



My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

In today's first reading, we hear the Lord call our forefather Abraham, who says with confidence, "Here I am!" In these words, we see the fundamental disposition of a Christian, namely, obedience to the will of God who, St. Paul reminds us in his letter to the Romans, ordains all things to the good for those who love Him (Rom. 8:28). For this reason, on the day of his ordination, the first vow of every priest is obedience, which is to say, an abandonment of his will to the will of God trusting the discernment of the bishop for the good of God's people.

It is in this same spirit of obedience that Bishop Noonan now calls me to tend another flock of the Lord's pasture. And so, after three years of joyful and grace-filled ministry, my time at St. Mary Catholic Church & School is coming to an end. Beginning March 15th, 2021, I will be assigned to serve as parochial vicar of multiple parish communities in Lakeland, Florida.

I know this may come as a shock and disappointment to many. But, it is at times like these we are reminded that the holiness of a parish is not built upon any particular priest and his initiatives. Rather, the holiness of a parish is built upon the Great High Priest and His Divine Mercy.

The Lord has blessed our time together. Through sacred liturgy, spiritual enrichment and zealous evangelization, St. Mary has become a beacon of hope and refuge for many souls including my own. There are no words to express my deep gratitude. Truly, Jesus used St. Mary to form my heart after the heart of the Good Shepherd. Now, it is time for me to share the fruit of this pastoral formation in another vineyard.

I leave with a peaceful spirit. For the Lord has not orphaned you, but sent a holy priest to care for your souls. I have full confidence in Fr. Juan's love for each of you and that he will work tirelessly to ensure the continued success of our community. The future of St. Mary is bright. God generously provided the foundations through Fr. Ivan and I's ministry. He will not stop now.

My task is done. I gave it my all, and God blessed the endeavor. Our parish continues to grow, children are being baptized, students are educated in our school, young families fill our pews, men are discerning the priesthood, young women have entered the convent, marriages are flourishing, liturgies are beautiful, confessions abound, the Eucharist is adored and loved. In short, by every metric worth measuring, St. Mary is alive and well.

As I depart you, I firstly want to ask forgiveness for all my shortcomings and failures as a priest. Like you, I am a sinner seeking Christ. Please know, that all I have done, has been for your salvation and sanctification. I also want to say, "Thank you". Thank you for letting me love you, for trusting me in the confessional and heeding my words in the Holy Mass. Thank you for forming me and teaching so many lessons. You will never be forgotten.

Finally, let us turn in thanksgiving to God and the Blessed Mother, who continue to look with favor upon our community. May the precious mantle of Mary enfold this campus and every soul that steps upon it.

I love you my dear children. Never forget your vocation to sainthood. May we all strive to become the saints God has made us to be. Goodbye now and God love you.

Your servant and father in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'BB' followed by a long horizontal flourish.

Fr. Blake Britton