



*From the Office of the President*

**John P. Fitzgibbons, S.J.**

REGIS UNIVERSITY | DENVER, COLORADO

**Spring Commencement Address  
Regis University  
May 4-5, 2013**

First and foremost, I offer my congratulations to you graduates and acknowledge and thank your families and friends for their part in supporting the accomplishments that we celebrate today.

In addition, I want to express my admiration and appreciation for the faculty and staff of Regis University. Even though they have already been recognized, I want to thank the faculty and staff for their dedication to you as masterful teachers and friends of our students.

Together, we have accomplished a marvelous thing in your life. And since I am about to give you the most expensive present you may ever receive, I think it is important to reflect - briefly - with you about what you have accomplished.

I hope you know how thrilled and confident the faculty and staff are for you graduates. Now, I'm told that there is an ancient and honorable tradition for Regis College graduates to spend a little time at the Hill Top Tavern just before graduation. Maybe, if my intel is right, that tradition now includes CPS and Rueckert-Hartman grads as well!

I'm told that at the Hill Top Tavern, the traditional visit includes toasts and congratulatory remarks with the aid of certain adult malted beverages. This is a time of great celebration, but now, just for a moment, we have time to savor and reflect. So I would turn our attention to certain parallels between the Jesuit way of education and winemaking. I'd like to use three words to focus my reflection with you: time, growth and learning.

But, of course, I'm an old English professor and wish to start with a sonnet by the Victorian Jesuit, Gerard Manley Hopkins.

Patience, hard thing! the hard thing but to pray,  
But bid for, Patience is! Patience who asks  
Wants war, wants wounds; weary his times, his tasks;  
To do without, take tosses, and obey.  
Rare patience roots in these, and, these away,  
Nowhere. Natural heart's ivy, Patience masks  
Our ruins of wrecked past purpose. There she basks  
Purple eyes and seas of liquid leaves all day.



We hear our hearts grate on themselves: it kills  
To bruise them dearer. Yet the rebellious wills  
Of us we do bid God bend to him even so.  
And where is he who more and more distills  
Delicious kindness? – He is patient. Patience fills  
His crisp combs, and that comes those ways we know.

Now, as they say in the English department here at Regis, “a text without a context is merely a pretext.” So, a bit of context for the poem.

While Hopkins was at Oxford University, he experienced a significant change of heart, a conversion. He came under the influence of John Henry (later, Cardinal) Newman. When he entered the Catholic Church soon after his graduation, his parents and family were shocked and came close to disowning him. Shortly thereafter, Hopkins entered the Society of Jesus (the official name of the Jesuits) and, in an unfortunate paroxysm of piety, burned his growing corpus of poems.

During the long years of Jesuit formation, Hopkins was given to bouts of serious depression. His creative outlet, the composition of poetry, was not open to him for many years. Yet when five Franciscan nuns, exiles from Germany because of Bismarck’s Falck Laws, were killed off the coast of England in a shipwreck, Hopkins’ Jesuit superior encouraged him to begin writing again in tribute to them – as much for the community’s sake as for Father Hopkins, I am sure!

This particular sonnet, on the virtue of patience, articulates the three qualities that go into creating good wine and good human beings.

As a virtue, patience is all about time; that is to say, it takes great patience to live in peace with the arduous process of becoming. In Hopkins’ way of thinking, human persons – and this comes directly from his Jesuit training – are God’s masterpiece. They are complex, full-bodied, sensitive to their environment, and meant to be enjoyable. Hmmm... sounds more like a good cabernet than beer!

Our missteps, mistakes, even our sins (according to St. Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Jesuits, and Father Hopkins) are, if taken as part of a much bigger process, a fermentation or a distillation of God’s gifts. We can “let our hearts grate on themselves,” we can lacerate our souls with shame, or we can let God labor within us and make us slowly into who we are meant to be. According to Hopkins, a mistake or a sin is only made more serious by failing to learn from it. Learning takes time and quiet and reflection. It takes time.



Becoming fully human, like crafting a great wine, is a process of growth from small to large.

- grapes puzzled over, worried about, and finally chosen
- the fruit crushed and made into must
- the natural fermentation process that takes time
- the addition of yeast and more time
- the aging in cooperage, casks, barrels and bottles - all taking time

All of this is growth, not so much in terms of arithmetic or simple addition, but in terms of making something splendid out of discrete parts.

Finally, learning. We hear from the master teacher in the 14<sup>th</sup> chapter of John's gospel that, "I am the vine, you are the branches. The one who abides in me, and I in that person, will bear much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing." We learn to abide, to "waste" time with God, so that we ripen into who we are meant to be.

Jesus, Ignatius, Hopkins - any vintner worthy of the name - will tell you: you become like those you love. We learn these virtues, especially patience, from the master teachers we've had. We learn patience not only by watching God work His fermentation with others, but more importantly, we learn it by allowing God to work this process in us through time.

And so be eager to apply all that you have learned, but be patient with the process of becoming all you are.

Congratulations, graduates!

Now I need only welcome you to the alumni association of Regis University. I will stay in touch. See you at the reception!