



From the Office of the President

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REGIS UNIVERSITY | DENVER, COLORADO

**Homily for the Baccalaureate Mass
Sixth Sunday of Easter (C)
St. John Francis Regis Chapel
Regis University
May 4, 2013**

Readings:

Acts 15:1-2,22-29

Revelation 21:10-14,22-23

John 14:23-29

What we call the beginning is often the end
And to make an end is to make a beginning.
The end is where we start from...

We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And to know the place for the first time.

- T.S. Eliot, from "Little Gidding"

Would those graduating from Regis University this week please stand for just a moment?

Please join me in acknowledging the accomplishments of these women and men!

Please, be seated.

We call it "commencement" rather than the more usual term, "graduation." There is a real ending and - thank God - an ending of tuition payments! But the emphasis is on the beginning, the new and different start of your lives.

Challenging but exciting beginnings are not new to the People of God. In the reading from the Acts of the Apostles, the early Church is branching out and experiencing some growing pains. The Gentile believers in Antioch and other places were deeply distressed. The Jewish believers were defensive about the people's adherence to the Mosaic Law. So the great question of the day became, "What is strictly necessary?" (Kavanaugh, *The Word Engaged*, 67).



The debate raged between Antioch and Jerusalem and nearly tore the nascent community apart. It merits examination for what it can tell us, especially those of us who “commence” today.

“It is the decision of the Holy Spirit and of us not to place on you any burden beyond these necessities, namely, to abstain from meat sacrificed to idols, from blood, from meats of strangled animals, and from unlawful marriage.”

“Now that is interesting, not only for what is mentioned, but also for what is not” (67). Abstention from the offerings to idols, avoiding consuming blood and the meat of strangled animals, circumcision, and the avoidance of unlawful sexual unions. Are these still prohibited? It’s good to remember: there are 587 laws in the Mosaic code. In this context, the Holy Spirit and the community asks the Gentile Christians to pay attention to four.

The appeal of the apostles is to the Holy Spirit and their own good and prudential judgment in light of the Holy Spirit’s working within them and all in the community, Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians alike. In other words, leadership must appeal to divided parties to bring the believers together in Christ, not keep them separate.

Some community laws are poignant, some are touching, and some even funny, given historical context. As my friend and teacher, Father John Kavanaugh points out, “one can read in the First Letter to Timothy that women ought not to speak in the assembly. The Letter to Titus, for its part, directs that bishops must be of irreproachable character. They ought not to be heavy drinkers or money-grubbers. And they should be married only once – their children solid believers and properly respectful.” (67) Now that’s a new twist on the celibacy debate. What do we deem strictly necessary in thinking with the Holy Spirit and the Church? Inclusive language? Latin Masses? Male homilists? Short sermons? We can all agree on the last!

“One of the most seductive temptations of the believer is to identify the will of God with the will of the believer, and not the other way around. God’s will squeezed into patriotism, leftism, capitalism, feminism, hierarchy, civil law, financial success, ecclesiastical tradition” (67). It’s a delusion that finds its roots in cultural prejudice, class interest, or personal preference. It’s a delusion that has been manipulated to justify slavery, domination of women, and the exploitation of the poor (68).



But, why all this fuss in a homily? Why not simply congratulate those who commence this day and those who have sacrificed so much to see you commence?

All this fuss is why you are educated at a Jesuit university. To live in the spirit of Jesus, to live and appeal to the wisdom of the Holy Spirit is why Regis University exists.

In John's gospel, Jesus promises the Advocate, the Holy Spirit who will teach you everything. This University exists to facilitate that wisdom - whether you are a Jew or a Gentile, a woman or a man, a believer or a searcher. Here, we believe and act on the belief that the Holy Spirit instructs us through the scriptures, through the Church, through the world loved and blessed by God, and especially through your preciously earned education.

Your education has prepared you to listen before you speak, to hear truth from a variety of sources, to make good and life-giving judgments. That is a magnificent gift...and a great obligation that you receive this day.

But one bright truth we should never forget, as my teacher John Kavanaugh taught me, remains: "all ideologies and requirements, all popes and rituals, all theologians and mystics, all laws and traditions, would mean nothing to us as [believers and especially as] Catholics, if Christ had not risen and saved us" (69).

May you commence with grace and the wisdom of the Holy Spirit!