

Remarks by University President Rev. Scott R. Pilarz, S.J. at the 2007 Undergraduate Commencement

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THE UNIVERSITY OF SCRANTON
UNDERGRADUATE COMMENCEMENT
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REMARKS BY
REV. SCOTT R. PILARZ, S.J., PRESIDENT OF THE UNIVERSITY

Members of the Class of 2007, in the midst of this great celebration, let me address you first. Can you remember four years ago when we first arrived at The University of Scranton, you as freshmen, me as fledgling president? I remember it very clearly. A perfect day at summer's end and one event stands out: Mass with you and your parents on the freshman patio. I'm not sure who was most nervous, you, your parents, or me. The experience was thrilling. We stood on the verge of something fresh and brimming with potential. Today, nearly four years later, we gather to celebrate your potential fulfilled. For me, and hopefully for you, what's most profound and palpable in these last days together is a sense of gratitude, giving thanks for all that has been.

I can't stress enough how right this is, this sense of gratitude – right for us at a Jesuit university because gratitude is first among virtues in the spiritual imagination of St. Ignatius Loyola. When God's grace transformed Ignatius from soldier to saint, Ignatius felt what we feel today: Gratitude. The experience of gratitude was, for Ignatius, the start of all else – the founding of the Society of Jesus, the establishment of the schools and a worldwide mission. From gratitude springs the fundamental twofold Ignatian commitment: first to the magis, a restless desire for excellence and the greater glory of God, and then to an uncompromising care for one another, respecting uniqueness, *cura personalis*.

So our experience of gratitude returns us to our roots as a Jesuit university. And it should prod you to ponder your own roots -- your parents, your families, your first, best teachers. For years, your parents and families have waited and watched and worried and wondered about you. Today, you should wonder about them. Marvel at them. Ponder the pattern of their lives and discover deep down in it the dearest wisdom, the wisdom that complements and completes all that you have learned at Scranton, the wisdom of Jesus that "there is no greater love than to lay down your life for those whom you love." Don't quit today without expressing your gratitude to those who sacrificed so much out of love for you. On behalf of the University, I want very explicitly to do the same, to thank the parents and families of the Class of 2007.

Parents and families: what began with you, continued on campus under the caring tutelage of our faculty and staff. You enabled your daughters and sons to experience the life of the mind in the company of incomparable scholars, teachers, and a staff committed to the sacred work of undergraduate education. To you, our faculty and staff: as a result of your influence and inspiration, our graduates leave Scranton appreciating that knowledge gained is not simply for its own sake, but for the sake of a world waiting to be made more gentle and just. Thank you for that.

Today, our University holds up three people who embody the virtues of gentleness and justice: Dr. Loretta Brennan Glucksman, Fr. Rick Fricchette and Dr. Ashraf Ghani. We proudly honor you and make you our own, a daughter and sons of Scranton forever. You exemplify our animating Ignatian spirit, and very purposefully, the trustees have invited you here to connect us to the wider world.

From the first days of the Society of Jesus, Ignatius and his companions grasped that, while the world is "charged with the grandeur of God," ours remains a planet to heal and in need of grace.

An educator and philanthropist, Loretta Brennan Glucksman sparks many "moments of glad grace" in the idiom of W. B. Yeats. As chairman of the American Ireland Fund, she has rebuilt and reinvigorated the land of her ancestors, reminding us that we ought never to forget from whence we came. As put by another Irish poet, Seamus Heaney, her efforts occasion a time "when the longed for tidal wave of justice can rise up, and hope and history rhyme." Her generosity of spirit provides a fixed mark by which you, our graduates, can chart your future. Loretta, you are a living answer to St. Ignatius' prayer for generosity, in which he implores God "teach us to give and not to count the cost."

Fr. Rick Fricchette, Passionist priest and physician, answers another request in that same Ignatian prayer, "Lord, teach me to toil and not to seek for rest." Fr. Fricchette's indefatigable efforts on behalf of the poorest of the poor in Haiti have healed many in body, mind and spirit. I had the opportunity to witness Fr. Rick's days and works of hands in Port Au Prince in January. His commitment to the arts of medicine and prayer can inspire you, our graduates, to transgress the comfortable boundaries of the familiar and open your hearts wide enough to welcome all who are poor,

dispossessed and marginalized. Rick, your life proclaims “the faith that does justice.”

Dr. Ashraf Ghani: as a member of a sister Abrahamic faith tradition, Islam, reiterates that God calls us all to create common ground, especially in times of strife and misunderstanding. Dr. Ghani’s service to the people of Afghanistan and the world fulfills another plea of St. Ignatius, where he asks God “to teach us to labor and not ask for reward.” The labors of Dr. Ghani, most conspicuously in the post-9/11 era, are countless and compelling. He tirelessly promotes democracy and peace, urging all to be responsible and active citizens, regardless of cultural context. Dr. Ghani, your commitment to the efficacy of higher education, especially in the developing world, reminds our graduates of their responsibility to use what they have learned at Scranton to promote the common good.

Dr. Glucksman, Fr. Fichette and Dr. Ghani, we thank you for your presence among us. You add dignity and prestige to our commencement. More importantly, you stand as vibrant symbols of who we are as a university and who we all strive to be. Your embrace of God’s world reaffirms the instinct of the earliest Jesuits articulated anew in a recent general congregation: “faith in God is inescapably social in its implications, because it is directed to how people relate to one another . . . faith generates communities . . . and from faith comes the justice willed by God, the entry of the human family into peace with God and with one another.” (GC 34, Decree 2, 37-38).

So, my friends in the Class of 2007, as a community generated by faith, today you are surrounded by the parents and families who nurtured you, the faculty who challenged and inspired you, our distinguished honorary degree recipients and this whole host of witnesses, let me now address you last and ask again, can you remember arriving at Scranton for the first time? More importantly, can you calibrate how much you’ve changed and stretched and grown since August 23, 2003? Perhaps not entirely right now, but down the decades ahead, I pray you will look back on these years in your lives and realize how rare and privileged they have been. You are more learned now, wiser, more sensitive. You graduate well able to grapple with the mysteries that life is sure to present. With strong bonds forged in four years time, you approach the future confident that you can always rely upon good Scranton company. Cherish your friends. Be deliberate about deepening already rich relationships. Stay close. As Colleen (Rengert, president of the Class of 2007) suggested, dance at each other’s weddings, be godparents to each other’s children. As close as you are now, imagine how much closer you will be at a fifth or tenth or twenty-fifth reunion.

Stay close to Scranton, too. The university is fully yours now, yours to shape and steer and celebrate. Come back often. Walk the commons. Talk to teachers and staff, catch them up on where life has taken you. Stop in my office and tell me how I should be running this place.

Having started with you, I want to end on a personal note by thanking you. In the words of an ancient rabbi, “much I have learned from my teachers, most I have learned from my students.” Thank you for all I have learned from you, learned from you as you reached out to one another after the loss of your classmates, Drew and Steve. Learned from you as you responded in the aftermath of hurricane Katrina and in other countless opportunities to give, learned from you as you supported and sustained one another in ordinary day-by-day ways. You do ordinary things extraordinarily well. You proved in all those instances St. Ignatius’ conviction that love manifests itself more in deeds than in words.

Finally, I learned from you about Scranton’s unique culture: what to order from the Meaner Weiner truck, how to walk in flip-flops through the snow, how to cheat at Quizzo in the Green Frog, the relative merits of Bruce Springsteen versus Michael Bubl , my own attitude which should be expanded to include pride, passion, promise – parade day. And, most of all, the meaning of the immortal words of “the Office’s” Michael Scott: “ain’t no party like a Scranton party ‘cause a Scranton party don’t stop.”

While there’s truth there, let me tweak that aphorism and say this to you in manner of farewell: there is no education like a Scranton education, because a Scranton education doesn’t stop. There are no friendships like Scranton friendships, because Scranton friendships don’t stop. As graduates of The University of Scranton, never stop learning: look at problems from every angle, reject the quick fix. Embrace complexity. Know that humankind was “made to serve God wittily in the tangle of our minds.”

And never stop serving, remember always your role in the world as women and men for others. Never stop loving. Here at Scranton, you were handed and then built for yourselves a community where people care deeply about one another and invest their energies accordingly. That’s the surest sign of God’s grace active among us. Take that special Scranton grace out into the world and, as St. Ignatius urges, “...set the world on fire.” Do that and your Scranton education, your Scranton friendships, and, yes, your Scranton parties, will not stop. God bless the class of 2007, God bless Catholic and Jesuit education, and God bless The University of Scranton.