

Commencement Remarks

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

May, 2001 | St. Ignatius Church

We conclude this ceremony where we began – with words of congratulations. This time, my own. My appreciation, congratulations and best wishes to you graduates and those who have supported you throughout your years of work and study – parents, spouses, partners, friends & family. This is a proud and long awaited moment for you and a huge relief for them.

I gratefully acknowledge USF's faculty and staff who are the lifeblood of this Jesuit University. I won't embarrass those faculty who were singled out in emails and letters of appreciation that I have received from some of you over the past few days. The common thread that ran through those notes was a sense of gratitude and appreciation for individual faculty who stretched your intellects and touched your hearts, who called you to a level of excellence that you may not have demanded of yourselves. This is what Jesuit education is about.

You have written all the papers, completed the exams and passed the courses required for your degree. But the final evaluation of your education is not a grade or a diploma, but the quality of life that you live.

As graduates of the University of San Francisco, you are the value added to society by Jesuit education. In that context, I caution you against the danger of futility – the belief that in the face of the world's enormous problems, one person can do nothing. I repeat today what Robert Kennedy told a surging crowd of about 15,000 people at the University of Cape Town, thirty-five years ago:

Few will have the greatness to bend history itself; but each of us can work to change a small portion of events...It is from numberless diverse acts of courage and belief that human history is shaped. Each time someone stands up for an ideal, or acts to improve the lot of others, or strikes out against injustice, they send forth a tiny ripple of hope, and crossing each other from a million different centers of energy and daring those ripples build a current which can sweep down the mightiest walls of oppression and resistance.

We hope that with your USF education you are motivated and qualified to make waves.

You are now alums and we look for your continued support of the University – once your debts are paid for! We hope that you will help us help others receive the education that you have. God bless you and your efforts to make of this world a better place for us all.