

Commencement Remarks
Spring 2012 Commencement
St. Ignatius Church

I conclude where we began this commencement by congratulating you graduates and gratefully acknowledging the love and support you have received from your family and friends. I also thank our faculty for their commitment to teaching and your learning. As you know, their interest in you extends beyond the classroom and is expressed in their service as mentors, advisers, research associates and confidants. I ask them to stand for one final round of appreciative applause. I also thank our outstanding staff, especially those who have given up their time to serve as marshals here at your graduation.

The British author, Margaret Silf, wrote about spooning cauliflower cheese into her baby granddaughter's eager mouth, when a sudden realization dawned on her. "Do you know what?" she asked the infant, "You and I are performing a miracle here. We are turning cauliflower into a little girl!" The baby smiled her approval and went on with her part in the miracle as though it were the most natural thing in the world. Perhaps it is.

In much the same vein, the poet, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, wrote:

*Earth's crammed with heaven and every common bush afire with God.
But only he who sees takes off his shoes.
And all the rest stand around picking blackberries.*

In his first speech to Parliament, Prime Minister David Cameron spoke about a six year old girl who sent him a one pound note that she had recently received from the tooth fairy. The child wrote that she wanted the country to get better and asked Mr. Cameron to use her gift from the tooth fairy to pay for jobs. Obviously economic recovery is not that simple, but the story does underscore a profound truth that we may easily overlook at our peril. This six year old kid got it right: she gave something up so that someone else may benefit. Miracles happen or at least trace their beginnings to one person's putting the common good over his or her own personal gratification. Jesus hints at this fundamental human truth in his parables about tiny seeds and small unseen deeds, whose transformative power and impact is not immediately evident. We are accustomed to see "ta-da" moments, the great transformations – rather than the tiny, miraculous beginnings that are all around us, and whose completion only time may see. And so we dare to hope.

My prayer for you today is that you do not place yourselves among those who stand around picking blackberries; that you see the flaming bush afire with God and play your part in the miraculous, if unheralded and microscopic, efforts to change the world from wherever and however you may be.

God bless you and welcome to the alumni association of the University of the Best City Ever.