

**EULOGY FOR
BROTHER PHILIP KEAVNEY FSC**

Mont La Salle Chapel

Napa, California

Easter, 2018

Welcome dear Keavney family, Brothers, friends and former students.

This morning we gather to reminisce and celebrate the life of the extraordinary Brother Philip Keavney (called affectionately “Pat Boy” by his family), and bid him farewell in the spirit of his favorite poem, George Herbert’s *The Pulley*:

***“When God first made man,
Having a glass of blessings standing by
‘Let us,’ said he, ‘pour on him all we can...’
So strength made a way;
Then beauty flowed, then wisdom, honour, pleasure.
When almost all was out, God made a stay,
Perceiving that, alone of all His treasure,
Rest in the bottom lay.”***

Today, we should strive to discover in our hearts the joy that Brother Philip Keavney has finally come to be blest with -- the rest that this world could not render.

“Pat Boy” Keavney was born on the day remembered as a day of infamy -- December 7 th, 1942. But we should recall his birth as falling on the eve of the feast of the Immaculate Conception and that he journeyed to his eternal rest on Easter morning, April 1 st, 2018, even though henceforth it will be observed as All Fools Day.

Only the sardonic Brother Philip would leave us in such befuddlement and amusement regarding his entry into this world and his departure from it!

Scripture proclaims that there is a season for everything...However I failed to unearth any mention of a time for allowing an Italian to speak at an Irish wake.

I first heard tell of Patrick Keavney in the Novitiate here in July of 1962. “Wait’ll you meet Keavney,” was

the oft-repeated buzzword which was being exhorted with countless re-tellings of the infamous Victory Park clash, where “Pat Boy” apparently fought a hefty football player to, according to him, a draw. “Pat Boy” may have been diminutive in size but not in his prowess or his personality or his firmly-held convictions.

All this pluckiness was especially illustrated in athletics. On the basketball court he had a devastating shot from ten feet that was impossible to guard. On the baseball diamond, Pat Keavney was celebrated as the ultimate baseball catcher, as framed in the words of a high school friend, “In my opinion, he was the best catcher in all of Pasadena. He was definitely the toughest!.”

My first glimpse of this epic figure took place when he arrived at the Novitiate. To me, compared to the trumpeted account of him, he appeared under-sized. I thought to myself, “THIS is the fabled Keavney???” I soon learned that the reputation was indeed true. Despite being total opposites in consequential ways, we became friends from the start. Though I had entered the Novitiate a year earlier this would be the only time I would precede him in our vocation, for in our teaching journey as La Sallian Brothers, he would be assigned to our schools and communities before

me, and then I would be sent to that same community and school later, perhaps some kind of divine comedy. Even to this day, he is being called to his next assignment before me, this one being the eternal one.

In community, though fiercely independent and treasuring solitude, his Irish charm spontaneously animated everyone. His communal sense was exemplified by his charity to all. He ardently practiced this great virtue mainly by always giving to those in need when asked. He would immediately drop whatever he was doing whenever someone came to him for assistance. One Brother has summarized it this way: "He had his faults, but he would give you the shirt off his back if you asked him." As Scripture professes, "Where charity and love prevail, there God is ever found."

As a spiritual person, to me he was quite akin to the apostle Thomas. Many times Philip needed to put his finger into the truth with intense curiosity and scrutiny in order to, like Thomas, have his eyes opened to the abiding verities of life, as his eyes are now truly open but in a glorious fashion.

Like all of us he was not perfect. The most succinct way to capture this was when, at Christlan Brothers

High School in Sacramento, his friend, Oretha, the Brothers' Community cook, chided him fondly one day, "Brother Philip! Why you be so contrary?"

As an educator, one former student exclaimed to him, "Well, you were an incredible force." Brother Philip didn't start out that way, but in time, he came to find his own path in the classroom. His approach was socratic, engaging his students in dialogue. He was convinced that it was in the arena of discourse with his students where he would touch their hearts. A Brother perceived that his uniquely-shaped strategy had created nightmares for Department Chairs and Principals. This same Brother elaborated further, "He left an indelible mark on his students which focused on the art of reasoning, and therein lies his legacy."

A former student captures the essence of his educational journey under Brother Philip's tutelage in this way: "Arriving to high school in the fall of 1979, I was a damaged boy. The Christian Brothers, true to their mission, and Brother Philip as point man in my case, nurtured my mind and mended my soul....I am eternally grateful for my time in his classroom and... for his guidance during the many, many occasions he listened to me sorting through my muddled, youthful life. I shall miss his sense of humor that always lifted me when I was in need of such. And his reliance on

the Holy Spirit for all things he couldn't explain was a powerful lesson...."

A La Salle High School, Pasadena friend phrased it this way, "Brother Philip taught me to think critically and to this day it informs how I think and what I say....He transformed young fools into thoughtful men. I thank God, for the life of Philip Keavney.

Rest in peace, great teacher."

Leave Jesus in our hearts forever.

Alleluia!