Bishop Joseph Kopacz – Funeral Homily for  
Father Brian Kaskie  
and Renewal of Ordination Vows

There is sadness in our gathering today, especially for brother priests who have known Father Brian for many years, from seminary through nearly 30 years of priesthood. We are in solidarity with his family of origin who will gather together next week at St Alphonsus, and his family of the Catholic faithful throughout our diocese, especially the faithful of St Alphonsus in McComb, Saint James in Magnolia, and the former St Theresa in Chatawa. 

Anointed in the Lord, through Baptism, Confirmation and Ordination, Father Brian is now claimed by the Lord in death in the hope of the resurrection. We grieve, but not like those who have no hope. In fact, we are able to gather at this funeral liturgy, the Mass, the pledge of eternal life, that was for Father Brian, and is for us, the fountain of grace through the Body of Christ broken for us, and the blood of the Lord poured out for us. We give thanks for these sacred moments together, an opportunity denied many people who lost loved ones in death this past year.

Pope Francis wrote a remarkable Apostolic Letter on December 8, 2020 when he dedicated this year in honor of Saint Joseph, marking the occasion of the 150th anniversary of Pius IX’s 1870 declaration in honor of this great saint as the Patron or the Universal Church. Entitled *Patris Corde, With a Father’s Heart*, the husband of Mary and the foster father of Jesus, is distinctly a guiding and kindly light for us as priests, for we too are spiritual fathers. Patris Corde, is comprised of seven chapters: A Beloved father— a loving and tender father—an obedient father—an accepting father—a courageously creative father—a working father—a father in the shadows, or out of the limelight. These chapters are a litany for our lives as priests. In this moment of commendation to the Great High Priest, our crucified and risen Lord, we can say that like Saint Joseph, Father Brian in life and
death, is much-loved by family, friends and the faithful around the
Diocese of Jackson, and by many beyond our Catholic faith. Although Father Brian’s heart failed him in the end, he loved with
great heart for nearly 30 years as the Lord’s Anointed. The spirit of
the Lord was upon him, and God used his larger than life
personality to attract people to the Church, and to faith in Jesus
Christ. He loved the Lord, the Word of God, the Church and its
tradition, and the culture of Mississippi and the South. He
enculturated more than a few of you into the Diocese of Jackson.

I recommend *Patris Corde* in this year of Saint Joseph as a treasure
of encouragement for us as spiritual fathers in our vocation to
teach, sanctify and lead with the heart of the Good Shepherd. I
quote:

“Joseph found happiness not in mere self-sacrifice but in self-gift.
In him, we never see frustration but only trust. His patient silence
was the prelude to concrete expressions of trust. Our world today
needs fathers. Every true vocation is born of the gift of oneself,
which is the fruit of mature sacrifice. The priesthood and
consecrated life require this kind of maturity. Whatever our
vocation, whether to marriage, celibacy or virginity, our gift of self
will not come to fulfilment if it stops at sacrifice; were that the case,
instead of becoming a sign of the beauty and joy of love, the gift of
self would risk being an expression of unhappiness, sadness and
frustration.”

Our prostration in the sanctuary on the day of our ordination is the
symbol par excellence of our self-gift to God to work in the Church
for the salvation of all.

Archbishop Hughes, who blessed us with our Lenten Spiritual
Conference last week, is fond of recommending the timeless
classic of Bishop Fulton Sheen, “*A Priest is Not His Own*” The
renewal of our vows of priesthood on this day, all of us present and
through live streaming, is an offering of self-gift as an alter Christus who gave his life for the salvation of all.

In the midst of unyielding trials and accompanying temptations that can weigh us down, our renewal today is a gift for one another, and a sign of hope for our people. “The gift we have received, give as a gift,” our Lord’s own words. Or, as Saint Paul wrote to Timothy, “stir into flame the gift you have received with the laying on of hands.” This is our purpose today.

There is so much at stake in the midst of the Pandemic’s captivity. Pope Francis in his recent book, *Let Us Dream Together* The Path to a Better Future, writes profoundly. To enter a crisis is to be sifted. You enter a crisis you cannot avoid. You don’t come out the same. A crisis always demands that our whole self be present.

May our whole selves be present today, knowing the immeasurable gift of our priesthood as spiritual fathers in service to others. Isaiah, the Suffering Servant of today’s first reading knew that the dignity of a people—even the poorest, most wretched enslaved people—comes from God’s closeness, even while they remained in the grip of the Babylonian captivity.

In the Gospel today, Jesus reveals that he comes to restore Israel to the remembrance of God’s closeness, the basis for their dignity, occupied by a foreign power or not. (Fulton Sheen) “The passage was familiar to the Jews. It spoke to the Babylonian exile. He took this text woven out of the exile and wrapped it around himself. He changed the meaning of the poor, the captive and the blind. The poor were bereft of God. The blind had not yet seen the light, and the captives were those who had not experienced God’s loving mercy for their sin. The Jubilee Year spoke to just restoration in society, a reality of hope rising. Anointed people, the baptized and the ordained, are called to strive no matter what they feel by applying their will to overcome apathy, doubt, or fear.
Hope is not a step in life; it is a stance for this life and life everlasting! But like the Lord, who thanked his disciples for remaining at his side in his trials at the Last Supper, it is easy to lose heart when the demands are daunting. Our renewal together also says that we are Fratelli Tutti, to apply the title of Pope Francis’ recent landmark Encyclical. Fratelli, Tutti, Hermanos Todos, Brothers together. We are there for one another.

As your Bishop, in the spirit of Patris Corde and from the heart of God the Father, I thank you for being beloved fathers, for being loving fathers, for being obedient fathers, accepting fathers, for being fathers who serve with creative courage during this pandemic, for your hard work, indeed, most of it in the background.

With abundant hope for this life and for eternal life, at this time we stand before God and the People of God to renew the vows of ordination.