

A Future Full of Hope

- *Baccalaureate Mass*
- *June 15, 2013*
- *Stephen V. Sundborg, S.J.*

Welcome, graduating students of Seattle University to your commencement weekend and welcome to St. James Cathedral. Think of coming here with your classmates, to this beautiful cathedral with Archbishop Sartain, with the scriptures, the music and song of your choir, and the worship as taking a first step together off Seattle U.'s campus. Think of going to Key Arena tomorrow as the second step of leaving campus. Perhaps in terms of how some of you are feeling, think of this as standing at the very back of a high diving platform holding on to secure rails, and tomorrow walking out to the edge of the platform and taking the plunge!

At this moment can you hear God saying to you, as we just read, "I know well the plans I have in mind for you... plans to give you a future full of hope?" You may not know, but God knows the divine plans for your life, and they are that you have a future full of hope. Take the plunge into God's plans for you, into his future for you full of hope.

I believe it is very different graduating from college or finishing a graduate degree now than it used to be in terms of the future which lies ahead of graduates. Let me use an image for that. If you were able to step onto Seattle U.'s campus 25 years ago you would notice a difference about the students—other than how nicely they are dressed, or are unplugged, or are not carrying around water bottles—that no one has a backpack. Amazing. If you saw someone then with a backpack you'd ask, "Oh, are you a member of the hiking club?!" You'd see most students with armfuls of books or nerds like me with shining black briefcases. For at least the last ten years—at least from when you were 12 to when you are 22 or more—you have carried a backpack every day. So a question I have is what is in your backpack as you graduate from Seattle U. and what will need to be in it for the years ahead as you walk the roads of God's plan to give you a future full of hope.

In your backpack you've got a very good knowledge of an area or two of special competence; you've got a more developed sense of yourself and your purposes and values; you have a great appreciation of friendships and of deeper relationships; you have memories of great fun; you have the experience of service, of how you make a difference in the lives of people you have come to know, and help, learn from, and love. You also have in your backpack the proof that not only can you change the world but that the world can change you. Perhaps, at the bottom of your backpack you have two things: a feeling of beginning to miss the university, these years, and these people; and hopefully some awareness of your own spirituality, faith, and your search for the sacred.

So the question becomes: is that enough in your backpack for the future, for the years ahead? Will it supply you with what you need to get to that future full of hope which God intends and plans for you? I think the answer is, "No." There was a book published this last year called The

Defining Decade. Its point is that we have shifted from the defining decade being 12 to 22, to the decade which begins after college, so roughly the years from 22 to 32. Much more than by the past years—however much you’ve gained or learned or loved or will miss—you will more truly define yourself by the decade ahead in the multiple jobs you’ll have, the people you’ll meet, the friends you choose, the support groups you develop, the relationships you enter into, where you go, what you will experience, what choices you make and which values you form. In sum, how you will set the course of your life. It used to be that the graduating student had already defined the essential aspects of life and then just got about it. For multiple reasons, this is no longer the case; the defining decade lies ahead, not behind.

It’s for this reason I say that what’s in your backpack is not enough if God’s plans for your future full of hope are to be fulfilled. Perhaps what’s needed is best seen in the gospel and maybe it even means throwing off the backpack altogether.

A man named Bartimeaus sits at the side of the road. He is blind and he’s begging. Think of that. Sitting at the side of the road: stuck, stopped, stymied, life passing by, missing the journey, not in the flow—could that in some way be you about the future? Blind: not seeing, not sure, guessing what’s going on, not clear, in the dark—could that evoke something of you and your not seeing the future? Begging: asking for help, depending on others, reaching out, needing assistance—again, what does that speak to in you about your future? But he can hear and he hears Jesus of Nazareth, Son of David, passing by and he shouts out, grasps at his chance, does not let this opportunity pass by, asks for mercy, is desperate enough that he will not be silenced so much does he want not to be stuck in the dark, depending on others, letting life pass him by. Life stops; Jesus stops; life calls; Jesus calls him to come to him. Now get this: he throws aside his cloak—read backpack?—springs up—not bad for a blind sitting man—and comes to Jesus who has stopped for him—again pretty good to be able to run blind.

So now it’s just a one-on-one—Jesus and the blind man—face to face, question to answer. Jesus asks the great question, the toughest question asked of any of us, “What do you want me to do for you?” Let me try that in four ways:

“What do you want me to do for you?”

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That one question is a stopper for almost all of us all the time. But it is not a stopper for the blind, backpack-free, begging, formerly-by-the-side-of-the-road man, who is now asked the big question by the one who stopped for him and with whom he is now face to face though he can only hear not see. He has his answer, which is also always our best answer, “Master, I want to see.” The Master has met one who has known how to answer the question, “What do you want me to do for you?” So the Master answers quietly but without hesitation, “Go your way, for faith has saved you.” That’s the answer: Go your way, your faith will take you along our way. Faith is the response to “Master, I want to see.” The man must have had faith, for the story ends, “Immediately he received his sight and followed him on the way.” I love the fact that the very

first thing the blind man saw was the face of Jesus who stopped for him, had mercy, called him, and asked him what he most wanted.

This can be a very powerful gospel for this moment for you before plunging off the diving platform of the university. This moment of checking what you've got in your backpack, asking whether it's enough as you move into your defining decade ahead, trying to believe God who says, "I know well the plans I have in mind for you... plans to give you a future full of hope." Somehow for each of you in your own way and on your own way what's needed when you are stopped and called by one who has mercy on you, is to spring up, to throw off all that you've thought was enough, to come to him who asks you and you alone, "What do you want me to do for you?" What's needed is to answer what you do want, which is whatever the equivalent is for you of "I want to see." In that encounter, that moment of truth, that request on your part from what is truest and neediest in you, what's enough is to have faith—and then to go on your way to the future full of hope which God knows well, has in mind for you.