

*Final Draft*

*Commencement Address SCU 6/17/06*

*Thomas Reese, S.J.*

Thirty-five years ago, I attended my first commencement at Santa Clara University. It was a different world in 1971. Richard Nixon was president and no one had yet heard of Watergate. There was a military draft and a war in Vietnam. There was no Internet, no desktop computers, no cell phones or i-pods. There was no Google, no Wal-Mart, no Starbucks, no MTV, and gasoline was 35 cents a gallon. No one had ever heard of John Paul II and the Berlin Wall was still standing.

The commencement speaker in 1971 was Bob Hope. His words of advice to the graduates who were about to leave Santa Clara and go out into the real world were simple: "Don't go!"

I wish I could give you the same advice. The world into which you must go is a world full of war, terrorism, corruption, hunger, and exploitation. For the first time in our history, we have put soldiers at risk on the battlefield while cutting taxes for those who stay at home. We are funding

both sides of the war on terror through government spending and through oil purchases from countries that support terrorists. We have refused to fund trained personnel for FEMA and the border control and then send in the national guard to clean up the mess. We are piling up government debt which you will inherit at the same time that the Social Security system is going broke.

And yet if we look beyond our borders, the situation is even worse. The suffering of the refugees from Katrina is an everyday occurrence for people in Africa, Central America and Asia. Genocide and rape are still instruments of war in Darfur. Diamonds and gold are washed with blood in the Congo. Bribery is an expected way of doing business in too many places and a government job is a license to steal in resource rich countries where beggars and billionaires live side by side.

All of this may seem far away in the Third World. But during one of his visits to the United States, Pope John Paul II retold the parable of the rich man and Lazarus--How the rich man enjoyed life and ignored Lazarus starving at his gate. Ultimately, Lazarus went to heaven and the rich man went to hell. John Paul looked over the crowd of Americans

at Yankee Stadium and said, “Lazarus is at your gates. It is the Third World.”

So, although I would like to say to you, “Don’t Go,” I have to say, “Go fix it.” If the only question you ask about life after Santa Clara is “What’s in it for me?”, then we failed you. Before you are a lawyer or a business person or a doctor, you are a citizen—a citizen with rights, but also a citizen with responsibilities. As citizens, we have the right to complain, but as citizens we also have the responsibility to fix it. It is your city, “Go fix it.” It is your state, “Go fix it.” It is your nation, “Go fix it.” It is your world, “Go fix it.” It is your church, “Go fix it.”

In Matthew’s parable of the Last Judgment, God does not ask us our GPA, he does not ask us what law school we are going to, he does not ask what our beginning salary is. Rather he says, “I was hungry and you fed me, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a migrant and you welcomed me, I was a disabled veteran and you gave me a job, I was not your color and you trusted me, I was not your gender and you respected me, I was not your religion and you prayed with me.” At this point I imagine the disciples asking, “Hey Jesus. Will this be on the final?” Yes, Jesus is saying

that all of these items will be on the final exam--in the ultimate final exam of the final judgment.

I have great hope for the class of 2006, because Santa Clara has given you the opportunity to grow in competence, conscience and compassion so that when you go into the world you will be up to the challenge of fixing your world.

Many of you during your time at Santa Clara were already trying to fix your world. There were engineers who helped design a sturdy bicycle for Salvadoran farmers so they could cheaply and efficiently get their produce to market. There were students who immersed themselves in Salvadoran life at the Casa de la Solidaridad. Others immersed themselves in Peru, in India and in Africa. Among you are tutors and teachers of English as a second language and volunteers at the Pacific Free Clinic in East San Jose. Others have gone to Mexico and built houses. You have worked to help immigrants, people with AIDS, and reached out to those excluded because of nationality, gender or orientation. You have participated in Discover groups, in Santa Clarans for Social Justice and in RLC's.

You have tried to love your neighbor as yourself, and you have recognized that in the global village, everyone is your neighbor.

What will the world be like in another 35 years? Will we once again be at war? Will gasoline be \$10 a gallon? Will the oceans be rising because of global warming? Will the world have experienced a pandemic? Will Muslims and Christians be friends or enemies? Will you be on your 10<sup>th</sup> job since graduation?

The world will be what you make it. During your time here at Santa Clara, you were urged to be men and women of competence, conscience and compassion. Now we send you forth on a mission: to confront ignorance with competence; to challenge selfishness with conscience; and to fix what is unjust with compassion. The world is waiting. Go fix it. Thank you and God bless you.