



From the Office of the President

John P. Fitzgibbons, S.J.

REGIS UNIVERSITY | DENVER, COLORADO

**Spring Commencement Address - CPS
Regis University
May 3, 2014**

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 that 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 I'd like to take a few minutes to reflect on your achievements. 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 coined 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 just 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 while back 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 a half-hour talking through the concept, putting his vacation on hold to make sure she understood. "That's a 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.

Sam is a good example, a student graduating with you here today. Years ago, Sam served his country as a military police officer and combat soldier. When he returned from his service, he settled into a career in the construction and building industry. But over the years, he heard stories about returning servicemen and women, and the issues they were facing - PTSD, depression, family challenges, economic struggles - and he felt a stirring in his heart. Now, a "reasonable" person might have thought, "I served my country well. Sure, people are struggling, but I've done my part." But not Sam. Sam answered the call. In 2004, he and a friend started a nonprofit focused on helping veterans make the transition from military service to civilian life. A few years later, Sam took another big leap. He enrolled in the BA in Applied Psychology program at Regis. He was anxious to go back to school as an adult, but knew it was the only way to serve the veterans to the very best of his ability.

A person with the courage to follow his heart and to push beyond fear to serve others.

That is a Regis person.

And then there is Bertha, another student graduating today. Doing research for one of her first Master of Nonprofit Management classes, Bertha heard the story of a remote mountain village in Ecuador that didn't have clean water. Residents, sometimes women in their 80s, had to carry buckets of water up steep trails, which was not only hard work, but led to the water being contaminated by bacteria. Hearing that story, Bertha, a native Ecuadoran, had what she describes as a "crazy" idea. She would create a program that brought clean water, proper sanitation and



education to the village. She recalls going to the head of the MNM program with the idea, and expecting him to say “slow down.” Instead, he said, “Go for it.” Bertha has not looked back since. She has been working with local organizations in Ecuador to make contacts and piping has already been built around the community. She is currently waiting on 501c3 status so she can begin fundraising and promotion. And the dream doesn’t stop there. If successful, she hopes to replicate the method elsewhere in Ecuador and beyond.

A person who sees a need in the world, and pushes beyond reasonable expectations to help meet that need.

That is 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 Regis people. You have followed your heart. You have pushed beyond fear. You make decisions every day that have the power to change lives – starting with your own and your families’. And 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.

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

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 that 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.

So, this is my charge to you, graduates of Regis University:

Follow your heart – it may take you places you never imagined.



Be courageous in the face of changes and challenges and hard work.

Live a life of moral conviction, one that sees needs in the world and acts to meet them.

Dream and strive and push beyond all reasonable expectations because that is who you are – Regis people.

Congratulations, graduates!!

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