

Jesus says in today's Gospel: *I am the Good Shepherd*. And to borrow a line from today's second reading, that is what He is: the Good Shepherd.

As Psalm 23 says: *The Lord is my Good Shepherd, I shall not want; The Lord is your Good Shepherd, you shall not want; And the Lord is, and has been, and always will be, our very Good Shepherd*, and we shall not want, so long as we all keep faithfully following Christ the Good Shepherd, wherever he leads us.

That's my whole homily today; and since it's so brief, I'm going to repeat what I just said, but first, I have a story to tell you; I'll begin at the beginning.

On the Tuesday after Easter, I was getting ready to go to a three day priests conference out towards the Cape, when I got a call from Bishop Evans's office telling me that the bishop wanted to see me as soon as possible.

Now, if a priest is in trouble, Monsignor Kenny's office calls you, but if a priest is being asked to take a new assignment, Bishop Evans's office calls you, and then you're really in trouble.

So I said to his secretary "I'm leaving in a half an hour to go to a three day conference out near the Cape, and I'm driving Fr. Kelly and Monsignor Saborin to it, can I come in Friday, or maybe the Bishop can call me — it's easier to say no to him over the phone!"

But he wanted me to come in, and so I said I could come Monday morning, April 9, and that worked for him.

Meanwhile, I had time to think and pray.

Most likely, the Bishop wanted me to move from St. Joseph's. Of the parishes opening up, I figured he might want me to take one on the East Bay.

I also said to myself, if the diocese wants me to move this year, they will definitely want me to move in next year when my second six-year term is up in July 2019.

I came to the conclusion that if this was the case, I tell him I respectfully wish to stay at St. Joseph's one more year and finish out my canonical term, as my dad is home on hospice with my mom caring for him, and I need to be available to them, and starting a new assignment would be very difficult, especially one further away from them. Next July, my term will be up, there will be even more pastors retiring, and the Bishop can move me if he wants.

I felt very confident that this was what the Lord wanted me to do, and that the Bishop would understand.

But then I suddenly remembered something: the Monday I was meeting with Bishop Evans on, April 9, was the Feast of the Annunciation — the day God asked Mary to say yes.

And I said "O crap, of all the days to schedule a meeting where I'm saying "No" to what the Bishop wants me to do!"

But still, I said to myself, I'm saying "Yes" to another year at St. Joseph's.

So that Monday morning I went to see Bishop Evans, and he sits me down and says to me "Michael, I think you are going to be very surprised at this, but Bishop Tobin would like you to be the Pastor of Ss. John and Paul Parish."

Surprised was too mild of a word. Ss. John and Paul is the biggest parish in the diocese. St. Joseph Woonsocket has one thousand three hundred registered families, John and Paul has Four Thousand Three Hundred registered families.

It's also the biggest parish in the Diocese, area wise: about nine miles east to west, and thirteen miles north to south.

But most significantly, Ss. John and Paul Parish is my home parish. I was Baptized there, made my First Communion and Confirmation there, was ordained a Deacon there, and celebrated my first Mass there, the first priest ever to come from the parish.

And here I was, on the Feast of the Annunciation being asked by the Bishop to become the Pastor of my home parish.

I said "Well Bishop, I was going to tell you I couldn't take a new assignment because my dad is very sick, and I need to be close to my parent's home — but, seeing as they live only a half a mile from the Church, I guess I can't give that excuse!"

He said to me "The parish needs a young and energetic priest, and the parish school is facing some challenges. All the priests on the Personnel Board were unanimous that you are the priest to send there, and the Bishop and I agree."

I said "I'll need to pray about this." "OK, I'll call you tomorrow morning"

And so, I prayed about it, and talked to my spiritual director about it, and the next morning I called up the Bishop and said "Please tell Bishop Tobin my answer is: *Fiat mihi secundum verbum tuum*" The words Mary said to the Angel at the Annunciation. It was too crazy to say Yes to it in plain English!

And so, on July 1, St. Joseph Woonsocket will be given a new pastor, and I will become the Pastor of Ss. John and Paul Parish in Coventry.

Your new pastor will be announced at all the Masses next Sunday; I just recently found out who it is, and I think he will do very well here at the parish and also over at the school.

I told you all this, because I want to make it clear that in no way did I ask for a new assignment. I would have been very happy to have stayed at St. Joseph's forever.

But I couldn't say no to my home parish, and I couldn't say no to the opportunity to be so close by to my parents at a time when they need me around.

And finally, I couldn't say no of course, to the Lord, who 15 years ago brought me to the Green Pastures of East Woonsocket, besides the restful waters of the Blackstone River (and I came here, because Fr. Grenon left Our Lady Queen of Martyrs to become the Pastor of Ss. John and Paul, Fr. Moe left St. Joseph's to go to OLQM, and I left St. Mark's Cranston to come here, now its come full circle and I will replace Fr. Grenon!), and the Lord has blessed me in so many countless ways through all of you, through Good Shepherd School, and through this great faith filled city of Woonsocket these 15 years. And I'm certain that He is calling me now to the big pasture land of Coventry and West Greenwich, beside the restful waters of the Pawtuxet River.

So that's the big news. If you could all please pray for me, for the new incoming pastor, and for the parish, as we make this transition.

Its certainly not going to be easy for me to leave this parish I've come to love so much, and take over a much bigger one, but I have a lot of peace about it, because its very clear to me, from the way it all happened, that the Lord is calling me to go, and therefore I know He will somehow give me the grace to do it.

For as Jesus says in today's Gospel, He is the Good Shepherd. And with Him as our Good Shepherd, we shall certainly not be wanting, so long as we continue to faithfully follow Him wherever he leads us. God bless you.