

## Commissioning 2016

- June 11, 2016
- Stephen V. Sundborg, S.J.

The commissioning of our ROTC cadets as officers in the US Army is the very first event of this commencement weekend. It deserves to be first because it is first in importance, first in seriousness, first in consequences, and first in dedication. I cannot imagine a commencement weekend which did not start bright and early with this commissioning. It is for me like the invocation, the dedication, the morning prayer giving blessing to the whole of these two days of brunch, Mass, receptions, family gatherings, honorary degrees, and commencement on the stage and on the Jumbotron of KeyArena with 10,000 people followed by congratulations and celebrations.

It all starts here, starts small, starts quietly, starts with the words of an oath, with the pinning of bars, a salute, starts really in your hearts in the commitment each of you make. It may be small and quiet next to other events, but it is the deepest of all of the events, and the most moving for you as new 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenants and especially moving for your parents, families, partners, friends, faculty, and even your university president.

I cannot participate in this commissioning without reflecting on two things.

The first is what are the deepest, most consequential, most important commitments of my own life and service. Priest yes, Jesuit yes, but something more and earlier and longer lasting and underlying all else. It's the commitment to give my life to the service of others and to the praise of my God. That means to treasure every gift of life especially the gifts from family, to treasure every talent, to welcome every opportunity, to respect and to rejoice in life itself and to hold it as precious. It means to pour out this vessel of life in whatever way I am given to others and to offer it before God. I believe this commitment underneath all other commitments is also yours in these years of your life and today and that being commissioned as an officer in the US Army is one way, your way at this time, to offer your life's gifts to others and to your God. That's the first thing on which this commissioning calls me to reflect.

The second thing this commissioning asks me to reflect on is our country, its history, its land, its people, its freedom, its future. More than a place, our country is a story, a narrative, a story composed by and shared by all of us. I grew up in the Territory of Alaska wanting so much to be a state within the union. My father was one of the authors of the Alaska State Constitution. I graduated from high school in Washington, DC, the same year I was in the crowd when John F. Kennedy was sworn in as president and said, "Ask not what your country can do for you; ask rather what you can do for your country." The holiest, most solemn place in our country for me is at the Lincoln Memorial, between Abe seated and looking out over America and the spot where Martin Luther King stood and called us all to become what we really could be. How we love this country! How we owe everything to it! How we must serve its people, bind up its wounds, continue to write its narrative, its story, which seems interrupted, off track, untrue to what our whole story tells us we are! That is what you, in accepting your commissioning today, are committing yourself to do: to continue to write the true story of America.

Thank you for your commitment and your service. Thank you for this deepest and most moving moment and start of our commencement weekend. Thank you for your life's gifts to America's story. And thank you for being Seattle University students and very soon our graduates. My own prayers and commitments go with you.