

Commencement Remarks

Rev. Stephen A. Privett, S.J., President of the University of San Francisco
December 15, 2006 | St. Ignatius Church

My own congratulations and best wishes to you graduates. I also offer my and your gratitude and appreciation to your parents, spouses, partners, friends & family members. This is a great day for them, as well as for you.

I want to publicly express my admiration and appreciation for our staff and faculty, in particular. You leave the Hilltop today; they remain as the heart and soul of this great Jesuit University.

Today is your graduation, and for the Jewish community tonight marks the first night of Hanukkah. Hanukkah celebrates the rededication of the Jerusalem temple over 2000 years ago after its desecration by foreign occupiers. Once the temple had been fully purified, it was time to light the eternal lamp which burns in every Jewish house of worship, and once lighted is never extinguished. In this case, however, there was only enough oil for one day. The lamp, however, burned for eight days — which was the length of time it took to press, prepare and consecrate new oil. On each of the eight nights of Hanukkah, Jews recall this miracle by lighting a candle on the eight branch candelabrum called a menorah.

Hanukkah, the feast of light, celebrates an historical incident in the Jewish tradition; it also celebrates a universal truth about the human spirit — each one of us is called to light a darkened world. When we are true to the best of our humanity, the light we enkindle will burn far longer than we might ever imagine on our own. The divine spark that lights the human spirit cannot be extinguished.

Last Sunday, Mohammad Yunus accepted the Nobel Peace Prize. He is the founder of the Grameen Bank of Bangladesh, which today gives loans to 7 million poor people, 97% of whom are women. Mr. Yunus firmly believes, as do I, that “peace is inextricably linked to poverty” and that “putting resources into improving the lives of poor people is a better strategy for securing peace than spending it on guns.”

At the conclusion of his acceptance speech, Mr. Yunus said:

A human being is born into this world fully equipped not only to take care of him or herself, but also to contribute to enlarging the well being of the entire world... Some get the chance to explore their potential..., but many others...never get any opportunity to unwrap the wonderful gifts they were born with...and the world remains deprived of their creativity and their contribution.

Jesus challenged us to be lights dispelling darkness. Hanukkah recalls the inexhaustible source of light within our hearts and our faith communities. May you, with your

education, advance the day that all human beings have the opportunity you have — to unwrap their God-given gifts and join their lights with ours to dispel the darkness of poverty, war and immense human suffering that engulf too much of our world.

This is the miracle of Hanukkah and the miracle of the human spirit. During this season, let us join hands with good people of all faiths and no faith to celebrate the divine spark that burns at the heart of our common humanity.