

Graduate Commencement 2012

- *Graduate Commencement*

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You are graduating today from a Jesuit university and will always be able to claim (and never to deny!) that you are “Jesuit educated”, however you carry that education into your professions and lives. Jesuit education is the oldest and the largest educational system in the world. It was also the world’s first free educational system, but I think you may have noticed that this last characteristic has been changed. It is a revered thing to be “Jesuit educated”... at least today. It was not always so and not always so esteemed particularly in America.

The second president of our country, John Adams, writing from Quincy to our third president, Thomas Jefferson, in Monticello, put his views about the Jesuits this way:

“I do not like the reappearance of the Jesuits. Shall we not have regular swarms of them here, in as many disguises as only a king of the gypsies can assume, dressed as printers, publishers, writers and schoolmasters? If ever there was a body of men who merited damnation on earth and in Hell, it is this society of Loyola’s. Nevertheless, we are compelled by our system of religious toleration to offer them an asylum.”

Well, John Adams, thanks for the gracious asylum. We Jesuits do now swarm especially as schoolmasters, and we spawn annually hundreds of thousands of Jesuit-educated graduates, such as these today, to infect our republic with our values.

Actually, John Adams had better days and better judgment than he did on the day he wrote that letter to Jefferson. The much less dyspeptic Adams earlier had written from Paris to his wife Abigail and family the following which is much more fruitful for today’s ceremony. He penned:

“I must study Politicks and War that my sons may have liberty to study Mathematics and Philosophy. My sons ought to study Mathematics and Philosophy, Geography, natural History, Naval Architecture, Navigation, Commerce and Agriculture, in order to give their Children a right to study Painting, Poetry, Musick, Architecture, Statuary, Tapestry and Porcelaine.”

Now here is something worth pondering. Notice the progression. He must study war and politics, so that his children may be free to study math and philosophy, so that their children can study all the practical subjects from geography, agriculture, to business, so that in turn their children might have the right and the leisure to immerse themselves in the arts from painting, to poetry, to porcelain. So that goes from great-grandfather learning about military and political tactics so that the great-grandchildren can tickle the keys of the piano and perform on the boards of the theatre.

So three questions for you from his observations:

- 1) Who gave themselves to unpleasant subjects so that you might study and enjoy at Seattle U. the subjects you have chosen and succeeded in mastering?
- 2) Where are you in this progression: among the more engineering subjects of study, or the more philosophical, or the more artistic? Or none of the above. Do you notice he does not mention educators, nurses, ministers, psychologists, criminologists, among other areas of study necessary for developing a free and healthy society?
- 3) What will your children and their children and theirs again be able and free and have the right to study because of what you have studied and today get a degree in and create from it a new space of study in society? John Adams could not imagine some of what we now study nor perhaps can you imagine what you are opening up for future generations, what their blessings and freedoms and fullness will be because of you.

Be thankful for those who have come before, be thankful for what you have been free to learn, and be thankful in advance for the new liberties and learning of those who will come after you. And join as Jesuit-educated graduates this Jesuit, this son of Loyola, in praying a swarm of blessings in all disguises on John Adams and all of his descendents.