

Commencement Remarks  
Winter 2012 Commencement  
St. Ignatius Church

Your commencement comes in the middle of the holiday season: Thanksgiving, Hanukkah, Christmas, Kwanzaa, New Years. The holiday season beckons us back home. Returning home raises questions about where we come from and what we go back to? Such questions are not answered by red pins on Google maps. They are probing even disturbing questions. The kinds of questions that Mitch Albom asked his dying former professor, Morrie Schwartz, whom he visits sixteen years after college. Albom's best selling book, *Tuesdays with Morrie*, talks about these visits, which took place over a number of successive Tuesdays. He writes:

Morrie's high smoky voice took me back to my university years, when I thought rich people were evil, a shirt and tie were prison clothes, and life without freedom to get up and go... down the streets of Paris, into the mountains of Tibet, was not a good life at all. What happened to me?

The eighties happened. The nineties happened. Death and sickness and getting fat and going bald happened. I traded lots of dreams for a bigger paycheck, and I never even realized I was doing it.

Yet here was Morrie talking with the wonder of our college years, as if I'd simply been on a long vacation. "Have you found someone to share your heart with?" he asked. "Are you giving to your community? Are you at peace with yourself? Are you trying to be as human as you can be?" I squirmed pretending that I had been grappling deeply with such questions. What happened to me?

I once promised myself I would never work for money, that I would join the Peace Corps, that I would live in beautiful inspirational places. Instead I had been in Detroit for ten years now, at the same workplace, using the same bank, visiting the same barber.

I was thirty-seven, more efficient than in college, tied to computers and cell phones. I wrote articles about rich athletes who, for the most part, could not care less about people like me. I was no longer young for my peer group, nor did I walk around in gray sweatshirts ... I did not have long discussions about the meaning of life. My days were full, yet I remained, much of the time, unsatisfied.

What happened to me? Thus, Albom concludes the passage.

The holiday season has the power to bring us back "home" – not simply to a street address, but home in the sense of who we really are, who we are called to be, a home that asks whether we are worshipping the right gods, a home that asks "Morrie questions." I leave you with the thought that "Morrie's questions" are God's questions. Do not evade

them, but recognize them for what they are: a grace and a gift from a God calling us all home.

My congratulations and a warm, personal welcome to the Alumni Association of the University of San Francisco.