

Thank you.

I gratefully accept this national teacher of the year award from the Association of Graduate Liberal Studies Programs on behalf of St John's College in Annapolis, Santa Fe, and on behalf of our on-line global campus; and especially on behalf of my colleagues in St. John's Graduate Institute.

This is an award that could have gone to any of my colleagues. It is an award we share because we share a mission to keep the Liberal Arts alive and flourishing. This award could have gone as well to any of you listening. For you share this mission. You recognize that Liberal Arts education enables us to remain human by thinking deeply, reasonably, imaginatively, and creatively in dark and hard times.

In this brief talk, I will point out three truths. First, the liberal arts give us wisdom. They are a foundation of human excellence, strengthening our individual souls, our friendships, and of our communities. Second, the liberal arts offer us a practical way to renew the world by a Great Awakening of thinking and virtue and their active enactment. Third, we are at an inflexion point. We are called to awaken ourselves, our institutions, our communities, and the world. The time is now. The opportunity is here. Graduate Liberal Studies Programs such as the St.

John's Graduate Institute can lift up our voices, our hearts, and our shared spirit to make things new.

First truth: let's recognize the power and light of the liberal arts and the wisdom they provide. The purpose of life is not just to live but to live well. To live well, you must answer five questions: For the sake of what am I living? Do I know who I am? Do I know what I think? Do I know how to live? Do I know what to do? These simply expressed questions call you to a lifetime of learning. There is no authority or expert who can answer them for you. You will find answers only by honestly questioning your own mind, heart, body, and soul. But you are not totally alone in this endeavor. The Liberal Arts are a reliable path and guide for exploring these questions as you proceed on the journey of your life.

Whenever experience drops you into a dark wood of despair, confusion, and fear your Liberal Arts education is at hand to lead you into the light. When you lose your way, the seven liberal arts plus the seven classical and spiritual virtues stand ready to show you your path, illuminating the darkness. In a personal, spiritual, moral, or political crisis, the Liberal Arts are at hand to bring to our intellect the light it needs. The Liberal Arts awaken the Life of the Mind and enable thinking to ascend.

You may feel despair in the land now. What you do with this feeling is your choice. I recommend you recollect the wisdom resting in the books foundational to your liberal arts education. Return to the seven disciplines of the trivium and quadrivium. Here you can be reawakened to the best that we human beings can think, say, and do. The past is not the enemy of the present or the future. We can draw courage, wisdom, prudence, and justice from the writings of others who walked before us as we make their dogmas new and walk boldly where they never dared to tread.

The liberal arts also give us a way to pursue the classical and spiritual virtues: wisdom, justice, courage, fortitude, faith, hope and love. These virtues enable happiness, fairness, liberty, equality, security, peace, affection, respect, and friendship. If we fail to preserve the seven liberal disciplines and seven virtues, we can descend into a flood of darkness and despair.

The liberal arts mission sends us forth to build the earth together as citizens of the world. Let's embrace the power of the Liberal Arts to pursue excellence and fight all the ancient enemies of humanity—ignorance, war, poverty, disease, injustice, prejudice, wrath, envy, and pride. Let us battle together to bring forth the good, the true, and the

beautiful. And let us never abandon our posts. (PAUSE HERE. LET AUDIENCE FEEL THE IMAGE.)

Second truth: the Liberal Arts offer a way for all those everywhere who want to cross over into the promised land of the good, the true, and the beautiful. For practitioners of the Liberal Arts, the Promised Land is not just mental. We are not satisfied with the view from Mt. Pisgah. We will shoulder the burden, walk down into the valley, make the desert bloom, and establish the Republic. How do we make the theory of the Liberal Arts practical so that we may be true, active, and vital contributing citizens of the world? We do so by being active members of republics, by harkening to the American spirit, and by behaving as Americans do at their best.

We here today are citizens of four republics: the Republic of Letters, the Republic in speech, the standing Republics of our local and national institutions, such as the democratic republic of the United States of America, and the Republics of our Graduate Liberal Studies Programs. Through citizenship in these four Republics, we practice being citizens of the world.

But how shall we be citizens of the world regardless of where we are and how we now live? The Republic of America is an ideal type that shows us the way. What do I mean by the Republic of America? I mean

more than the United States of America, although I mean this also. I mean the American Spirit which lives in the heart of each person, regardless of situation, origin, location, fate, or condition—the spirit that lives in each person who responds to the words of the American Declaration of Independence, who holds these truths to be self-evident: that we are one people, all created equal and endowed by our Creator with inalienable rights. These ideas take us home. Take us out of the desert of despair. Take us to the promised land we know without ever having been there.

Another way to think about this is to envision the ideal type of an American. What is an American?

By an American I mean being a citizen of the four republics, but I also mean something more. By an American, I do not just mean being a citizen of the United States of America, although I also mean this. By an American I mean an ideal type---something more than legal status. To be an American is to be a citizen of the promise. Americans ask questions of themselves and others. The old questions out of which the United States of America was made. What is wisdom, courage, and justice? How do we make a great city? How do we build the earth? What is the true source and power of love, hope, and belief? The Liberal Arts give us a dialectical method, setting us on the path of

addressing these questions thoughtfully, carefully, deeply, and attentively. A true American is one who follows this path of respectfully questioning and attentively listening. America and the Liberal Arts are united at birth.

An American, in truth, is anyone on earth called by the luminous ideas of the Declaration of Independence. An American understands the tough-minded practicality of the United States Constitution, which structures peaceful dialogue among those with legitimately conflicting interests who may profoundly disagree. An American is anyone who sees strength, balance, and ever-fresh wisdom in the grammar, rhetoric, and logic of the trivium of the legislative, executive, and judicial branches of Articles I, II, and III.

An American is a citizen of much more than a nation. America is human enterprise founded upon ideas. It is a meta-nation beyond the historical context of nationalism. America is founded on ideas, values, and principles applicable to everyone—not, as most nations are, on the vile segregation of religious, racial, ethnic, cultural, language, or historical tribalism. We hold that a house divided cannot stand, whether that house is a family, neighborhood, community, state, or Household Earth. An American understands this truth. An American is a member of a community, and a citizen of the world armed with the

dialectic of classical ideas and virtues made new as we question, and think, and act anew.

In the great American poem “Song of Myself” the author identifies himself as “Walt Whitman-- one of the Roughts”. I embrace Walt Whitman’s self-identification. As an American citizen of the world and as one of Whitman’s Roughts, I am embarked on a liberal arts mission to make the world new and all things new. This is fundamentally a teaching mission and a learning mission. In a liberal arts classroom, we learn by doing; we put into practice civil discourse and the dialogue of democracy without which the Republic will fail.

Substitute your own name and sing the song of yourself. Let each one lift up your voice and sing out strong as one of the America Roughts. Rough-hewn and imperfect though we may be, and rough as our questions and efforts may be, we share a common hope of the promised land.

I close with this third truth: we stand at an inflection point. The dialogue of democracy and the flourishing of the four Republics requires the Liberal Studies Programs championed by this organization and by the kind of graduate education offered by St. John’s College in

Annapolis, Santa Fe, and by our on-line global campus. Public discourse upon which a democratic republic depends is threatened when narrow faction replaces thinking. Thinking is in peril when marketing slogans, quips, tweets, hashtags, and viral branding replace dialectic thinking. Branding divides us threatening to enslave us to anxiety and fear. Thinking takes courage and heart.

Cultivating fear and anxiety works in advertising whether you seek to saturate market share with cosmetics, the latest electronic device, infomercials, political advertising, or tweets. Don't get me wrong. I am no Luddite. I celebrate our revolution in technology, instantaneous global communications, global supply chain, and universal capital. Yet I also recognize that this unprecedented technological and communications revolution risks unimagined alienation and despair. Let's celebrate the virtue of prosperity, but recognize the threat to individuals, communities, and the planet. Feeling left-behind? Relief is just a purchase, a meme, or a swallow away. Right? No it isn't. Relief will come instead with a Great Awakening of thinking and talking dialectically, and walking the Liberal Arts talk. This is the American way. Let us lift up our hearts together as citizens of the world. Let us honor ourselves together. Let us share the deep commitment of AGLSP and St. John's Graduate Institute to the liberal arts as the best way for each

of us, for our communities, and for our world to improve as we form together a more perfect union, by putting into practice and action the life of the mind. Both in substance and process, the liberal arts are a source of lasting happiness and the best way to preserve, protect, and defend the values of liberty, equality, and justice that we the people hold dear.

Let us relentlessly continue the dialogue of democracy. Let us practice the values of a democratic republic by continuing to model, as we do in liberal arts graduate programs such as St. John's, the pedagogical method that cultivates the American virtues of equality, inclusion, respect, and questioning. Let us dare to be Americans. The small republics we form in each class exercise the civic virtue needed to be free citizens. Our method of open discussion founded in the liberal arts works excellently. Insights abound and learning thrives. The ability to discuss oppositional views respectfully and attentively is the lifeblood of a free and just society.

As an American Rough, I thank you AGLSP, I thank all my colleagues in the Liberal Arts, and I thank Americans in spirit all over the world.

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