

Commencement Remarks

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

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We – students, faculty, staff – have not gathered in this Church in these numbers since September 11, when the tragedies of that day drew us together in prayerful support for one another and in solidarity with those who lost loved ones. One of our law students said it best in her reflections at a tree planting ceremony within hours of the attacks. She recalled how intensely jealous she was the previous spring when two friends and classmates landed high paying jobs at major law firms, both headquartered in the World Trade Center. Their tragic deaths led her to the realization that when we focus too narrowly on what we want, we lose sight of what we already have and of what is ultimately important.

The shadow of September 11 had not yet lifted from the Hilltop, when we learned that cancer had taken Esther Madriz from us – a treasured teacher, beloved colleague and dear friend. This Spring, Jennifer Ramiro was killed in a tragic car accident that took this vivacious and warm-hearted student from us. Most recently, we mourned the death of Sunny Kidd -- a staff member who faithfully and cheerfully served the students and faculty in the School of Education for over two decades.

When death strikes unexpectedly and close to home, we cannot but wonder about our own life's purpose and meaning. Classical authors urged their readers to look at life "sub specie aeternitatis" – in light of eternity. That is to say, decide now how you want to be remembered by others and live that way now; don't wait until you finish finals [pass the bar], get a job, find the perfect partner or bank your first million.

On this happy and proud occasion for you graduates and your families, let me simply suggest that you live your lives free from the dictates of popular culture, which would have us believe that wealth, pleasure, power, status, beauty can ultimately satisfy the deepest hungers of our hearts. Such is not the case – and we know that more surely now than we did last year at this time. This year's tragedies have brought us closer to the truth, so powerfully articulated by Dr. Martin Luther King: "The richer we have become materially, the poorer we have become morally and spiritually... We have allowed the means by which we live to outdistance the ends for which we live."

Saint Augustine got it right when he wrote, "our hearts were made for God and will not rest until they rest in God." Don't settle for anything less. Let that foundational truth be the beacon that lights your life's path.

God bless you all, and welcome to the rolls of the University of San Francisco's alumni association.