

Commencement Remarks

Rev. Stephen A. Privett, S.J., President of the University of San Francisco

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I conclude this ceremony as we began: by congratulating you graduates and those who have supported you – parents, spouses, partners, friends & family. If this is a proud and happy moment for you, it is a huge relief for them. You and I arrived on this campus together. You are the first group of students who began and completed your education during my tenure so you will always have a special place in my failing memory.

I want to acknowledge and thank our faculty and staff. The parents of a graduating student said it well in a letter to the dean, “We are most grateful to the dedicated faculty members who have worked so devotedly to insure our son’s academic success. Two of his professors played a very important part in his academic achievement, and I am, therefore, attaching a copy of the letters we sent to them in appreciation for all they have done for our son in the last four years...it is a pleasure for us to share our feelings about these outstanding professors with you.” Our faculty and staff are outstanding persons and professionals. They are the core community at USF; they are the “critical mass” of the University who remain after graduation. I thank them all in my name and yours.

This year opened with the Dalai Lama’s coming to campus with his simple but powerfully profound message of universal compassion. These last weeks have been scarred by images of abuse and humiliation of Iraqis by U.S. military personnel and the beheading of an American free lancer by terrorists. It is difficult to imagine more starkly contrasting images: the joyful tranquility of the Dalai Lama on the one hand, and on the other, those leering, mocking faces and the hooded agents of death.

The contemporary Irish poet, Seamus Heaney, who has tasted the bitter fruits of a century of conflict and bigotry in his own country wrote:

Human beings suffer,
They torture one another,
They get hurt and get hard.
No poem or play or song
Can fully right a wrong
Inflicted and endured.

The innocent in gaols
Beat on their bars together.
A hunger-striker’s father
Stands in the graveyard dumb.
The police widow in veils
Faints at the funeral home.

History says, Don’t hope
On this side of the grave.
But then, once in a lifetime
The longed-for tidal wave

Of justice can rise up,
And hope and history rhyme.

So hope for a great sea change
On the far side of revenge.
Believe that a further shore
Is reachable from here.
Believe in miracles
And cures and healing wells.

My prayer for you graduates is that you live your lives “on the far side of revenge.” That you play a role, however small, in raising up “the longed-for tidal wave of justice” in which “hope and history rhyme.” That you direct your lives to that “further shore” which really is reachable from here. May your time together here on the Hilltop embolden you to “believe in miracles and cures and healing wells.”

And may I now be the first to salute you, the newest members of the University of San Francisco Alumni Association?