

Inaugural Liturgy of the Holy Spirit
Rev. J. Dean Brackley, S.J.
November 17, 2000 | St. Ignatius Church

Rev. J. Dean Brackley, S.J., professor of theology and ethics at the University of Central America, delivered the following homily during the Mass of the Holy Spirit on November 17, 2000 in St. Ignatius Church in conjunction with the installation of Fr. Stephen A. Privett, S.J., as the 27th president of the University of San Francisco.

Joel 3,1-5 / Acts 2,1-11 / John 15,26-27; 16,12-15

We open this presidential inauguration with the Eucharist, asking God to send the Holy Spirit to renew the university's mission and to guide its new president. Jesus tells us the Spirit will lead us into all truth. The prophet says that the young—your students?—will see visions, while the old—the faculty?—will dream dreams. This is not the Spirit of abstract truth about just anything and everything. Joel cries out in God's name: "I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy." We are asking to receive the Spirit of the prophets and, above all, of the great prophet Jesus of Nazareth. This is the Spirit that anointed Jesus to announce good news to the poor and liberation to the captive. We pray that the same Spirit that inspired his words and actions will fill the university community and power its search for truth and its formation of students.

The Gospel of John says that this Spirit will be our Paraclete, that is, our defense attorney in the battle for truth. We are praying for the Spirit who defends Jesus' visions of a new way to live together. This Spirit unmask the lies of the prince of this world. The search for truth is not simply a matter of pushing back the frontiers of ignorance. Although it requires plenty of patients, painstaking research in the library, the search for truth also requires questioning the unjust status quo and its gospel of wealth and prestige. This morning we pray for the courage to raise the big questions.

This university was founded during the gold rush, and today it finds itself in the midst of a kind of "silicon rush." Nearby Silicon Valley symbolizes a technical revolution that offers peculiar opportunities and an ethos that poses special challenges. Today we ask for the Paraclete to help us appreciate the opportunities but also to defend us against the get-rich—quick microchip fever.

In its service for truth, the university draws on its Catholic and Ignatian inspiration even as it welcomes people of all faith and of no faith as equal partners. We need not be shy in affirming that a Christian and Jesuit University must have higher standards than those of the most demanding secular universities must. It may not be possible to compete with their endowments or their sophisticated laboratories; but it is possible and necessary to hold us to a more comprehensive set of academic standards, standards we cannot meet without the help of the Holy Spirit we are invoking.

For first of all, it is not enough for us to master "the literature" of our various disciplines, as indispensable as that is. We pray above all to understand reality in all its complexity and throbbing with the divine presence. We ask for what St. Ignatius called interior knowledge of how the world works. We cannot consider students educated if they cannot tell us how many people go hungry in this country, why they go hungry elsewhere, or what might be done to change this.

Secondly, we take sin more seriously original, habitual, actual, and structural sin than does secular culture. Therefore, we pray today that the Paraclete will help us unmask original distortion, habitual and actual distortion and collective distortion, especially those limitations, blind spots and prejudices that affect our middle-class tribe in affluent society. St. Ignatius appreciated the way our thinking is grounded in our commitments and shored up by our affectivity, so that's sometimes the most important questions never get raised. Reality is reasonable, but pure reason alone cannot bring us to it. Liberating our minds and imagination requires untangling the habits of our heart and ordering our commitments. Without cognitive liberation, our quest for truth will fall short on Christian grounds and on strictly academic grounds.

Thirdly, the Christian University has a focal point in its search for truth. Not all questions have equal weight for us. The university gives priority to the most important questions about the real world we live in. This does not simply mean asking about the meaning of life in general. Whatever our specialization, we hold that the disparate facts and all the disciplines gyrate around a central focus: The cross is the center of reality, the center of history. It is from the foot of the cross that we allow the questions to arise; from there we seek our answers. From the foot of Jesus' cross and all the crosses of our own time. Our first question arises from there: Who are the crucified people of today? What do they suffer and why? How can we bring them down from the crosses? How can we help them to rise again? From the foot of these crosses we can begin to see straight. Apart from these crosses, our wisdom turns to folly.

Your new president, Steve Privett, helped found the East Side Project to help students at Santa Clara University open their horizons by bumping up against the other world of the poor. Your students have similar opportunities here at USF. Steve was also a prime mover in the birth of the Casa de la Solidaridad at the UCA where students from Jesuit universities in the U.S. now spend a semester studying and working among the poor in El Salvador. Wonderful things happen in such settings. The students arrive in El Salvador nervous at first. But they soon find themselves asking why these poor people are smiling, why the poor receive them with open arms and insist on sharing their last tortilla with the visiting gringa. The victims break their visitors' hearts, and the visitors fall in love with them. The students discover that the world is far worse than they dared to imagine but also far more wonderful. The victims communicate their stubborn hope, their consolidation with no apparent cause in the visible facts. Clearly the students need these victims more than the other way around.

The Jesuits' Superior General Peter-Hans Kolvenbach recently reminded us at Santa Clara that:

This type of encounter helps people re-shape the basic, often unconscious assumptions that form the horizon for their interpretation of the world. It helps undermine the "original prejudice" of our world — that some are more humans than others. This is the "original distortion" that justifies the division of the world into important people and unimportant people.

The Ignatian understanding of the search for the truth leads us to higher standards for learning. Augustine was right to affirm that faith—commitment as a condition for understanding: *crede ut intellegas!* We must also say today *dilige ut intellegas!* We love that we might understand.

All this suggests a fourth way in which our standards must be higher. Interacting with the poor, students frequently hear what St. Ignatius referred to as the call of Christ. We want students not only to master literature of their fields and to understand the world in which they live. We want to help them discover their *vocation* in life. And we want them to discover not only the dramatist in them -- or the chemist or the psychotherapist-- but also above all their deepest vocation as human beings.

Ignatius says that Christ calls all of us to participate in God's project of abundant life, the reign of God. While each has a particular vocation — as an administrator, a musician, and a mother - our deepest vocation as human beings is to spend ourselves in love and service to others.

In a few days we will celebrate the 20th anniversary of the four American churchwomen who gave their lives for the poor in El Salvador. Maryknoll sister Ita Ford was one of them. Shortly before her death, Ita wrote to her younger niece in the U.S., "I hope you come to find that which gives life a deep meaning for you. Something worth living for — maybe even worth dying for." Ita's point was that life is short, and we only get to do it once. We want to make it count. Today we pray for the Spirit not only to help our students pass their history exams here, but even more to help them discover and deepen their vocation to love and serve and to learn to do so with professional competence.

As Fr. Kolvenbach put it, "The real measure of our Jesuit universities lies in who our students become," in their becoming "men and women for others," in a world sharply divided along the fault line that separates the haves from the have-nots. As your own Mission statement expresses it, USF "promotes high standards of academic excellence and prepares leaders who will work for justice for all people." It is central to USF's mission to "instill a passion for justice and integrate faith with life."

Understood in this way, the university's mission is vital to the needs of our world. We are off to a bad start in this new century. Inequality is increasing everywhere. Violence, social disintegration, and environmental destruction are spreading. Fortunately, fresh signs of hope have also appeared. Especially in the poor countries, groups of neighbors, human rights groups, environmental groups, women, trade unions, indigenous people, cooperatives are burgeoning. They promise change, not from the top down as the Old Left tried to change things, but from the bottom up. Yet these micro-initiatives are up

against daunting macro-obstacles. Without international allies, the fledging movements in civil society have little chance against those who control the market and the means of violence.

Our response can only be to globalize the practice of love. We need to make this new century the Century of International Solidarity. If the micro-initiatives of the poor are not to be crushed that will depend on a critical mass of people in the rich countries who will assume the cause of the poor as their own.

Universities like this one are in position to play a signal role in the formation of men and women for others, and especially for the crucified people of the world. I'm sure that the collaboration among the universities North and South can play an important role in this effort.

Pope John Paul's letter, *Ex corde ecclesiae* calls for the Catholic university to "demonstrate the courage to express uncomfortable truths, truths that may clash with public opinion but that are also necessary to safeguard the authentic good of the society" (nos. 32 and 34 0). The Jesuits at the UCA were killed for just this kind of university service.

May the Spirit of the prophets fill President Privett and the entire USF community with a deep sense of mission. May the Spirit fill us with compassion, defend us against the deceits of the enemy and lead us to the truth that sets us free. ■