

Commencement Remarks

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

Winter Commencement, December 16, 2011

St. Ignatius Church

In offering you graduates my words of congratulations, I acknowledge and thank your family and friends who share your joy of accomplishment today. I also express my appreciation and admiration for our staff and faculty. I ask our faculty here on the platform to please stand and be recognized.

At these December graduations it is customary for me to don Santa's cap, since I have just given you the most expensive Christmas gift you may ever receive. Happily, I only give you your diploma – not pay for it. This is a gift that will keep you giving for a long time!

With Hanukkah just around the corner, I thought to take a story from the Talmud, the authoritative written compilation of Jewish oral tradition:

A long time ago, there were two brothers, both working the fields; at the end of a days' work, they would divide the grain evenly between them. One brother was married, with a wife and six children. The other brother was not married at all.

One day the brother who was married said to himself, "It is not fair that my brother and I divide the grain evenly between us. I have a wife and six children to care for me in my old age; but my brother has no one."

And so secretly under cover of night, the brother who was married would cross the field with grain from his own barn, and place the grain in his brother's barn; so that his brother would never be without.

One day the brother who was not married, said to himself, "It is not fair that my brother and I divide the grain evenly between us. I just have myself; but my brother has a wife and six children to feed."

And so secretly under cover of night, the brother who was not married at all would cross the field with grain from his barn, and place the grain in his brother's barn; so that his brother and family would never be without.

Both brothers were surprised that that when they went to their barns the next morning there was always as much grain as there had been the day before.

Then one night it happened. Both brothers rose late. The moon had gone down and they went to their barns. Again, they gathered as much grain as they could carry and headed out across the field to their brother's barn.

It was so dark, that they almost collided in the middle of the field. They both stopped and stared at one another. What they saw made them smile. Only then did they realize what both had been doing for the other.

They dropped their sacks, and hugged one another for a long, long time. They then promised one another that they would always help each other, no matter what.

When God saw the two brothers hugging each other, God said, “Where those two embrace is holy ground, because it is a place of selfless love and generous hearts. It is the ground that I choose to build my temple upon.”

May you graduates live your lives on holy ground and may your lives be the place where God’s temple is built.

Now I need only welcome you to the alumni association of the University of San Francisco. We will stay in touch.