

Graduate Commencement  
Sunday, June 11, 2006  
Qwest Field

Welcome to the 2006 Graduate Commencement of Seattle University. We used to have, until about five years ago, only one commencement for all students. I'm glad we don't do that anymore. It got too large and too long. But what I appreciate about this separate ceremony is that it allows for a special recognition of what a graduate degree from Seattle U is and it can be carried out in a more fitting atmosphere, with appropriate honorary degree recipients as today with Bill and Paula Clapp, and can better acknowledge what your achievement and what professional formation is all about. None of you are 21 or 22, as were most of the undergraduates this morning, and I'm guessing that none of you would wish to be that age again.

First of all congratulations to you. I know that for almost all of you pursuing a graduate degree has meant special sacrifice on your part as well as on the part of your spouses, partners, and families. Most of you are already working professionals, so graduate education has meant extra hard work, long hours, and the sacrifice of much else over a long period of time dedicated to this degree. Till the completion of an undergraduate degree, education can be fairly automatic, just that thing you do come every September. It was not that way for you. It was not automatic, not just going along with what others were doing. You chose it, made room for it, and, therefore, perhaps today are earning the first degree that is really yours. Congratulations, nice going, you made it. Just stop for a second and realize the moment and give thanks to others for their help, and give thanks to yourself for your commitment and persistence.

I recently heard Malcolm Gladwell, the author of The Tipping Point and Blink, say that he believes people today increasingly are "experience-rich but theory-poor." He believes we are overwhelmed with an abundance, inundation, and richness of experience, but that we do not have the intellectual tools to make sense of what we are experiencing. I agree with him and believe that technology, travel, and rapid transitions will only multiply our experience.

I also firmly believe that what your education at this Seattle, Jesuit university and what your graduate degree today means is that you do have the theory, the intellectual tools, to make sense of what you experience. This is not a university so much of knowledge as of thinking, not so much of being stocked up with information as of learning the means to unpack all information. Make a living with your graduate degree but also make sense of life with it!

What Malcolm Gladwell does not say—but that we believe—is that it is not only theory or intellectual tools by which you make sense of overwhelming experience, but also emotional tools, imaginative tools, relational tools, and spiritual tools. The multiplication of the experience of the lives of all of us cannot be made sense of by thought alone, it is too complex, too mysterious, too human for our minds to sort out. It requires our hearts, imaginations, passions and souls. These are the human instruments that are essential companions of the intellectual tools your degree from this university represents.

They are certainly what Bill and Paula Clapp, the honorary degree recipients at your commencement represent: professional, thoughtful, accomplished people with heart, soul, imagination, and the warmth to win friends to help the poor.