The Magic Key

Good afternoon, graduates, and congratulations! We are all so proud of you and all you have accomplished. Take a moment now to look to your left, to your right, and behind you. See everyone who is here to celebrate YOU!

97 years ago, almost 100 years now, the Dominican Sisters opened this esteemed institution-- Albertus Magnus College. Why? They wanted the graduates to receive a special gift-- a magic key-- that would open many doors. Today, with your hard-earned diploma in hand, you receive this key.

This is the key that will allow you to follow your dreams. One giant dream is realized today-- but today is only the beginning. Now you commence.

What is next for you? You persistently followed this dream of higher education, even if on any given day, you simply put one foot in front of the other, hardly able to imagine the goal at the end.

A favorite poet of mine speaks of dreams and says,

Hold fast to dreams

For if dreams die

Life is a broken-winged bird

That cannot fly.

Hold fast to dreams

For when dreams go

Life is a barren field

Frozen with snow. (Langston Hughes)

Having held fast to your dream of attaining this degree, what do you dream today? What do you hope for your future? Remember, you now hold the magic key.

You have accomplished this degree in the middle of a global pandemic. You are strong. You are tenacious. You are a “Fearless Falcon.”

Falcons are fierce and passionate. They are adventurers. They act quickly. They spy opportunities and they take them when they present themselves. Falcons are symbols for us humans of bravery and vision.

As you take leave today, remember you are an Albertus Magnus College graduate, a “Fearless Falcon,” who holds a magic key.

This key will allow you to make a difference in the lives of others. Now, you must live not for yourself alone. Shaped by the values of your Alma Mater, you go forth to be a light, a force for good in our world.

In our troubled, polarized, and fractured world, marred by war, inequality and hate-- you carry an antidote. You hold a magic key. Your key invites you to be for others, and to know happiness for yourself.

And we know that “To be happy, is not to have a sky without a storm, a road without accidents, work without fatigue, relationships without disappointments…” But, “to be happy is to find strength in forgiveness, hope and battles, security in the face of fear, love in discord.”

(Jorge Bergoglio)

Please, as you live your life into the future, resist ever feeling like a victim, and become your destiny's author--you now hold the magic key. If you must cross a desert in the days ahead, look for an Oasis in the depths of your soul.

I do not know if you are a person of faith, if you believe in a Higher Power-- but standing here before you today I can tell you that I believe, and I see the God I believe in -- in you. I pray you will see in yourself what I see, and that with each passing day you will comprehend the profound and unconditional love available to you from within.

Let me conclude now by telling you a story—They say all stories are true—some really happened. You may have heard it before. See if it has special meaning meant just for you alone.

It is the story of the Hotel Clerk.

“One stormy night many years ago, an elderly man and his wife entered the lobby of a small hotel in Philadelphia. Trying to get out of the rain the couple approached the front desk hoping to get some shelter for the night. “Could you possibly give us a room here?” the husband asked.

The clerk, a friendly man with a winning smile, looked at the couple and explained that there were three conventions in town, “All of our rooms are taken,” the clerk said, “but I can't send a nice couple like you out into the rain at 1:00 o'clock in the morning. Would you be perhaps be willing to sleep in my room? It's not exactly a suite, but it will be good enough to make you folks comfortable for the night.”

When the couple declined the young man pressed on, “Don't worry about me. I have to sit out here all night anyway. I'll be just fine,” the clerk told them, so the couple agreed.

As he paid his bill the next morning, the elderly man said to the clerk, “You are the kind of manager who should be the boss of the best hotel in the United states. Maybe someday I'll build one for you.” The clerk looked at them and smiled, and the three of them had a good laugh.

As they drove away, the elderly couple agreed that the helpful clerk was indeed exceptional, as finding people who are both friendly and helpful isn't easy.

Two years passed. The clerk had almost forgotten the incident when he received a letter from the old man. It recalled that stormy night and enclosed a roundtrip ticket to New York asking the young man to pay the couple a visit.

The old man met the clerk in New York and led him to the corner of 5th Ave and 34th St. He then pointed to a great new building there, a palace of reddish stone, with turrets and watchtowers thrusting up to the sky.

“That,” said the older man, “is the hotel I have just built for you to manage.” “You must be joking!” the young man incredulously replied.

“I can assure you I am not,” said the older man, a sly smile playing around his mouth.

The older man's name was William Waldorf Astor. And the magnificent structure was the original Waldorf Astoria hotel. The young clerk who became its first manager was George C. Boldt. This young clerk never foresaw the turn of events that would lead him to become the manager of one of the world's most glamorous hotels.

There is no telling the good that comes from kindness. And you never know whose heart you may be touching.

Graduates, whose lives will you touch? What difference will it make for you, and for them? What simple kindness of yours may be transformative for another?

Some rewards are not as dramatic as the one this young man in the story experienced, but no less powerful or important.

Fearless Falcons, always remember that Albertus Magnus's College, your Alma Mater, has “faith in your future.”

As you go forth, may the magic key you now possess, your degree from this esteemed institution, open new and surprising doors for you. May your education allow you to be “…more observant, less judgmental, more responsive, less reactive. May you find more inner peace, and less outer chaos, more clarity, less confusion, more faith, less fear.”

While your diploma may be just a piece of paper, your Albertus Magnus College education is something that distinguishes you, and something no one can ever take from you. Congratulations!

Thank you for being the gift to this institution that you have been and are. We love you and we believe in you. Congratulations!