

In our country it's said that you shouldn't talk about religion and politics because it's likely to upset people.

We like to keep ourselves to ourselves, to live a quiet life, to keep our heads down; to go with the flow, and keep our beliefs to ourselves.

I can tell from the reading we had from the Acts of the Apostles that St. Peter certainly wasn't an Englishman! He didn't take that advice about not discussing religion in public.

He and John had been dragged in front of the Jewish religious leaders to explain how they'd healed a beggar in the name of Jesus: "By what power, or in whose name, have you done this." Acts 4: 7 the High Priest asks.

Peter, the man who'd denied knowing Jesus at the Crucifixion, now witnesses publicly, and courageously that the same Jesus, had healed this crippled man through him and John.

"Let me clearly state to all of you [he says] that he was healed by the powerful name of Jesus Christ, the man you crucified but whom God raised from the dead." Acts 4: 10

Could you speak like that? Could I speak like that?

But Peter goes even further. He says: "There is salvation in no one else! God has given no other name under heaven by which we must be saved." Acts 4: 12

That's shocking, isn't it?

But what other person came among us as God's One and Only Son? Only Jesus.

What other person could die to set us free from sin's power?

Only Jesus.

What other person rose from the dead to give us eternal life?

Only Jesus.

But do I know that for myself?

Do I want the Lord to change my heart so that I can be drawn into an ever-closer relationship with Him?

For a changed life convinces people of the power of Jesus.

If He can take my faults, my weaknesses, my failings, and still use me to witness about Him to other people, then He is indeed the Lord.

Peter, like me, was a weak and wilful man; so what gave him the courage to speak about Jesus as he did.

The Scripture says: "Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, spoke to them." Acts 4: 8

That's the explanation: Peter was filled with the Spirit of Jesus. Jesus wasn't just an abstract idea, or a distant memory, to Peter, He filled Peter's life. He's Peter's friend.

In his First Letter John says to us: "How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are." 1 Jn. 3: 1

The Spirit is the love, which the Father's lavished on us; to make us more like Jesus, to draw us ever closer to Him.

I think that's what Peter means when he says: "There is salvation in no one else!" Acts 4: 12 and this should give us hope, and courage to speak about Jesus.

Not hope in the sense of just a wish: 'I hope the weather will be sunny tomorrow.' Or 'I hope I win the Lottery this week.' But unshakeable confidence in His grace.

Knowing that: "God is so rich in mercy, and he loved us so much, that even though we were dead because of our sins, he gave us life when he raised Christ from the dead." Eph. 2: 4 – 5

I have that confidence, which means I enjoy being a Christian; but that doesn't mean my life is free from problems and stress.

I enjoy being an Ordained Deacon; but that doesn't mean that it's a bed of roses – it has thorns. To be an Ordained Minister is not an escape from the harsh realities of this world, but I know that I couldn't carry on in the Ministry if I was not basically happy being a Christian.

I couldn't carry on being a Christian if I didn't know that Jesus is my Good Shepherd, who loves me, and laid down His life for me.

I know that He protects me, and cares for me; I know there are times when I don't listen to His voice, and wander off from His protection.... but He always seeks me out, and leads me home to Him: "With cords of compassion, with ties of love. [and] lifts [me like] a little child to [His] cheek"
Hos. 11: 4

Each one of us has a vocation, a calling: to know Jesus, the Good Shepherd; and, having come to know Him, to listen carefully to where He wants to lead us in our lives as Christians.

As Pope Francis says: "Never be afraid to go out from yourselves and begin the journey! The Gospel is the message which brings freedom to our lives; it transforms them and makes them all the more beautiful. How wonderful it is to be surprised by God's call, to embrace his word, and to walk in the footsteps of Jesus, in adoration of the divine mystery and in generous service to our neighbours!

Your life will become richer and more joyful each day!"

Pope Francis: Message for 52nd World Day of Prayer for Vocations