

Commencement Remarks

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

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You may not realize this, but you are the sesquicentennial graduates of San Francisco's first university. You are USF's one hundred and fiftieth graduating class. You are the heirs and the carriers of the great Jesuit tradition of knowledge in service to the City and the world. I congratulate you and all who have walked with you and share your pride in achievement today – parents, family, friends, classmates, partners, faculty and staff; and I particularly want you to join me in recognizing our outstanding faculty.

Today's world is very different from the world when you first arrived on the Hilltop. Then, twitter was what birds did; kindle was fire wood; Facebook, a photograph anthology; and a dumpy Campion Hall stood in the footprint now occupied by the elegant Kalmanovitz. But the most stark and ominous contrast is the state of a global economy that has pushed millions more out to the edge. More and more families are feeling the harsh effects of an economy that had already left almost half of the world to survive on less than \$2.50 a day.

There is some hope that this current crisis constitutes a “teachable moment” for society-at-large. That is, a time to look beyond the corner office, fast car, sculpted body and mega bonus to the “dearest freshness deep down things,” as the poet says, that alone may satisfy our heart's most profound and human longings. Whether or not we take this opportunity to reorient our lives away from the superficial and the vapid to the substantive and the eternal or whether this is just another passing fad is ours to decide.

In a recent *America* magazine essay [5.4.09], Margaret Silf described her little granddaughter splashing around a pool as part of an infant swimming class. In the middle of the pool was an inflatable platform. Each child was invited to climb up onto it, only to discover how wobbly the whole contraption was as they recklessly tumbled back into the water.

This happy, noisy scene recalls the words of Jesus about building one's house on rock, not sand; about laying a solid life foundation that withstands the tests and trials of time. What our consumer culture would have us ruthlessly pursue – power, prestige, wealth, self-gratification – may initially appear stable and satisfying but ultimately prove to be as wobbly and unable to sustain us as that untethered air mattress floating in the pool. Your USF Jesuit Catholic education of mind and heart has prepared you to distinguish between what appears solid but is illusory, between empty calories that supply bulk without satisfaction and genuine nourishment of body, mind and spirit.

The truth is that we human beings are ultimately about amassing what the Bible calls, “treasures that will not fail, that thieves cannot steal nor moths consume nor rust destroy. For where our treasure is, there our heart will be” [Lk 12:34]. Treasure family, personal integrity, loving relationships, goodness, truth, beauty and compassion – there is where your heart belongs.

Saint Augustine got it right when he wrote centuries ago, “our hearts were made for you, Oh God, and will not rest until they rest in you.” May each of you be ever blessed with a restless heart that leads to that place where we all long to be.

Congratulations to you and my personal and warmest welcome to the alumni association of the University of San Francisco!