

Commissioning 2018

- June 16, 2018
- Stephen V. Sundborg, S.J.

Good morning and welcome on behalf of Seattle University to the Commissioning Ceremony of our soon-to-be new officers in the Army. It is a privilege as president of Seattle University and as a Jesuit priest to speak at this ceremony. I so enjoyed the President's Review of the Cadet Battalion a few weeks ago and indicated then how much I looked forward to this day and this hour of the commissioning. It is the perfect and proper way to begin Commencement Weekend, to start with the most serious, the most dedicated, and the most significant moment of the whole weekend. It is like beginning the weekend with solemnity and prayer, for no one this weekend makes a greater commitment than do these eleven students of Seattle University, and because of the seriousness of the commitment, they indeed have our prayer.

This is my 21st Commissioning Ceremony. Let me make some remarks today from what is deepest within me. That is my identity from my Jesuit life. Being a Jesuit has links to soldiers and to commitment. The founder of the Jesuits, St. Ignatius of Loyola, when he was in his early twenties in the 1500s, was a soldier in Spain, one dedicated to service, to winning glory, and he was a very brave soldier. In the battle of Pamplona against the French, when all others wanted to abandon the hopeless fight, he rallied his comrades and held his ground against all odds. (In our day and age he would have won the Congressional Medal of Honor.) There, defending the fortress, he was struck not just by a bullet, but by a cannonball, which crushed and shattered his leg. (He would have received the Purple Heart.) So valiant was he seen even by the French enemy that after the fortress had been taken, they helped carry him on a litter back home to Loyola. So Jesuits are descendants from a committed soldier, a brave soldier, a wounded soldier. But we would not have been founded as an order if it had stopped there.

That was the turning point in his life. In his recuperation he was made to realize that his desire to serve, to give it one's all, to win glory could be directed toward the service of God, giving God one's all, winning God's glory among people. Hence our motto "For the Greater glory of God." There is still in all Jesuits and in anything called Jesuit—as this university, and your education, and your formation in leadership—there is something of this original dynamism of taking it on, giving it your utmost, rallying others, being courageous, pouring out one's life in service, doing this not alone but with others, and doing all of this for God. There is also at the core of your Jesuit education and Jesuit formation in leadership this ability to accept woundedness, to reflect on it, to go deeper because of it, and not in spite of but within your woundedness to find and commit yourself to your highest purpose.

So this Jesuit University and this president, who is a Jesuit, are especially proud of you who are soldiers, are becoming officers and leaders, and are accepting this commission this morning for the high purpose of serving your country and the highest purpose of serving what you hold most sacred in your lives and hearts.

As a Jesuit university president I would hope for three things for each of you in your service in the army:

1. Be true to your Jesuit education by giving it your all, being brave, not letting anything stop you from fulfilling our oath and your purpose. You may not be stopped by a cannonball, but let nothing else stop you.
2. Reflect deeply and daily on your experience as a soldier as Ignatius did. Find what is below the evident level of your experience; find what comes from your heart, from the truth of who you are as a person. Follow that!
3. Allow your service to lead you to God; be open to faith; allow a higher calling. Do this by finding your own way to pray each and every day so that the threads of your service are stitched into a tapestry giving glory to God.

On behalf of the whole of Seattle university and in union with them at the start of this Commencement Weekend, we say thank you for being our students, thank you parents and family for supporting these young adults, thank you—both soldiers and families—for how you both serve our country and we its people. Soldiers, be true to your Jesuit education as an officer in the Army, and know our prayers—and mine in particular each early morning—for all of you. God bless and keep you.