

Stop 26 – Teaching with Stone

Gaze at the intricate carvings surrounding the entrance to Mission San Jose, the Queen of the Missions. Share in the wonder expressed by Fr. Juan Morfi in 1778. “No one could have imagined that there were such good artists in so desolate a place.” And yet today, we do not know the names of the artisans who produced these works of art. As with much of ancient art, they expressed strong significant symbolism.

Six saints watch over the entrance. Over the window is Joseph, patron of the mission with his son, the baby Jesus. To the right of the window is Saint Francis of Assisi, founder of the missionary order which served the Mission Indians. To the left is Saint Dominic, a contemporary of Saint Francis who like Francis pledged himself to a life of poverty, simplicity, and obedience. The saints on either side of the door are Joachim and Anne, the parents of Mary, the mother of Jesus. Mary’s parents may have served to reinforce to the natives the importance of family. Finally over the door is Our Lady of Guadalupe, the patron saint of the Americas. Depicting Mary as a native herself showed the inclusiveness of Catholicism for the native people.

Look closely at the intricate detail of the carvings. Find the three hearts, one surrounded by a crown of thorns, another with a dagger piercing it, and the third with a lily, (pause) What does a heart symbolize to you? (pause) ...perhaps love and devotion? The thorns around the sacred heart symbolize that Christ suffered because of his love.

Shells symbolize baptism, the entry into the faith. Baptism of these mission Indians was the most critical component for the Church--to save souls, and the State--to acquire new citizens.

During Mission times, vividly colored frescos enhanced the beauty of the church. It must have been breathtaking, as was the irrevocable change this building meant to those who entered its doors.