

Commencement Remarks

Rev. Stephen A. Privett, S.J., President of the University of San Francisco
December 15, 2000 | St. Ignatius Church

I add my own words of congratulations to you graduates and those who have supported you throughout your years of work and study – parents, spouses, partners, friends & family. This is a proud moment for you and a big relief for them.

It is customary for commencement speakers to point out that graduates face an uncertain future; it is necessary to note that the economic tidal wave sweeping across the globe will touch us all one way or another. If your education has been costly, as it has, I remind you that it is the only investment that can never be taken from you by anyone or any event and its value only increases over a lifetime.

I want to acknowledge and thank the faculty and staff who are the lifeblood of this Jesuit University. Recently, a faculty member told me about a student whose difficulties were compounded by the death of a parent. The student was grateful for the support and understanding and support and took the occasion to point out that each of her teachers had gone out of the way during the semester to personally ask if they could be of assistance to her. That kind of concern in the context of a demanding academic program is what Jesuit education is about.

You have written all the papers written, completed the exams and passed the courses required for your degree. But the final evaluation of your education is not a grade or a diploma, but the quality of life that you choose to live – how and who you choose to be in the world.

As graduates, you are now the value added to society by Jesuit Catholic education. Over four and a half centuries ago, Ignatius Loyola, the founder of the Jesuit order, wrote to a friend, “The Society Jesus hopes by means of its work in education to pour into society persons capable of leavening it for good.” Almost five hundred years later, that hope remains the animating force behind Jesuit education at the University of San Francisco. Today we are “pouring” you into society. You are the leaven that Jesus spoke about in the story of the woman who hid the tiniest particle in three measures of meal so that they rose into large loaves of nourishing bread. You may think you’re too insignificant or the problem is too big, but stay alert and stay at it. As a wise Salvadoran told me, “life is too short to sleep through it and ours is a culture designed for dozing.”

As alums we look for your continued support of the University. We hope that you will be able to help us help others receive the education that you have. It was a joy to give you what may be your best Christmas gift ever. God bless you and your efforts to make of this world a better place for us all.