

“Always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope.” Words from our second reading, taken from the first Letter of St. Peter. St. Peter is encouraging his audience not to be afraid or reluctant to evangelize, to share their faith with others, to offer an explanation for their hope. And he was doing this during a time in which the Christian message was new and unfamiliar to many people. He was doing this in a time when the early Church faced rejection from many of the Jewish leaders, as well as those in the Roman government. So, St. Peter wanted the early Christians to share their faith with others, even if this would be unpopular, rejected, and possibly even lead to persecution.

It’s just as important for us today to hear this same message, to receive this same encouragement. “Always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope.” We still live in a world where the Christian message will not be well-received by many. We live in a world where the Gospel will be unpopular and rejected. And we live in a world where persecution still occurs in various parts of the world, including China, Pakistan, Venezuela and Nigeria.

Now, we ourselves may not face this same kind of persecution here in Kettering, Ohio. But we do face possible ridicule, criticism or accusations of trying to force our beliefs on others, simply when we express our opinions and beliefs. So, it’s not an easy thing to always be willing to evangelize and to share our reasons for hope with others. For this reason, many of us would rather not enter into those discussions that focus on faith, religion or morals.

It seems many people are far more willing to invite discussions about other areas of their lives, though. I’ve seen those T-shirts that read “Ask me about . . . such and such.” It might be ask me about my grandkids, or my pets, or my job, and a host of other options. So we are willing to welcome conversations with others on some topics, but what about our faith?

Now, I’m not saying that we need to always be wearing a T-shirt that says, “Ask me about Jesus” (although these do exist). We don’t necessarily need to be that explicit about it because the lives we live should be inviting these discussions far more effectively than any T-shirt can.

If we go back and look at the passage from St. Peter, we will notice that he says to be ready to give an explanation **to anyone who asks you.**” So maybe we’ll excuse ourselves from evangelizing because no one directly asks us about our faith. This isn’t good enough, though. Perhaps the reason no one is asking us about our faith is because we don’t give them any evidence of faith. When those around us, our friends, co-workers, neighbors, look at our lives, maybe what they see is no different than what they see in everyone else they meet. Maybe there isn’t anything in the way we live that separates or distinguishes us from the rest of humanity.

But this shouldn’t be the case. We **should** seem different. Our lives should bring the light of Christ into the darkness of the world. Our lives should be filled with hope even when job loss, financial woes, and uncertainty cause worry and fear for others. Our lives should show patience in dealing with sickness and other burdens. Our lives should demonstrate true rejoicing and happiness when something good happens for someone else. And our lives should be a model of charity and love for all, following the example of Jesus Himself.

For it is Jesus Who is our hope. And so when St. Peter encourages us to be ready to give an explanation of our hope, this means we should be ready to give Jesus to others; to share with them His Gospel message. And it is possible to do this through a message on a T-shirt, or a bumper sticker, or on our Facebook page. There’s nothing wrong with this. But the best way, the most important way, and the most effective way is through the lives we live.

For if we love Jesus, then we will follow His commands. We will live the way that He has planned for us and the way He calls us to follow. And our lives will be different. They will be different from what they used to be. They will be different from those who do not yet know or follow Jesus. And our lives will serve as an invitation to others to ask us why we have such hope, such faith and such love. Our lives will enable us to share with others the greatest thing about us: not our job, or our pets, or even our grandkids, but rather, Jesus Himself.