

This Sunday is called “Good Shepherd Sunday.”

Our bishop, Bishop Cistone, and our vocations Director, Father Andy Booms, have asked their brother priests to speak about their vocation story in some way.

My earliest memory of being in church is when I was roughly 4 years old. My parents had the custom of sitting us all in the front row - us three boys, and my sister, my mom and my dad. While there were many reasons for this, the key reason was so that we wouldn't be bored during the Mass ... but would have a front seat so we could see everything going on. And this was the 1960s — so, the liturgy was according to the more ancient books, and there were long portions of the Mass which for all intents and purposes were silent.

Well, my youngest brother was a newborn, and because we had just started bringing the new baby to church, we ended up sitting all the way in the back row.

And I was NOT very happy about this. So, at one point in the Mass, most likely the Eucharistic Prayer, everyone was kneeling. My mom was holding the baby, and my Dad was holding my younger brother. The adults were kneeling, and so I began to make my move. I scooted along the back of the pew until I had made it to the very end of the pew. I checked around ... nobody had seen me. And then I let myself down onto the floor. Again ... everyone was fervently praying or else distracted from my clean break of things.

And at that moment, I started running ... right toward the front pew ... right up the center aisle ... right toward the altar.

Of course my dad was faster than me, and scooped me up ... and like any 4 year old, I HOWLED ... and Dad took me outside of the church.

At the earliest age, I was interested in seeing what was happening up “here” ... and wanted to be a part of it.

Of course, lots of things got in the way. Cars, computers, girls, travel ... but always in the back of my mind ... the priesthood was something I knew I should do ... somewhere I knew I should be.

After several years in the automotive industry and the military, I once again saw my chance to “make a break for it.” This time, I was roughly 40 years old.

Between my savings, the G.I. Bill, and whatever work I could find on campus, I managed to obtain the necessary academic credentials in philosophy and theology.

Now, instead of the obstacle being a new baby, or a parent trying to keep a young child safely in the pew ... I was dealing with vocations directors who were younger than me ... or else programs whose emphasis was on kids right out of High School.

I was “too old” or “too independent” or “had wasted my time going to school.” I heard “we don’t see how an ex-military man would fit in our community” or else “engineers aren’t the best candidates for our program.”

There were some who saw my past as a series of “mistakes” and that “finally” I had gotten my head on straight and wanted to be “just like them.” And that didn’t sound right to me, either.

None of this was very encouraging.

And so, after about three years of this ... which would have been the end of my first semester of graduate Theology, I went in front of the Blessed Sacrament, and said: “OK, God. I’ve had it with vocation directors. I don’t know what to do. I’m going to finish the degree, and work on the academics. But YOU are going to have to make this vocations thing work. SEND ME A BISHOP, because I’m sick of being ‘too’ this, and ‘too’ that.”

Six months later, I was on the phone with Bishop Carlson. A month later, I was in his office interviewing with him. This time of the year, four years ago, he called me and said he was sending me to seminary for the Diocese of Saginaw.

You see, God does have a plan for each and every one of us.

And God does answer our prayers - as long as we’re willing to get out of His way and let Him do the God part.

And that’s pretty much the “Reader’s Digest” version of my Vocations Story. And if there’s any ‘moral’ to the story, it’s this: If God is your co-pilot ... get out of the driver’s seat, and let Him take over.

God has a plan. God does answer our prayers. Ask Him for whatever you need to do His will, and He will NOT disappoint you.