

## Commencement Remarks

Rev. Stephen A. Privett, S.J., President of the University of San Francisco  
December 18, 2009 | St. Ignatius Church

I congratulate all of you graduates, and express my thanks and appreciation to your family and friends who stood by you during your time at USF and now rightly share the joy of your accomplishments today. I also want to thank and acknowledge our staff and faculty. I ask our faculty to please stand and be recognized.

My remarks to you this afternoon are not mine. They come from an unlikely source, from a person who has never been cited by a commencement speaker; from one who is generally held in very low esteem by society-at-large. His name is Salvador and he was a participant in one of Sr. Janet's programs: "Insideout Writer's Retreat of 2009." Salvador is 17 years old and one of those incarcerated minors whom today's honoree, Sr. Janet, has so faithfully championed for 35 years. Today, if only for a few minutes, she rightfully calls our attention to those who have been pushed to the very outer limits of our consciousness. They – he – have much to say to us so I turn now to Salvador's poem, entitled "Wisdom and Hope." He writes:

*As you sit here right now  
Look around  
Do we look like animals?  
Why do you sit in this cage with us?  
We are not animals  
We are human beings  
Just like you with a mistake that follows us just like our shadow  
We are bright, smart, and talented kids  
Sitting and wasting our days in a place that is supposed to change us  
Teach us a lesson so that we won't come back  
Wrong!  
This place is a place I call the black hole  
Where minors get lost  
How can you give minors 200 years with life  
Does anyone care about our future?  
Because we are the future  
Is the world afraid to give us a chance?  
....he continues:  
Sometimes at night I think about changing  
but it's hard knowing  
That the whole way down the black tunnel  
You have only a few people to give you wisdom and  
Hope  
The rest of the way is drama  
People trying to pull you back to the beginning  
Well guess what?  
I am going to take the wisdom and hope  
that I got and push it down the tunnel  
Because when I make it out*

*I want to be one of the people  
that give minors like us wisdom and hope  
.... he concludes:  
when I look in the mirror  
I see a teenage boy that wants to be somebody  
Not an animal that is going crazy and ready to attack  
As I look around  
I seen teenagers ready for a change in life and the world  
The only problem is that people that have power don't see it  
So I am telling every person here  
Never give up!  
Never give up when you are going down that tunnel  
because you are never going to be alone  
Believe and keep on trying  
Even when you fail, get back up  
Keep pushing  
Never give up*

My prayer for you graduates -- for all of us -- is that you be persons of wisdom and hope; that you see your power for good and that your belief in that power keeps you pushing so that you never give up.

And now it remains only for me to welcome you to the alumni association of the University of San Francisco. We will stay in touch.