging.

One of the old residents of Santa Clara, Rita Garcia, recounted this incident to the Commission for the Cause of Fr. Magín Catalá:

"My father and mother daily recited an Our Father in honor of Fr. Magín. I remember well what I am going to tell, because I was present at what happened.



A leather mail pouch used in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century

"My father was a soldier, and as such, when his turn came, had to carry the mail between Mission Soledad and Alonterey. One day as he was ready to set out on horseback from our home with the package of letters, he thought of taking some money along. He asked my mother to bring it out to him. She replied: 'Come and take as much as you want.'

"He dismounted. As the horse was gentle, he left the reins upon the pommel of the saddle without tying the animal. The package of letters was wrapped in a piece of cloth about one foot long. Instead of keeping it in his hands, as it was but a few moments to go into the house and return, he left the little bundle upon the saddle without securing it in any way.

Then he went into the house for the money. When he came out several minutes later, to his consternation the horse had disappeared and the letters with it.

"We went out with a lantern, for it was still dark, and looked everywhere, but the horse could not be found. My father asked a friend, Simon Cota, to look for the horse everywhere, without

telling him about the letters. Then he went away to hide himself, for if the package with the mail were lost he would surely be shot.

"The friend returned at noon the same day, and said that he had not discovered any trace of the horse. Meanwhile my mother and we children were weeping, for the death of my father was certain if the mail was lost and he were caught.

"My mother at last promised to have a Holy Mass celebrated and to receive the Sacraments if the horse and letters were recovered. This promise my mother made to the soul of Fr. Magin.

"During all this time my father in despair wandered off into the Sierra de la Soledad, where bears roved about at that period; for he said to himself it is better to die there than to be executed in disgrace and in the presence of my family.



The Soledad Hills where the mail carrier hid himself to die

"At last, tired out, he sat down about three or four miles from the top of the mountain range near a high rock. It was late in the night and very dark. All at once he heard a slight noise coming from the other side of the rocky steep. It sounded as though a horse were chewing his bit. Not knowing what it was, he cautiously moved around to the other side.

"To his great joy he discovered the horse there, just as he had left it at the door of his own house. The reins were on the pommel and the package, most wonderful of all, lay on the saddle where he had placed it.

"Blessed be God !' my father exclaimed. 'He has at last listened to a poor wretch ! Who would think of finding the horse in this place and with the package loose upon his back?'

"Declaring it was a miracle, he hastened homeward.

"When he arrived, my mother explained that this was a miracle due to Fr. Magin, because she had called upon him in their distress and had made the promise of a Holy Communion and Holy Mass.

"My father hastened to forward the mail, and my mother fulfilled her promise."

When questioned by the examiners as to the length of time that her father had been absent, Rita replied: "He left early in the morning when it was still dark. We bid him farewell and said: "Fly, and God help thee."

"My father fled and went afoot through the woods of the Sierra until midnight, when he, tired from wandering through the brush and over the rocks, sat down and then heard the horse chewing the bit. He came down from the mountain with the horse with much difficulty.

"That day he concealed himself until night, lest anyone found him as mail carrier off the road. When it was dark, he returned home and arrived at four o'clock in the morning."

To the question, "Did the horse have any covering or anything else which might have held the package fast?" she replied:

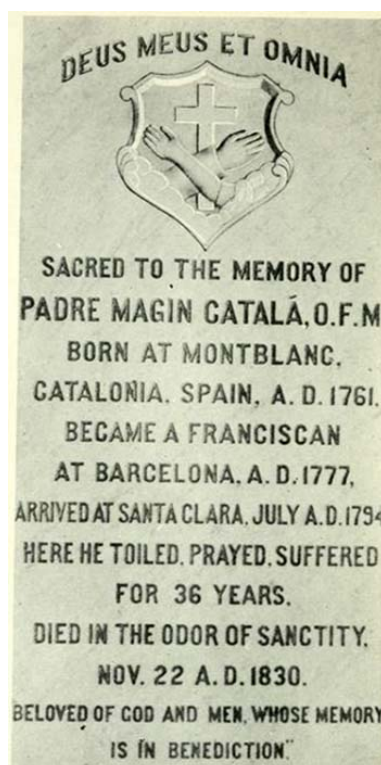
"No, sir, nothing but the saddle. He who carries the mail bears it tied around his body like a bandage. My father put it upon the saddle and intended to tie it around himself as soon as he was mounted on the animal."

Fr. Zephyrin concludes the narration thus:

U. I. O. G. D.

*Ut In Omnibus Glorificetur Dei*

(That In All Things God May Be Glorified)



The plaque at the tomb of Fr. Magín inside the Mission



**Ven. Antonio Margíl of Jesus: Apostle of New Spain & Texas**

Marian T. Horvat, Ph.D.



The barefoot friar - famous for his missionary work and miracles

The life of Fr. Antonio Margíl of Jesus (1657-1790) is an epic story of a man who seems larger than life. Barefoot, carrying only a staff, breviary, and the materials he needed to say Mass, he established hundreds of missions in a territory extending from the jungles of Costa Rica to east Texas and the borders of Louisiana. Countless Indians of Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Guatemala, Mexico and Texas received the divine gift of faith from him and revered him a saint. For this, he is called the Apostle of New Spain and Texas.<sup>22</sup>

He was also an extraordinarily capable administrator and founded two colleges in Guatemala and Mexico. His name is associated with the epoch of mission colleges, which made possible a rebirth of the Franciscan apostolate, first in Mexico, and later in Guatemala, Panama and most of South America. In effect, a second golden age for the Franciscans in Spanish America began with the foundation of the colleges, centers established by the Holy Congregation for the

Propagation of the Faith to train new missionaries and establish mission churches and settlements.

This “barefoot friar,” famous in his time for his miracles and sanctity, converted hundreds of thousands of Indians. In Guatemala alone, it is recorded that he converted over 80,000 Indians. He became known as the “Flying Father” because he would cover so many miles in such short periods of time it was nothing short of miraculous: It was normal for him to cover 40-50 miles a

<sup>22</sup> The main works used in this article: Ubaldus da Rieti, O.F.M., *Life of Venerable Fr. Anthony Margil, Taken from the process for his Beatification and Canonization* (Quebec/NY: Franciscan Missionary Printing Press, 1910); Eduardo Enrique Rios, *Life of Fray Antonio Margil, O.F.M.*, trans. by Benedict Leutenegger, O.F.M. (Washington D.D.: Academy of American Franciscan History, 1959); *Nothingness Itself: Select Writings of Ven Fr. Antonio Margil, O.F.M.*, (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1976).

day over rough terrain, and often more. There are written testimonies of companion brethren and soldiers who saw him, quite literally, walk on water as he crossed swollen streams and rivers on his apostolic journeys. This capacity to pass from place to place with great speed is known as the gift of agility.

Along his travels, he cured the sick, read souls, prophesied the future. God also granted Fr. Margíl the gifts of bilocation, to be present in two places at the same time, and subtlety, which enabled him to enter dwellings through closed doors. Like St. Anthony of Padua, he even received marks of veneration from animals. Once when he was directing the building of a missionary College in Guatemala, some Indians arrived with twelve cartloads of stone. Fr. Margíl addressed them and blessed them. The Indians knelt and, at the same time, the animals drawing the carts fell to their knees. It is small wonder the fame of this illustrious missionary spread far and wide.

What is more difficult to understand is why Fr. Antonio Margíl is not better known today. It is my hope that this article will make him better known to the North American Catholics, and that they may begin to invoke the great Apostle of Texas in their needs.

### **Epoch One: 1657-1684**

On August 18, 1657, Antonio Margíl was born in Valencia to poor but pious parents, Juan Margíl and Speranza Ros Margíl was blessed from childhood with an affable and good nature. Small of stature, the boy had a natural charm, and was attracted to practices of piety and study. Despite their humble means, his parents took care that he should receive the best education possible.

At age 15, Antonio entered the Franciscan novitiate at Corna Monastery in Valencia, and two years later gave himself the pseudonym *La Misma Nada* – Nothingness Itself. He made it his practice from that time on to conclude his letters by writing the words “*La Misma Nada*” above his name and signature.

After pronouncing final vows, he devoted himself to the study of Philosophy and Theology in the



The town square in Valencia where Fr. Margíl preached to large crowds

Monastery of Denia and the Royal Monastery of Valencia. During this time, he began the rigid regime he never abandoned his whole life. Every night in the convent garden he performed the pious exercise of the Way of the Cross, carrying a heavy Cross.

Afterward, he scourged his body with an iron chain,

saying that a religious of St. Francis ought to be fervently devoted to the sufferings of Christ.

He practiced a poverty so exact that he often deprived himself of even the necessary things. Amiable with all, he allowed himself no particular friendships, and no shadow of singularity or affectation. It is no surprise that after his death those who had studied with him testified that they had looked upon him as a saint even at this time.

Having completed his studies, he was ordained a priest at age 25. He had asked to remain a friar, like his holy Father Francis, considering himself unworthy of the great privilege of receiving full orders, but his superiors counseled otherwise. The fruits of his preaching and hearing confessions began to appear very soon afterward. Great crowds gathered in the public square of Valencia to listen to him, his words arousing them to tears and repentance. Sometime he spent whole nights in the confessional. Had he remained in Spain, it is no doubt he would have been a renowned preacher and theologian. But Fray Margíl was destined for a greater and nobler mission.

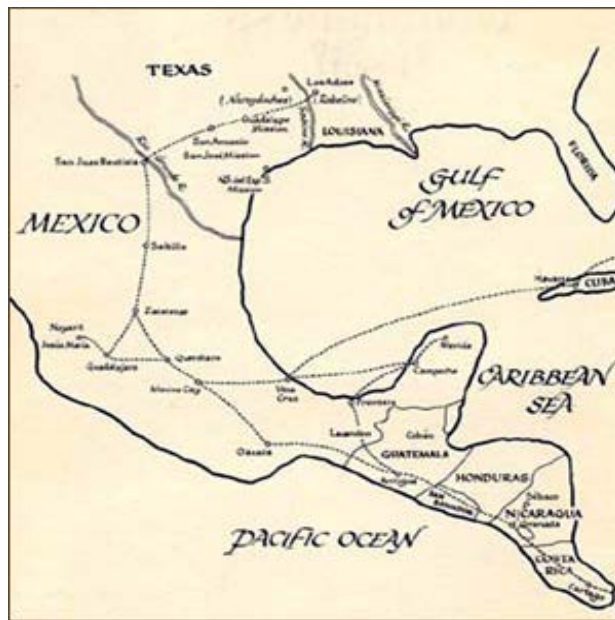
### To the New World

In 1682, Ven. Fr. Antonio Llinas, Franciscan superior of the American Mission, invited Fr. Margíl to be his companion to open the first missionary college in New Spain at Querétaro, Mexico (200 miles north of Mexico City). He immediately consented. Later Fr. Llinas would say that he had brought to America a second St. Anthony of Padua.

With the permission of his superiors, he made a farewell visit to his mother, worthy of mention. She wept bitterly at the thought that her son was to leave her, and entreated him to consider her advanced age and wait a few years so she might have the consolation of expiring in his arms.

The son did not waver in face of these entreaties. Kindly he reminded her that from the moment she consented he should enter religion, he belonged entirely to God, Who had called him to promote His honor and glory among the pagans. He gave her a Franciscan habit and told her to clothe herself with it and call upon him when death approached.

In fact, shortly after his departure, his mother was stricken with an illness bringing her to the point of death. She did not forget his promise and called on her son. By God's permission, her son appeared to her, assuring her of recovery, which immediately followed. A few years later when her end in truth approached, Fr. Antonio Margíl, by a prodigy of Divine Providence, assisted at her bedside and consoled her in the hour



The missionary travels of the barefoot friar would extend throughout Central America, Mexico and up to Texas and Louisiana

of death in the presence of many persons, even though they were separated by an immense distance.

### Epoch Two: 1683-1714 - Apostle of New Spain

The great odyssey of evangelization began in 1684 when Fr. Margíl set out from Santa Cruz College in Querétaro with another Franciscan missionary giant, Fr. Melchor Lopez, who would be his traveling companion for the next ten years. From town to town they traveled, giving missions for a year along the shores of Guatemala. From there, they set out for provinces of Nicaragua and Costa Rica, converting many pagans along the way, and re-catechizing and increasing the fervor of those already Catholic.

Preaching to whomever they met, they walked along, praying in silence or singing. Fr. Margíl always walked barefoot, but carried his sandals so he could wear them for Holy Mass out of respect for the Blessed Sacrament. Everywhere he went, he taught his famous *Alabado*, a song in verse written to catechize the Indians and Spanish children. It is still remembered and sung today in parts of Mexico, Central and South America. Its last verse reads:

“Whoever seeks to follow God and strives to enter in His glory, One thing he must do and say with all his heart: Die rather than sin. Rather than sin, die!” When they reached a village where they found welcome, they would establish a mission church. The Indians would be taught the catechism, the Rosary, and the Way of the Cross. Other friars would come to replace the first ones and to care for the new Catholics.

Before they left, Fr. Margíl would plant a wooden cross, as high as he could make it. Then the missionaries would continue onward. Fr. Margíl and Fr. Melchor came to be venerated so much that when the priests would leave a village, often the Indians would follow them in crowds of hundreds, carrying branches of trees in their hands, appearing like moving forests from a distance.



His travels in Mexico, Guatemala and El Salvador

### Mission among the Talamancas: Miracle worker

From Guatemala, Fr. Margíl and Fr. Melchor set out to preach among the Talamanca Indians of Costa Rica. The Talamancas were a mountain dwelling Indian people, actually three nations of Indians famed for their ferocity, human sacrifices, and obstinacy to missionaries.

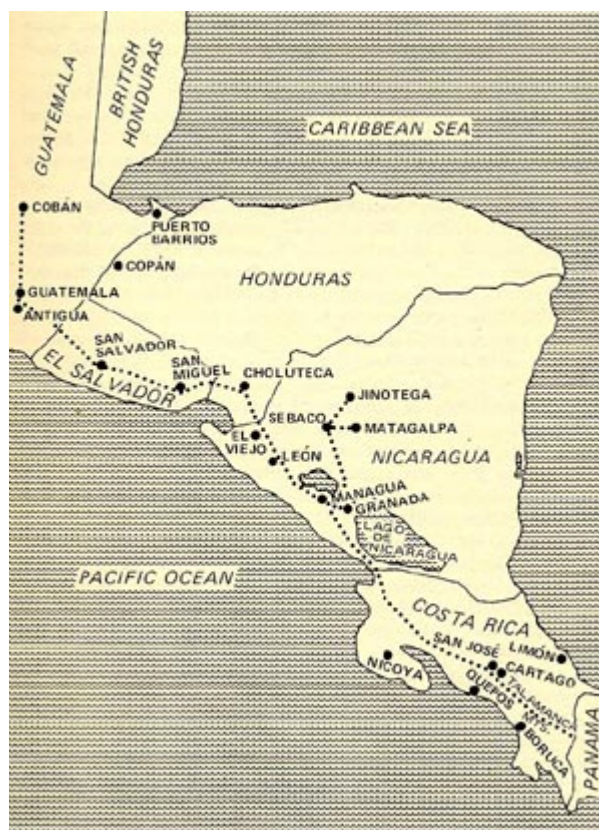
In particular, the shamans, or witch doctors, put every obstacle in the way to prevent the missionaries from preaching the Gospel of Christ. On one occasion in this region, Fr. Margíl was taken prisoner and the shamans instigated the warriors to cast him into a pile of burning wood. The fire was maintained for several hours but the flames did not injure him, even though they blackened the image of the crucifix he held in his hand.

On another occasion, Indians of a mountain town poisoned their food, which the missionaries blessed and ate, and came to no harm. Another time they were on the point of being burned at the stake, but the wood refused to burn. Such prodigies increased the fury of the medicine men, but opened the hearts of many of the Indians.

The missionaries suffered these things and more joyfully, their undaunted spirit and great courage earning them the admiration and awe of the Indians. "We suffered what the Lord was pleased to send us," Fr. Margíl later wrote. His only complaint was a sigh of regret not to have gained the crown of martyrdom.

When the Indians realized the utter indifference of the friars toward earthly goods and their great charity toward even those who ill-treated them, they came to trust and love the friars. One of the first things Fr. Margíl did was to successfully petition the government that none of his Talamanca Indians should be taken for work on nearby haciendas, so that the fruit of their missionary labor might not be nullified. In a letter to the president of the Audiencia of Guatemala, Fr. Margíl wrote: "Through all this region, called Talamanca, all the tribes say that they will persevere as long as the Spaniards do not come to rule over them; they shall welcome only the priests."

In the course of two years, he and a single companion, working together and alone, had erected 15 mission churches (some say 30), and baptized hundreds of Indians.



His travels to work among the Indians of Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica and Panama

Maps from *Nothingness Itself: Select Writings of Ven Fr. Antonio Margíl, O.F.M.*, (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1976)

With this success, the pair next decided to go among another unconquered and feared tribe, the Terrabi. Already, the fame of Fr. Antonio Margil was such that when he sent ambassadors to the eight Terrabi chiefs to request permission to enter their territory and preach the Gospel of Christ, seven readily consented.

One, however, refused, declaring before his idols he would slay any missionary who should venture into his territory. The bold response of Fr. Margil unnerved him. Instead of retreating or opening negotiations, Fr. Margil forthright entered his camp, where a war party was being prepared, and went straight to the abode of the chief. Overcome by the sight of this small but intrepid man, shining with a kind of supernatural light, the chief laid his weapons at Fr. Margil's feet and received the missionary with demonstrations of affection and honor. This was the effect of the person of Fr. Antonio Margil.



Map of Antonio Margil de Jesús Travels in the Americas.

Image available on the [Internet](#) and included in accordance with [Title 17 U.S.C. Section 107](#).

His reputation for discovering false idols was such that in many Indian villages, when word would arrive that Fr. Antonio Margil was coming, they would gather beforehand their false gods for him to burn. They had much experience with the futility of trying to fool the holy friar, who would unearth their idols straight away by a special grace from God. All these idols and charms were then burned in an open place and in the presence of Fr. Margil and Mr. Melchor, who did public penance in reparation to Our Lord for these sins of superstition.

### **Missions to the Chols and Lacandons**

As the name of Fr. Margil and the wonders he performed were on all lips, the Bishop of Guatemala asked that he be sent north to the lands of the Chols, a violent tribe who had rebelled against the efforts of the Dominican missionaries. Their religious instruction proved so fruitful that the greater number of them was converted. Eight towns with churches were established among the Chols.

Their next mission was along the border of Mexico among the Lacandons. When the missionaries arrived there, even their guides abandoned them, fearful of these naked savages with reputations of being cannibals. Entering their territory, the missionaries were seized, stripped of their

habits, bound to trees and commanded under pain of death to worship their idols. They refused, and preached instead the Gospel.

For the three days the men were bound to the posts and tortured, they waited to receive the palm of martyrdom. When the Indians discovered the missionaries were always cheerful and without fear, they believed they concealed something extraordinary in their hearts. At length they released them, on the condition that they leave the place immediately.

Seeing their efforts were of no avail, the missionaries left the place. Before they departed the main village, however, Fr. Margíl warned the people that God would punish them shortly with a catastrophe. The prediction was soon verified, for their houses were destroyed by a fire that came from heaven.

Some months later, accompanying a military expedition on a road between the Yucatan and Guatemala, Fr. Margíl again had opportunity to enter this area. This time, awed by his reputation and won by his kindness, great numbers of the fierce Lacandons came to him, asking to be baptized. Many of the sick here, as in other villages, were healed by the imposition of his hands or the reading of the Gospel of St. John. Of the many miracles performed among the Lacandons, one in particular is worthy of mention.

Among the newly converted, Fr. Margíl introduced the pious custom of greeting a person saying "Hail Mary," which was answered by "Conceived without original sin." One day Fr. Margíl met an Indian woman carrying an infant, still too young to speak. Approaching her in the presence of many persons, he said to the baby: "Ave María." Immediately the infant answered: "*Sin pecado concebida* (Conceived without original sin.)" In a marvelous way, the babe attested the singular privilege of the Mother of God, as well as the sanctity of Fr. Antonio Margíl.

The soldiers on this expedition witnessed many such marvels. Despite the fact that Fr. Margíl always remained far behind the expedition in order to hear confessions and teach catechism to the Lacandons, at the end of the day he arrived at the arranged meeting place ahead of the troops. When the Father Commissary questioned him about how he had passed the men who were traveling on horses, he answered smiling, "I take short cuts and God helps."



Fr. Margíl, shining with supernatural unction, would enter an Indian village with his arm upraised and holding his crucifix

The rumor was also spreading that his feet did not get wet when he crossed the swollen streams and riverbeds. One day a soldier in the expedition pretended he was tired and sleeping on the bank so he could discover how Fr. Margíl would cross the turbulent river. Margíl noticed the man and understood his intent. He walked over the water and came alongside the soldier. Smiling paternally, he said, “Now that you have seen it, move along.”

The Indians had a simple explanation for such wonders: they called Fr. Margíl “*santo*” and would not desist, even when he reprimanded them. Before he left the Lacandons, Fr. Margíl had erected two churches and installed all the pious customs he loved, the Rosary, morning and evening prayers, the Stations, and public processions on feast days.

### 1697-1714: Founder and administrator

In 1697, Fr. Margíl was recalled to Querétaro as superior, or *presidente*, of the Franciscan College of the Holy Cross, and a new phase of his life began as an administrator. When he reached the College, Fr. Margíl took off the ragged habit he had worn and mended for 14 years, patching it at times with bark from a certain tree called the *mastastes*, and exchanged it for a new one, thus avoiding the least shadow of singularity.

As superior, he never dispensed himself from any public act or expected anything but what he himself practiced. To maintain accuracy and the decorum of ritual, he imposed upon his religious the obligation of holding a conference once a week on the ceremonies of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. The friar who loved “Lady Poverty” exhorted his brethren and the faithful to ornament the altars and churches as much as they could so they might be worthy of the divine majesty of God.

### His mortifications and gifts

For Our Lord, there was nothing too rich or decorous. For himself, it was a different story. With the exception of Sunday, he fasted every day, taking a few herbs, a piece of bread, and some water or watered down chocolate once a day. He permitted himself sleep only from 8 to 11 every evening. He was wakened then by the brother porter, and together they read a chapter from *The Mystical City of God* by María de Agreda. After praying the Divine Office at midnight, he made the Stations and scourged himself, and would remain in prayer until the hour of Prime, absorbed in God.



Fr. Margíl read a chapter from Ven. Maria de Agreda’s *Mystical City of God* every morning

It was clear to all that Heaven smiled on the humble Franciscan. Ecstasies were habitual to Fr. Margíl, who was seen raised into the air in his prayer. Fr. Simon de Kierro, a faithful companion

for many years, solemnly testified that more than once he had seen him elevated several feet in the air while celebrating Mass.

His confessional was always crowded as persons learned of his rare ability to read souls and discover secret sins. For example, a soldier living in a fort in Texas could not free himself of habits of lust and impurity, and had abandoned himself to a life of vice. One day, hearing Fr. Antonio Margíl preach, he desired to have recourse to him, but feared to expose his immoral conduct to a man so pure and holy.

Fr. Margíl, inspired by God, called the soldier by name, and encouraged him to make a confession. The soldier made a good confession, lived 40 more years, and attested he had never committed a sin against purity since his confession to Fr. Margíl.

His countenance portrayed his virginal purity, shining with the radiance of a burning light. He admitted that in the confessional when penitents entered, he could distinguish those who had been impure, and he was endowed with the rare gift of banishing all impure thoughts and desires from the hearts of those who approached him.

He had the gift of prophecy, especially in reading vocations. At the end of his first visit to the Secretary of War in Guadalajara, Don Juan Martinez de Soria, Fr. Margíl asked, “Where is the Little Sister of St. Clare?” Don Juan replied there was none there. Fr. Margíl smiled and entering a room where the children were playing, he fixed his gaze on a child, saying, “Behold the little sister of St. Clare.” In fact, the girl became a St. Clare sister, lived a holy and edifying life, and died in the odor of sanctity at age 75.

It was not uncommon for Fr. Margíl, upon seeing a boy for the first time, for him to tell the mother or father, “This one belongs to me.” Such prophecies were verified in every case.

Like another Jeremiah, he also often prophesied doom for those who would not heed his words.

Once he was preaching in Mexico City, speaking with great zeal against the immoral productions presented in a theater near the church. He warned that God Almighty would soon send down fire to destroy that place where so many sins were committed. That same night, the building was reduced to ashes.



His countenance portrayed his virginal purity, shining with the radiance of a burning light

### More appointments and then freedom for missionary work

Seeing the graces and favors bestowed by God upon Fr. Margíl and those around him, he was asked to found the College of Christ Crucified at Guatemala, and was elected its first Guardian in 1701. He personally oversaw the construction of the edifice, again working many miracles.

Once he ordered a group of children to leave a mortar ditch where they were playing. A few seconds later a pile of dirt fell on it and submerged it. Another time, he bilocated to the work site and stopped a heavy rock from crushing one of the workmen. Astonished by what they saw, the laborers united prayer with their work, substituting the recitation of the Rosary for the normal idle conversation.



His prophecy of a silver mine allowed the building of the College of Our Lady of Guadalupe of Zacatecas

As soon as his term as superior ended in 1705, Fr. Margíl was appointed commissary of the missions of Costa Rica. Shortly afterward, he was appointed to found another new mission college in Zacatecas, Mexico. In need of financing for this new college, which was in a poor and barren area, he encouraged a benefactor to open a long abandoned silver mine, promising it would yield an abundance of silver.

His prophecy proved correct, and the benefactor could defray all the expenses of the building of the College of Our Lady of Guadalupe of Zacatecas, as well as the church and monastery annexed to it.

In November 1713, a new superior of the college was elected, leaving Fr. Margíl again free to dedicate himself fully to his missionary labors among the Indians. At an age when many men are dreaming of retirement and relaxation, the almost 60-year-old friar, stooped and worn from a life of hardship and mortification, was ready to embark on the third and last epoch of his life, the founding of missions in Texas.

### Mission to Texas: 1716-1726

What is most interesting about the Texas missions is that one could say that this was the only assignment Fr. Margíl chose himself. All his life, he lived under holy obedience. He wrote that he had “never undertaken any enterprise, not even a step, without permission.”

Often poorly considered orders compelled him to leave his missions when the missionaries were on the very brink of reaping the harvest of their preaching and labors. But Fr. Margíl never hesitated to abandon enterprises and every hope of success, and travel hundreds of miles through the roughest and most dangerous country, to obey the order of his superiors.

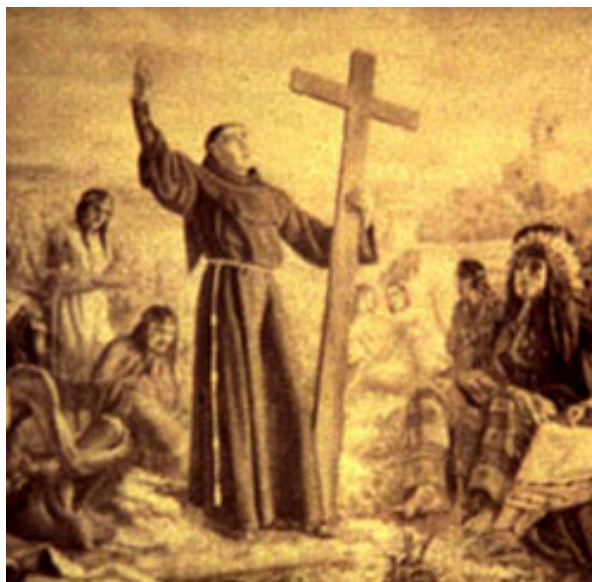
In 1714, however, he had been appointed vice-commissary of the missions of New Spain and had been granted an apostolic faculty to give missions wherever he deemed proper and with those companions who seemed to him best qualified for the accomplishment of this work. He had heard of the plight of the Indians of Texas, ignorant of the true Faith, and living in deplorable and brutish conditions. Now, at almost the age of 60, he was intent upon making the difficult journey there to found missions and convert them.

His five years of work in Texas, only a little over a year in San Antonio where his name is best remembered, could be itself a lifetime's work, but it was just a fraction of all he did in his 43 years of work as a missionary in Central and North America. In a certain way, the years in Texas constituted the crown of the glories and sufferings of his lifetime.

### Difficult beginnings

Threatened by French encroachments from Louisiana onto Spanish territories, Spain had stepped up its colonization and the Franciscans had established a mission in Texas in 1690. But it had lasted only three years. Because the conditions for colonizers were bleak and difficult, the government was not concerned about its colonization and progress. The friars had to contend with so many difficulties, exorbitant costs, and losses that Fr. Isidro Félix de Espinosa reported in his chronicle, *Nuevas Empresas*, "The very name of Texas had become odious to the religious."<sup>23</sup>

Fr. Margíl faced a first major obstacle standing in the way of an expedition. A presidio, or military post, had to be established at the entrance to the provinces to afford escorts to the missionaries and render assistance in case of uprisings or attacks. Funds were needed for this purpose, and the royal treasury was exhausted from wars. As usual, Fr. Margíl relied on Providence, which supplied in a remarkable way.



The missionaries converted the Indians and ordered all things to Catholic truth and morals

<sup>23</sup> Eduardo Enrique Rios, *Life of Fray Antonio Margil, O.F.M.*, trans. By Benedict Leutenegger, O.F.M. (Washington D.D.: Academy of American Franciscan History, 1959), p. 57.

Other works used in this article include: Ubaldus da Rieti, O.F.M., *Life of Venerable Fr. Anthony Margil, Taken from the process for his Beatification and Canonization* (Quebec/NY: Franciscan Missionary Printing Press, 1910); Eduardo Enrique Rios, *Life of Fray Antonio Margil, O.F.M.*, trans. by Benedict Leutenegger, O.F.M. (Washington D.D.: Academy of American Franciscan History, 1959); *Nothingness Itself: Select Writings of Ven Fr. Antonio Margil, O.F.M.*, (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1976).

Because of his reputation and popularity among the soldiers, each member of the garrison voluntarily offered him out of his pay \$25 a year for life, and with this money he financed the presidio of St. John the Baptist on the Rio Grande. The way to Texas was opened.

At the beginning of 1716, an expedition party of 25 soldiers with their families set out for the 2,000 mile trek from Nicaragua to Texas. They were accompanied by friars from the Colleges of Querétaro and Zacatecas. Fr. Margíl led the party from the Zacatecas College, and Fr. Espinosa was appointed head of the Querétaro College missionaries. Each of the colleges was to establish three missions.

As with many ventures God desires to bless, the beginnings were difficult, and for a while it seemed Fr. Margíl would not even make it to Texas. Weary from the labor of the preparations, he took a fever at the very onset of the expedition and could hardly walk. When they reached the Rio Grande, he barely managed to cross, and received the Last Sacraments. The rest of the missionary party, mourning, left him to die with only a lay brother to attend him so that they could continue on with the soldiers, who could wait no longer.

But Fr. Margíl did not die. He slowly recovered, and in June set out to regain the party. By the time he rejoined them in July, the first of the Zacatecas missions, the Mission of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Nacogdoches, Texas, had been founded.

In 1717, Fr. Margíl established the second, Mission San Miguel, near present-day Robeline. Thus he had the honor to erect the first church building in what is now the State of Louisiana. Shortly afterward, he also established *Mission Nuestra Señora de los Dolores* near San Augustine, Texas, halfway between the two, and resided there.



The stream at the crossing of Lanana Creek, Louisiana; below 'The Eyes of Father Margíl' is a pilgrimage site in Nacogdoches, Texas



A memorial to one of the miracles he performed during this time still exists at a crossing of Llanana Creek. During a journey from Nacogdoches to an outlying village, his group was exhausted and faint with thirst, with no hope of finding water.

Fr. Margíl addressed his companions: “Fear not, do not be dismayed. Trust in God, for in a short time you shall have water.”

Then striking a rock in the dry creek bed twice with his staff, fresh and clear water gushed forth from two spots, giving the site its name of “The Eyes of Margíl.” The water continues to flow there to this day and is attracting increasing interest as a pilgrim site.<sup>24</sup>

### **More troubles and false promises**

The most testing problems the missionaries faced in Texas were not the difficult terrain or savage character of the inhabitants. First and most trying, they had to contend with the false promises and treachery of the Spanish captains, who enriched themselves in Texas while the missions suffered from lack of the most basic food and supplies. Second, they faced the French soldiers, who were vying with the Spanish for control of the territory.

In fact, with the Texas Indians, the simple weapon Fr. Margíl employed was kindness. On every occasion and for every need, he was at hand. He ploughed and sowed their gardens, procured fruits, nuts and other products for their enjoyment, relieved their fatigue by doing their work. He liberally gave his services to obtain his end, to harvest a great wealth of souls.



*Above, Mission San Antonio de Valero, better known as El Alamo; below, Mission San Jose founded by Fr. Margíl in 1720*




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<sup>24</sup> Miracles worked or favors granted through the intercession of Ven. Margíl can be reported to Sacred Heart Catholic Church in Nacogdoches, TX: Phone 936.564.7807 or Email: [office@catholicnac.org](mailto:office@catholicnac.org).

Nonetheless, having won the Indians of that area to hear the preaching of the true Faith, he felt all the more keenly how crucial the provisions were to sustain the missions. But the promised help did not come. In a report of the missions to the Mexican Viceroy in February 1718, he wrote: “All this will perish if help does not come immediately.”

Two years passed without receiving help from any source. Failed crops worsened the situation. There were always promises of help from the Texas governor, but nothing ever came. Finally, the six missionaries met and decided to send two of their members to make a report of the actual situation.

In fact, Fr. Mattias spent three months in Mexico City, but could not succeed in making the authorities understand the urgent need for soldiers and supplies to sustain the Spanish Texas settlements, especially in the northeastern missions of Fr. Margíl where the French were already building forts and trading guns for horses to gain the good will of the Indians.

To make matters worse, in 1719, France declared war on Spain. As soon as the French garrisons in Louisiana learned of this, they attacked Mission San Miguel in Robeline. Fr. Margíl was forced to abandon his missions and withdraw to the Mission of the Immaculate Conception, one of the three missions of the Querétaro College that had been established around San Antonio. Finally, it was also abandoned for the more secure *Mission of San Antonio de Valero*, better known today as the Alamo, founded in 1718 by Fr. Isidro Félix de Espinosa.

Fr. Margíl and his small band were at the Alamo mission from December 1719 to March of 1721. He took advantage of the time to write a dictionary of the various dialects spoken by the Indians of this vast territory. And he founded on the banks of the San Antonio River the Mission of San Jose, which prospered and came to be the most beautiful mission of Texas, the “Queen of the Texas Missions,” as it is called today.

He never gave up hope of recovery of his lost missions, first, as he wrote, “for God and for love of souls,” and second, “so that they may not say it was lost because of us or that it was not recovered by us.” The opportunity came in April 1721, when large expeditionary forces of a new governor arrived. Fr. Margíl had the pleasure of seeing those missions restored one by one. He had already founded another mission dedicated to Our Lady of Guadalupe of the Bay and was intending to go further when news arrived in 1722 from the College of Zacatecas that he had been elected again as Superior for a three year term.



Barefoot & walking until his last days

He had found delight in the silence and broad expanse of the land, and had written in his letters to his brethren missionaries that he hoped to die here, a simple friar, small and forgotten among his Indians of Texas. Instead, he set out on the long return trek to again take up the burden of superior in Zacatecas.

### **His death and miracles**

Five months after Fr. Margíl left Texas, he conducted a great mission in Zacatecas that was an enormous success. The Bishop took advantage of the marvelous good effected by his words and example, and sent him to Guadalajara to ease a dissension that was disturbing its citizens, and then on to several other places of his Diocese. Fatigued and infirm, Fr. Margíl obeyed.

Truly it was a remarkable sight to see this saint still traveling barefoot, not so fleet of foot anymore, humble, worn and old, but shining every day more with a supernatural sheen, burning with zeal for souls. The people would go in procession to meet him as he entered a city, some traveling great distances, scattering branches of palms and flowers along the way.



*'Hasta mañana, my dearly beloved Lady, until tomorrow'*

When he reached Querétaro, he was so weak and emaciated it was obvious that death was near. As he traversed the streets of that city where he had done so much good, the people saw he would not be with them much longer and they cut pieces from his mantle to preserve them as holy relics. The Commissary General, fearing proper treatment was not available for him there, ordered him to go to Mexico City where he would have the advantages of an infirmary and the best medical attention.

Fr. Margíl obeyed and set out on his last journey, a hundred miles he knew would shorten, not lengthen, his earthly days. On August 2nd, 1726, he arrived at Santa Cruz College and went to ask the blessing of the superior. "Rev. Father Superior," he said, "the donkey has come here to deposit its burden."

His illness lasted five days, but he never complained of sufferings or asked the least relief, although he suffered greatly. When sickness brought delirium, he was

heard preaching, singing hymns, invoking the holy names of Jesus and Mary, reprimanding sinners with kindness and charity, and reciting the Rosary.

On August 5, when a picture of Our Lady of Remedies was brought to him, Fr. Margíl greeted her with tender affection, and ended, “*Hasta mañana*, my dearly beloved Lady, until tomorrow.” To keep his promise, the next day, the feast of the Transfiguration, his soul peacefully went to God between 1 and 2 o’clock in the afternoon.

He died just 12 days short of his 69th year, having spent 53 years in the Franciscan Order and 43 years as a missionary in North and Central America.

### **The grandeur of God is revealed in His saints**

Before he died in Mexico City, he insisted on making a general confession, which was very short, since the faults of his lifetime were so slight that the confessor had difficulty finding sufficient matter to give him absolution. Seeing the surprise of the priest and fearing he would attribute the merit to him for such rare, spotless purity, Fr. Margíl said:

“If Your Reverence should see a ball of gold suspended by a hair, though gold is very heavy, would you think that it was supported by itself? Now, I have been a poor creature, liable to fall at any moment, and if God had not kept his omnipotent hand over me, I do not know what I might have done.”

This conviction that all the good that came from him was due to God, and not himself, formed the foundation for the heroic humility he practiced.

The confessor also reported that he had questioned Fr. Margíl about his experiences while saying Mass. With the greatest possible humility, he wrote, Fr. Margíl told him a singular favor that he was wont to receive during Mass. After he spoke the words of the Consecration, Christ would seem to respond from the consecrated Host, using the same words of Consecration and alluding to the body of Fr. Margíl, ‘*Hoc est Corpus meum.*’ This favor Fr. Margíl attributed to the fact that he always had or tried to have Christ living within him.

### **Conclusion**

The missionary efforts of Fr. Margíl could be called diametrically opposed to the ecumenism introduced by Vatican II. With his burning zeal to bring all people to the Catholic faith, Fr. Margíl would have been confounded by the meeting at Assisi, where Catholics met on an equal level with American Indian medicine men and African animists. For him, the Catholic Religion was the supreme value of life, the one truth all should profess. The false gods must be combated, the idols and superstitious charms burned.

He understood that all the values of life are good to the measure that they serve the Catholic Church. So among the people he set out to evangelize, his first objective was to order everything to the Catholic faith. The customs, habits, ways of being that already existed among those people were good only in so much as they were ordered to the Catholic truth and morals. Those that

were not ordered in this sense had to be put aside. This is the complete subjection of all things to the Catholic Religion, which is demanded by a truly saintly soul.

It is an honor to describe a little of the life of this extraordinary and saintly man, Fr. Antonio Margíl. It is not by chance that part of the land he evangelized today is the United States, and especially Texas. Nothing happens by chance with Divine Providence.

What, then, is its significance? I leave the answer for each of my readers to discover. One thing is certain: From his place in Heaven, he is watching us, and he wants to help us to persevere in the true Catholic Faith, as he helped the thousands of Indians in the New World. With this conviction I invite you to begin to pray to the glorious Ven. Antonio Margíl de Jesus.





## Miracles of Fr. Margíl: The Tree of the Cross

Dr. Marian T. Horvat



On March 11, 1697, Fr. Antonio Margíl received the news that he had been elected Father Guardian of Holy Cross Monastery of Querétaro, Mexico. Father Guardian, for those who do not know, is the title for a Superior in a Franciscan house. He received this honor along with the order to leave immediately to take up the new charge. At the time he was laboring among the Indians in Guatemala. Without delay, he took to the road, and in only 14 days traveled the distance of 700 miles barefoot, and without a mule.

Thirteen years earlier when he had set out for mission work from Querétaro, he was already famous for his zealous preaching, love of penance and prayer, and the gift of reading souls. Now, he had become a legend. The story had traveled back to Querétaro about the time when the fierce Talamanca Indians had cast Fr. Margíl into a pile of burning wood, but the flames did not injure him although it blackened the image of the crucifix he held in his hands. Many persons gave accounts of how Fr. Margíl would enter a village and go straight to the places in the mission churches where the witch doctors had hidden their idols, and then burn them in the public squares.

Eyewitness reports exist of soldiers who had accompanied the missionaries and returned to Querétaro telling how Mr. Margíl's feet did not get wet when he crossed streams or swollen rivers. One priest gave a sworn report of how Fr. Margíl ate from a small bag of corn and shared it with other Indians of a village for three months without the corn ever running out.

Crowds of people were waiting in Querétaro in the *Convento de la Santa Cruz* (Monastery of the Holy Cross) to catch a glimpse of the humble Padre, toasted by the sun, with the poor mended habit, ragged sombrero, and the cord with a scull hanging from his neck that he wore when he preached.

Fr. Margíl entered the Monastery, changed his ragged habit for a new one, and showed that he knew how to govern with the same zeal and prudence that he showed in his missionary work. He insisted on the exact observance of the Rule and customs of the Order. Every night, after praying the Divine Office, he used to make the Stations of the Cross in the Convent courtyard, and then took a harsh scourging.



Fr. Margíl's tree of the cross stands in the patio of the Monastery of Santa Cruz in Quéretaro, Mexico; *below*, a close-up of the branches with the unique cross-thorns



On his return one day from preaching a mission in a nearby village, Fr. Margíl stuck his walking cane on the ground in the garden of the courtyard adjoining the Monastery. Some days passed, and it was noticed that the cane had begun to sprout and grown into a tree. The miraculous *Árbol de la Cruz* produces no flower or fruit, but has a series of small thorns, each in the form of a cross. Each cross, in its turn, presents three smaller thorns that simulate the spikes of the crucifixion. Persons have tried to plant cuttings from this tree in other places, but they will not grow anywhere else. The tree can still be seen in the courtyard of the *Convento de la Santa Cruz* today.

The miraculous tree is a kind of metaphor of the lives of Fr. Margíl and so many other early Franciscan missionaries who labored and offered everything for the conversion of the souls of the Indians. Their labors only took root because the missionaries were willing to take up and embrace the difficult crosses in their apostolate among the natives. The life of Fr. Antonio Margíl was the cross

and only the cross.

The tree of the crosses also reminds us of Fr. Margíl's favorite devotion, the Stations of the Cross. On Fridays he would pray it in the streets, carrying a large cross, barefoot, with a rope around his neck and a rough crown of thorns on his head. Everywhere he went, he promoted the practice of the Way of the Cross. In Guatemala alone, he established more than 2,500 Ways of the Cross.

One can imagine the consternation and indignation of this grand missionary today when he witnesses from Heaven the Conciliar Church stimulating Indians to return to their idolatry under the pretext of preserving their "cultural values." The Cross, also, has been set aside or forgotten by the modern preachers, who only think about social actions and class struggle.

Fr. Margíl gave his life and blood to abolish the idolatry of the infidel tribes. He sought to plant the seed of Faith and Christian Civilization, through the Cross. The *Árbol de la Cruz* remains as a memorial to his zealous and untiring labor.

Miracles worked or favors granted through the intercession of Ven. Margil can be reported to Sacred Heart Catholic Church in Nacogdoches, TX: Phone 936.564.7807 or Email: [office@catholicnac.org](mailto:office@catholicnac.org).



From the 'tree of the cross' that burgeoned from Fr. Margil's staff into a bush, the only one known to produce this unique thorn