

## Commencement Remarks

Rev. Stephen A. Privett, S.J., President of the University of San Francisco  
December 2002 | St. Ignatius Church

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

I want to acknowledge and thank the faculty and staff who are the lifeblood of this Jesuit University. At memorial services for three deceased faculty members over the past year – Fr. Dick Mulcahy, Bob Mackus and Esther Madriz – I was struck by the student testimonials to these wonderful human beings and outstanding teachers. “Changed my life” was the recurring phrase in each of those tributes. Unfortunately, we frequently fail to say what is most important to those individuals who touch our lives when they are still with us. Let me simply acknowledge now those faculty who continue to change the lives of our students by challenging accepted beliefs and opening their minds and hearts to new ideas and fresh perspectives – in a rigorous, demanding and supportive learning environment. That is Jesuit education – rigor and support – two qualities characteristic of a USF Jesuit education.

Your papers are all written, your exams completed, all the courses required for your degree have received their passing grade. But the final evaluation of your education is not a grade or a diploma, but the quality of life that you choose to live.

As graduates, you constitute the value added to society by Jesuit education. Over four and a half centuries ago, Ignatius Loyola, the founder of the Jesuit order, wrote to a colleague, “The Society Jesus hopes by means of its work in education to pour into society persons capable of leavening it for good.” That hope still animates Jesuit education at the University of San Francisco. USF now “pours” you into society. You are the leaven that Jesus spoke about in his story of the woman who put the tiniest particle of leaven into three lumps of dough that they rose into large loaves of nourishing bread. If you think you’re too insignificant to tackle the massive problems of the world, recall the what the late Senator Robert Kennedy told an audience of University students over thirty five years ago:

Let no one be discouraged by the belief that there is nothing one man or woman can do against the enormous array of the world’s ill – against misery and ignorance, injustice and violence...Few will have the greatness to bend history itself, but each of us can work to change a small portion of events, and in the total of all those acts will be written the history of this generation.

Or as a friend of mine likes to say, “life is too short to sleep through it, and our culture is designed for dozing.” Stay awake, alert and engaged in your piece of the world however small. Write your sentence in the history of this generation.

As alums we will look to you for continued support of the University. We hope that you will be able to help us offer others the education that you have received. It was a joy for me 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.