



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER FRANCIS
TO THE PARTICIPANTS IN THE PLENARY ASSEMBLY
OF THE PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR SOCIAL COMMUNICATIONS**

Saturday, 21 September 2013

Dear Brothers and Sisters, good morning!

I am pleased to greet you and to thank you for your work in the important sector of social communications, but after having heard Monsignor Celli I feel I must remove the word “sector”...and instead refer to an important “ecclesial dimension”. I wish to thank Archbishop Claudio Maria Celli for his kind words of greeting extended to me on your behalf. I would like to share some thoughts with you.

1. First: *the importance that the Church attaches to the area of communication*. This year is the fiftieth anniversary of the Conciliar Decree *Inter Mirifica*. This anniversary is more than a commemoration; the Decree expresses the Church’s solicitude for communication in all its forms, which are important tools in the work of evangelization. There is a difference between these forms, that are functional means of communication, and communication itself which is something else entirely. In the last few decades the various means of communication have evolved significantly, but the Church’s concern remains the same, though it assumes new ways of expression. The world of communications, more and more, has become an “environment” for many, one in which people communicate with one another, expanding their possibilities for knowledge and relationship (cf. Benedict XVI, *Message for the 2013 World Communications Day*). I wish to underline these positive aspects notwithstanding the limits and the harmful factors that also exist and which we are all aware of.

2. In this context - and this is the second reflection - we must ask ourselves: *what role should the Church have* in terms of the practical means of communication at her disposal? In every situation, beyond technological considerations, I believe that the goal is to understand how to *enter into*

dialogue with the men and women of today, to know how to engage this dialogue in order to appreciate their desires, their doubts and their hopes. They are men and women who sometimes feel let down by a Christianity that to them appears sterile and in difficulty as it tries to communicate the depth of meaning that comes with the gift of faith. We do in fact witness today, in the age of globalization, a growing sense of disorientation and isolation; we see, increasingly, a loss of meaning to life, an inability to connect with a “home” and a struggle to build meaningful relationships. It is therefore important to know how to dialogue and, with discernment, to use modern technologies and social networks in such a way as to reveal a presence that listens, converses and encourages. Allow yourselves, without fear, to be this presence, expressing your Christian identity as you become citizens of this environment. A Church that follows this path learns how to walk with everyone. There is an ancient rule for pilgrims, which Saint Ignatius adopts, and which is why I know it! In one of his rules he says that the person accompanying the pilgrim must walk at his or her pace, not going on ahead or falling behind. In other words, I envisage a Church that knows how to walk with men and women along the path. The pilgrim’s rule will help inspire us.

3. The third thought: this is a challenge which we must all face together in this environment of communications where the issues are not principally technological. We must ask ourselves: are we up to the task of bringing Christ into this area, or better still, of *bringing others to meet Christ*? Can we walk alongside the pilgrim of today’s world as Jesus walked with those companions to Emmaus, warming their hearts on the way and bringing them to an encounter with the Lord? Are we able to communicate the face of a Church which is “home” to all? We sometimes speak of a Church that has its doors closed, but here we are contemplating much more than a Church with open doors, much more! We must, together, build this “home”, build this Church, make this “home”. A Church with closed doors or open doors; the task is to move forward and help build the Church. The challenge is to rediscover, through the means of social communication as well as by personal contact, the beauty that is at the heart of our existence and journey, the beauty of faith and of the beauty of the encounter with Christ. Even in this world of communications, the Church must warm the hearts of men and women. Do our presence and plans measure up to this requirement or do we remain technicians? We hold a precious treasure that is to be passed on, a treasure that brings light and hope. They are greatly needed. All this, however, means that priests, religious and laity must have a thorough and adequate formation. The great digital continent not only involves technology but is made up of real men and women who bring with them their hopes, their suffering, their concerns and their pursuit of what is true, beautiful and good. We need to bring Christ to others, through these joys and hopes, like Mary, who brought Christ to the hearts of men and women; we need to pass through the clouds of indifference without losing our way; we need to descend into the darkest night without being overcome and disorientated; we need to listen to the dreams, without being seduced; we need to share their disappointments, without becoming despondent; to sympathize with those whose lives are falling apart, without losing our own strength and identity (cf. Pope Francis, *Address to the Bishops of Brazil*, 27 July 2013, n. 4). This is the path. This is the challenge.

It is important, dear friends, to bring the solicitude and the presence of the Church into the world of communications so as to dialogue with the men and women of today and bring them to meet Christ, but it is an encounter which is personal. It is not to be manipulated. Today there exists a great temptation in the Church which is a spiritual form of “abuse”: to manipulate the mind; a sort of theological brainwashing which ultimately brings one to a superficial meeting with Christ but not to an encounter with the Person of Christ Alive! Within this encounter, there is the person and there is Christ. There is no room for the spiritual engineer who wishes to manipulate. This is the challenge: to bring the person to Christ. This must be done, however, in complete awareness that we ourselves are means of communication and that the real problem does not concern the acquisition of the latest technologies, even if these make a valid presence possible. It is necessary to be absolutely clear that the God in whom we believe, who loves all men and women intensely, wants to reveal himself through the means at our disposal, however poor they are, because it is he who is at work, he who transforms and saves us.

It is our prayer, the prayer of all, that the Lord may make us zealous and sustain us in the engaging mission of bringing him to the world. I ask you for your prayers because I too share this mission and I gladly assure you of my Blessing.