



From the Office of the President

John P. Fitzgibbons, S.J.

REGIS UNIVERSITY | DENVER, COLORADO

**Winter Commencement Address
Colorado Convention Center
December 14, 2013**

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

In addition, I want to express my admiration and appreciation for the faculty and staff of Regis University. I ask the faculty and staff to please stand and be recognized.

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

But since I'm an old English professor, I need to begin with a true and brief story.

In a letter to his brothers George and Thomas written in 1817, the English Romantic poet, John Keats first used the term "negative capability." He wrote:

"Several things dovetailed in my mind, and at once it struck me, what quality went to form a man [we would say, person] of achievement...I mean negative capability, that is when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, [and] doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason..."

In other words, negative capability, for Keats, was the skill of putting the perceived wisdom and local reason aside in order to be receptive or open to the world. Of course, Keats was referring to letting radical rationality drop away in order to fully experience the world in service of creating better art, poetry specifically.

But in the Jesuit university context, our students and graduates also possess a kind of negative capability. They don't let the usual way the culture thinks about things get in the way. They don't let so-called reason or reasonableness become reasons to be discouraged, reasons to look the other way, reasons to accept the status quo. In other words, Jesuit university graduates – and specifically Regis University graduates – don't accept a status quo that keeps them from making a difference in their own lives and the lives of others, especially the marginalized and poor.

Keats called the geniuses to which he refers "men and women of achievement." Around here, we call them Regis People.



I wish I could take credit for that name, but I can't. It actually comes from a conversation I had a few months ago with a student. I asked her what she loved most about Regis University and without hesitation she said, "Regis people." I asked what she meant by that, exactly, and she told me a story. She was working on a paper that she'd started later than usual. It was due in two days and she'd come to a point where she felt stuck. There was a concept she didn't quite understand and she couldn't continue without some clarification from her professor. But therein lay the problem: It was the weekend and, on top of that, she knew the professor was on vacation with his family. So, she hemmed and hawed for a bit before finally sending him an email, apologizing profusely, but saying she needed to talk. The professor responded and shortly thereafter they were on the phone. That professor spent an half-hour talking through the concept with her, putting his vacation on hold to make sure she understood. "That's a real Regis person," the student said to me. And it's a phrase that has stuck with me; one I've been thinking about ever since.

A Regis person - someone who goes beyond reasonable expectations to help others.

Take Amber for example. Amber is a fairly recent graduate of our nursing program. She was working in a local hospital and noticed that the nurses didn't have a lot of expertise when it came to placing IVs into patients. She felt terrible for the patients and could see the pain on their faces, especially those who were getting multiple needle sticks. She felt for the nurses, too, who weren't feeling confident about their own ability. So, she went to her superiors and suggested putting together a 24-hour specialty team that focused on IV placement. "A great idea," she was told, "and we'd love to do it but there simply isn't enough money to make it happen." Now, Amber could have simply accepted what she'd been told by her supervisors. Another person might have been worried about keeping her or his job or not wanting to create conflict in the hospital. Another person might have kept her or his head down and continued with the status quo. Not Amber. They told her they couldn't afford it; but she believed in her heart that they could not afford not to have this change, this improvement. It took three years of planning, budgeting, and educating decision makers but in 2012 Amber was able to secure funds for the IV team.

Someone who will not take "no" for an answer to a genuine need. That's a Regis person.

And then there is Stefan, a student who graduates today with you. Stefan was the director of a ballet company when his wife unexpectedly lost her job. Stefan knew



he needed to find more work in order to make ends meet for the family, so he landed a job as a deputy sheriff. That decision changed the course of his life in a way he never anticipated. During the overnight shift, Stefan rediscovered classic literature. While the rest of the world was asleep, he passed some of his slower hours reading the Brontë sisters and Dickens, among others. He found himself falling in love with classic texts. Now, another person might have let it go at that, a nice diversion, might have felt that tug in the heart but responded with resignation, “I have enough going on with family and work and other commitments.” Stefan might have said, “It’s too late to reinvent myself, too late to start down another career path now.” Those would have been “reasonable” thoughts. But Stefan decided to listen to that calling. He came back to school at Regis and today he receives his master’s degree, the next step on his way to a career in teaching literature.

Someone with the courage to face unexpected challenges and listen when his heart speaks. That’s a Regis person.

Why say all this? Why share stories on your big day? It’s because these stories are really about you. You are all Regis people. You have faced adversity. You have gone the extra mile. You make decisions every day that have the power to change lives – starting with your own and your families’. But the deep truth is that your decisions change the world for the better.

Getting a degree, especially a degree from a Jesuit university known for high standards and academic rigor, is no easy task.

In the end, that’s why we’re here today: To celebrate you and the family members and the friends who have helped you become who you are. Regis people.

In a few minutes, you will hear your name called. You will walk across this stage and receive your diploma. It is a momentous achievement and one for which I offer my sincerest congratulations. It’s my hope you will frame your diploma, maybe put it on your desk at work or hang it on your wall at home. But even more, I hope you will remember that a degree from Regis University is more than a piece of paper that certifies the completion of your degree. Rather, a diploma from Regis is better described as a promise to yourself and to the world. It’s a promise that you will use your gifts and skills to make the world a more humane and just place.

That won’t be easy. But you know that already. My charge to you graduates of Regis University is this:



Don't take "no" for an answer when it comes to doing the right thing.

Don't be afraid but be courageous before changes and challenges and hard work.

Do dream and strive and push beyond all reasonable expectations because that is who you are.

Live a life of moral conviction; listen to your heart and the needs of the poor.

In short, be what you are: Regis people.

Congratulations, graduates!!

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