

## Commencement Remarks

Rev. Stephen A. Privett, S.J., President of the University of San Francisco  
December 14, 2001 | St. Ignatius Church

My own congratulations to you graduates and my appreciation – and yours -- to those who supported you during the past years of work and study: parents, spouses, partners, friends & family.

I acknowledge and thank our faculty and staff. My appreciation for our faculty increases daily. Just two weeks ago today, Professor Esther Madriz died. I was touched by the messages of gratitude and appreciation that students taped to her office door and the lighted candles they placed in the hallway outside the Sociology Department. It was a marvelous show of affection. Like Esther, many of our faculty evoke an extraordinary response from students because they represent a rich blend -- unusual in higher education -- of academic competence and wholehearted commitment to the development of students. While we mourn Esther, we celebrate so many of our faculty who mirror her ideals of rigor, warmth and compassion.

We celebrate this joyous occasion under the shadow of September 11. Maybe that event will mark this generation as the assassinations of the Kennedy's and Martin Luther King did mine, or the explosion of the Challenger did the generation who watched it happen on TV. Our leaders are not safe from the assassin's bullet; technology cannot always deliver on its promises; and our country is not immune from the specter of terrorism, which haunts the lives of too many people in too many countries across the globe.

We now know that neither military might, nor control of the global market, nor a monopoly of the world's resources, not even a missile defense system can ensure us against the forces of hatred and violence. While we respond to the very real threats posed by terrorists, we must not fail to recognize that our real enemies are the age old ones of ignorance, hatred, fear and profound disregard for the worth and dignity of every person on this earth. The world will never be secure while these forces remain at large, and they are not defeated by force of arms alone, but by policies, actions and lives directed by reason tempered with compassion.

In the face of the September 11 tragedy, the University of San Francisco reaffirms its commitment and strengthens its resolve "to educate leaders who will fashion a more humane and just world" -- knowing that the need for a more just world, rather than a violently reactive one, has never seemed greater.

Whether USF is successful as a Jesuit University depends on the choices that you will make. My hope is that you will never look back and say of USF what Thomas Meagher said of his Jesuit education in Ireland at a time when thousands of his countrymen were deliberately starved to death and brutally repressed. He wrote: "they talked to us about Mount Olympus...they entangled us in Euclid...gave us a look, through an interminable telescope, at what was doing in the New World; but, as far as Ireland was concerned, they left us like blind and crippled children, in the dark"[*The Great Shame*, 73]. May you live in the light.

My final comments are from Maryknoll Sister, Ita Ford, who with three other American church women was tortured and murdered by Salvadoran soldiers in 1988. On the occasion of her niece's graduation from college, she wrote to her:

I hope you come to find that which gives life a deep meaning for you. Something worth living for, maybe even worth dying for, something that energizes you, enthuses you, enables you to keep moving ahead. I can't tell you what it might be. That's for you to find, to choose, to love. I encourage you to keep looking and support you in your search."

What Ita Ford hoped for her niece is my prayer for you – that you keep searching and know that your alma mater supports you in your life's search. God bless you.