

Pope to visit, celebrate Mass at U.S. seminary in Rome

By Cindy Wooden

Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY - Pope Francis will visit the Pontifical North American College May 2 and celebrate Mass there at the end of a conference on the life and significance of Blessed Junipero Serra, the Franciscan founder of California missions whom the pope will canonize in the United States in September.

Guzman Carriquiry, secretary of the Pontifical Commission for Latin America, which is sponsoring the study day in Rome along with the North American College, said April 17 that Pope Francis would arrive at midday for the Mass with the U.S. seminarians, U.S. and Mexican cardinals in Rome, as well as with Archbishop Jose H. Gomez of Los Angeles and other conference participants.

Some 250 seminarians, most from the United States, study at the college on the Janiculum Hill overlooking St. Peter's Square and Basilica. The building was inaugurated personally by Pope Pius XII in 1953. St. John XXIII visited in 1959; Blessed Paul VI visited the campus in 1970; and St. John Paul II visited in 1980.

Monsignor James F. Checchio, the college's rector, told Catholic News Service that the pope himself expressed an interest in going to the seminary; visiting before he visits the United States will be like a preview.

"He will find a great vitality here and he will witness first-hand the faith of our country," Monsignor Checchio said. "There is a lot of excitement here for receiving his message. Our men have been so impressed with him from the beginning, especially for his care for the poor."

The 18th-century Franciscan missionary, Father Serra, founded a string of missions across Mexico and California. He died in 1784, and is buried at Mission San Carlos

Borromeo in Carmel, California. He was beatified in Rome in 1988 by St. John Paul.

At the time of Blessed Serra's beatification, controversy arose over his treatment of Native Americans and his attitudes toward Indian culture, although supporters of his canonization have said the charges are without foundation.

Carriquiry said both he and Archbishop Gomez will discuss the controversy in their presentations at the conference in May.

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