

Commencement Remarks

Rev. Stephen A. Privett, S.J., President of the University of San Francisco
December 17, 2010 | St. Ignatius Church

I offer a final congratulatory word to you graduates and to all the folks in your particular village: your parents, spouses/partners, family, friends, classmates, faculty and staff. I particularly acknowledge our outstanding staff and faculty and ask those faculty here on the platform to please stand and be recognized.

In my concluding remarks, I offer for your consideration the “daffodil principle,” which was developed by a grandmother, Ms. Jeroldeen Edwards after an experience that began with a two-hour drive from her Laguna Beach home to her daughter’s place at Lake Arrowhead. Not too long after she arrived at her daughter Carolyn’s house, grandma announced that she had to get back on the road before the rain started.

Carolyn begged her mother take the time to go with her to “see the daffodils.” Ms. Edwards declined and insisted on heading directly home. Carolyn finally prevailed on her mother to drive her to the garage to pick up her car. “It’s just a few blocks,” Carolyn said, “and I’ll drive because I’m used to this weather and familiar with the roads.”

After a few minutes, an anxious grandma asked how far the garage was? “Just a few blocks,” Carolyn answered. When her daughter finally confessed that they were taking the long way, her mother sternly ordered Carolyn to turn around. “It’s okay, mom,” Carolyn said. “Trust me. You’ll never forgive yourself if you miss this experience.”

“Twenty minutes later,” Ms. Edwards writes, “we turned onto a narrow gravel road and I saw a small church. On the far side of the church was a hand-lettered sign that said, “Daffodil Garden.”

She continues:

“We each got out of the car and started down the path. When we turned the corner, I looked up and gasped. Before me was the most glorious sight I’ve ever seen. It looked as though someone had taken a great vat of gold and poured it over the mountain peak. The flowers were planted in majestic, swirling patterns – great ribbons and swaths of deep orange, white, lemon yellow, salmon pink, saffron, and butter yellow. Each different-colored variety was planted as a group so that it swirled and flowed like its own river with its own unique hue. There were five acres of flowers.”

“Who did this?” I asked Carolyn.

Carolyn pointed to a small, neat A-frame house and said, “The woman who lives in that house.” We walked up to the house and saw a poster on the front porch. It read: “Answers to your questions: (1) 50,000 bulbs and 6 different colors; (2) one at a time, by one woman; with two hands, two feet, very little brain; (3) began in 1958.

She goes on, “There it was, ‘the daffodil principle.’ “For me, that moment was a life changing experience. I thought of this one woman, unknown to me, who more than fifty years before had begun – one bulb at a time – to bring her vision of beauty and joy to an obscure mountain top. Her planting one bulb at a time, year after year, had changed the world. She had created something of indescribable beauty and inspiration. She had forever changed the world in which she lived, one bulb at a time.

The principle behind her daffodil garden taught me one of the great principles of my life. That is, learning to move toward our goals and desires one step at a time. When we multiply tiny pieces of time with small increments of daily effort, we can accomplish magnificent things. We can change the world.

“It makes me sad,” I admitted to Carolyn on the drive home. “What might I have accomplished if I had thought of a worthy goal thirty or forty years ago and had worked away ‘one bulb at a time’ through all those years to reach that goal. Just think what I might have accomplished.”

Carolyn’s response to her mother is my suggestion to you graduates, “start now.”

Welcome to the Alumni Association of the University of San Francisco. We hope you stay in touch with us. God bless you.