



From the Office of the President

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REGIS UNIVERSITY | DENVER, COLORADO

**Winter Commencement Address
Colorado Convention Center
December 15, 2012**

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 have just given 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.

One night, late in Advent, a decade ago, I walked into the women's shelter at 6 p.m. with the usual load of homework I hoped to get done in-between answering the phone and playing with the kids.

I was immediately handed a bottle and a baby to feed. This was not going to be a quiet night. I took my place at a table with four mothers, each holding an infant. There were a dozen other kids, a little older, running around the shelter that night.

One woman sitting at the corner of the table, a veteran of several weeks in the shelter, said, "I hear you're a priest!" I never wore clerical garb there. When I responded that, "Yes, indeed, I am a priest and that I did not mean any deception," she laughed. Then she challenged, "How come you didn't tell us?" I replied, a little haltingly, that lots of times - while intending the best - clergy have been part of the problem of domestic violence by not listening or not really understanding the cries of the women and children who are violated. Sometimes clerical garb can be a hindrance more than a help. She was skeptical still; one more violation of trust.

The woman asked me where my parish was. I told her I didn't have one and that I teach English at a university, that I love to teach poetry. This obviously scored no points with her or the other women at the table! She asked if I had anything that I teach with me - I think to verify my story! I was teaching a unit on Petrarch's and Shakespeare's sonnets, so, clumsily, I pulled a bulky text out of my satchel and read a sonnet recalling the first time Francis Petrarch meets the love of his life. It was a love poem in which form and content recall and conjure an eternal truth - that we human beings are made for love.

By the time I finished, there was quiet in the room and it took me a while to understand it.



A few of the women had college degrees; most did not. But they all knew holy words, words of genuine love, when they heard them. For these women, perhaps for the first time in some years, words of genuine love, not counterfeit love, were spoken and heard. That is what true words, words that speak truth, can do.

For me, the words were never so full and tender as they were that night. I teach them more authentically now. The woman at the corner of the table asked me to read another poem; and so I did.

The truth is that this story is not about me; it is about you. This story and the truths it contains are about what you have become, what your Jesuit, Catholic, mission-centered education at Regis University has called you to be, what it has enabled you to do in the world.

When we ground ourselves in the truth, often learned at the feet of the poor and the marginalized, we have the opportunity to become who we really are: lovers in the manner of our God.

There is immediacy and a compassion that is engendered only through person-to-person relationships with the abused and marginalized of our world, especially those who have been violated or given a counterfeit love. We learn that we walk on holy ground every day. This is the legacy of the Sisters of Loretto; this is the legacy of the Society of Jesus. This legacy is now yours.

When we learn this truth, we become bearers of that truth, teachers who work to make the world more humane and just. Whether you now have a Master of Business Administration or a Master of Nonprofit Management, whether you have a Bachelor of Science in Nursing or a Bachelor of Fine Arts, that is now your vocation – to give away the most precious Christmas gift you have received: your education. Such an education calls us to take risks for justice, risks from which we might otherwise cower.

This integration of faith and justice will always carry us beyond ourselves and our limitations. Graduates, you are now schooled in the Jesuit and Loretto mission. May you live lives on holy ground and may your lives be the place where God's temple is built.

Congratulations, graduates! Merry Christmas and Happy Hanukkah to you!

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