



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO EMPLOYEES OF THE DICASTERY FOR COMMUNICATION,
ON THE OCCASION OF THE PLENARY ASSEMBLY**

Sala Regia

Monday, 23 September 2019

[Multimedia]

Address pronounced by the Holy Father

Address consigned by the Holy Father

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Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I have a discourse to read... it is not very long; it is seven pages... but I am sure that after the first one the majority of you will fall sleep, and I will not be able to communicate. I think that what I want to say in this address will be clearly understood by reading it, in reflection. For this reason, I will consign [this address](#) to Dr Ruffini, whom I thank for the words he addressed to me, so that he may make it known to all of you. And I will allow myself to speak a little spontaneously with you, to say what is in my heart regarding communication. At least I think not so many will fall asleep, and we can communicate better!

Thank you for your work, thank you for this quite numerous Dicastery... I asked the Prefect: "But... does everyone work?" — "Yes", he said — to avoid that famous anecdote... [*Pope John XXIII was once asked, "How many people work in the Vatican?" and he answered: "About half"*]. They all work, and they work with this attitude that expresses God's desire: to communicate himself, in what theologians call *perichoresis*: he communicates himself, and is communicated to us. This is

the beginning of communication: it is not an office job, like advertising, for example. To communicate is precisely to receive from God's Being and to have the same attitude; unable to remain alone: the need to communicate what I have and I think to be true, just, good and beautiful. To communicate. And you are specialists in communication; you are technicians in communication. We must not forget this. One communicates with the soul and with the body; one communicates with the mind, with the heart, with the hands; one communicates with everything. A true communicator gives everything, gives all of him or herself — as we say in my land, “they put all the meat on the grill”, they do not save any for themselves. And it is true that the greatest communication is love: in love there is the fullness of communication: love for God and among us.

But what should communication be like? One of the things you must not do is advertising, mere advertising. You must not do what human businesses do, that try to attract more people... To use a technical term: you must not *proselytize*. I would like our communication to be Christian and not an element of proselytism. Proselytism is not Christian. [Benedict XVI](#) said this very clearly: “the Church does not grow through proselytism but through attraction”, that is, by witness. And our communication must be a *witness*. If you want to communicate just one truth without goodness and beauty, stop, do not do it. If you want to communicate a truth more or less, but without involving yourselves, without witnessing to that truth with your own life, with your own flesh, stop, do not do it. There is always the signature of witness in each of the things we do. Witnesses. *Christian* means *witnesses*, “martyrs”. This is the “martyrial” dimension of our vocation: to be witnesses. This is the first thing I would like to say to you.

Another thing is a certain resignation, which so often enters the hearts of Christians. We see the world...: it is a pagan world, and this is nothing new. The “world” has always been a symbol of the pagan mentality. Jesus asks the Father, at the Last Supper, to guard his disciples lest they fall into the world and into worldliness (cf. *Jn* 17:12-19). The climate of worldliness is not a novelty of the 21st century. It has always been a danger; there has always been temptation, it has always been the enemy: worldliness. “Father, guard them lest they fall in the world, lest the world be stronger than they are”. And many, I see them, think: “Yes, we must close ourselves off somewhat, be a small but *authentic* church” — I am allergic to those words: “small but *authentic*”: if something is *authentic*, it is not necessary to say so. I will come back to this. This is a withdrawal into oneself, with the temptation of resignation. We are few in number: but not few like those who defend themselves because they are few and the enemy is greater in number; few like yeast, few like salt: this is the Christian vocation! We need not be ashamed of being few in number; and we need not think: “No, the Church of the future will be a Church of the chosen ones”: we would once again fall victim to the heresy of the Essenes. And this is how Christian authenticity is lost. We are a Church of few, but like leaven. As Jesus said. Like salt. Resignation to cultural defeat — allow me to call it that — comes from a mean spirit; it does not come from God. It is not a Christian spirit, the complaint of resignation. This is the second thing I would like to say to you: do not be afraid. Are we few in number? Yes, but with the desire for “*mission*”, to show others who we are. By bearing witness. Once again I repeat that expression of Saint Francis to his friars, when he sent them to

preach: “Preach the Gospel, and if necessary, even with words”. That is, witness in the first place.

I look at this Lithuanian Archbishop here before me, and I think of the Bishop emeritus of Kaunas, who will now be made a cardinal: that man, how many years did he spend in prison? By his witness he did so much good! With suffering... It is our martyrs, those who give life to the Church: not our artists, our great preachers, our custodians of the “true and complete doctrine”... No, the martyrs. A Church of martyrs. And to communicate is this: to communicate this great richness that we have. This is the second thing.

The third thing I take from what I said just a bit ago, which I am slightly allergic to: “This is something *authentically* Christian”, “this is *truly* so”. We have fallen into the culture of adjectives and adverbs, and we have forgotten the strength of nouns. A communicator must make one understand the weight of the reality of the nouns that reflect the reality of people. And this is a mission of communication: to communicate with reality, without sugar-coating with adjectives or adverbs. “This is a Christian matter”: why say *authentically* Christian? It is Christian! The mere fact of the noun “Christian”, “I am of Christ”, is strong: it is a substantivized adjective, yes, but it is a noun. To pass from the culture of the adjective to the theology of the noun. You must communicate in this way. “How, do you know that person?” — Ah, that person is like this, like that...”: immediately the adjective. First the adjective, perhaps, then, afterwards, what the person is like. This culture of the adjective has entered the Church and we, all brothers, forget we are brothers, by saying that this is “this type of” brother, that one is “the other” brother: first the adjective. May your communication be austere but beautiful: beauty is not rococo art; beauty does not need these rococo elements; beauty manifests itself from the noun itself, without strawberries on the cake! I think we have to learn this.

To communicate by witness, communicate by involving oneself in communication, communicate with the nouns of things, communicate as martyrs, that is, as witnesses to Christ, as martyrs. To learn the language of martyrs, which is the language of the Apostles. How did the Apostles communicate? Let us read that gem that is the Book of the Acts of the Apostles, and we will see how they communicated at that time, and what Christian communication is like.

Thank you, thank you so much! Then you have that [*the written address*] which is more “structured”, because the foundation was made by you. But read it, reflect on it. Thank you for what you do, and go forth with joy. To communicate the joy of the Gospel: this is what the Lord is asking of us today. And thank you, thank you for your service and thank you for being the first Dicastery headed by a lay person. Well done! Carry on! Thank you.

Address consigned by the Holy Father

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I welcome you and thank Dr Paolo Ruffini, Prefect of the Department, who is presiding over the Plenary Assembly for the first time, for the words he has addressed to me on behalf of you all. Some of your faces are more familiar to me, as you accompany me in my daily work and in my apostolic journeys. I know, however, that there are many other people who also live their work week at the pace of the Pope's commitments. But they do so "behind the scenes", putting into their work, at the service of the Church, all their professionalism and creativity, their passion and discretion.

I am happy to be able to see you all together today and to thank you for what you do! Thanks to your work many people are encouraged in their journey of faith and many are invited to search for and encounter the Lord. Thanks to your work, the Pope speaks in nearly forty languages — it is a true "Pentecostal miracle"! Thanks to you the Magisterium of the Pope and the Church is read on paper, listened to on the radio, seen on television networks and websites and shared through social media, in the ever increasing whirlwind of the digital world.

It is the first time that I have met you all together since the beginning, four years ago, of the process of bringing together in a new department of the Roman Curia all the entities that, in different ways, deal with communications (cf. Motu Proprio [*The current context of communications*](#), 27 June 2015). Reforms are almost always laborious, and so are those regarding Vatican media. There may have been some particularly difficult stretches on the path; there may have been some misunderstandings, but I am happy to see that the road is going ahead with foresight and prudence. I know of the effort you have made to make the best use of the resources entrusted to you, containing non-productive costs.

For the Church, communication is a mission. No investment is too great for spreading the Word of God. At the same time, every talent must be well spent, made to bear fruit. The credibility of what we say is also measured by this. Moreover, to remain faithful to the gift received, one must have the courage to change, never to feel that one has succeeded, nor to be discouraged. It requires always getting back into play, leaving behind one's false sense of security and embracing the challenge of the future. Moving with the times does not mean extinguishing the memory of the past; it means keeping its flame alive.

I have seen the work you have done. I see it every day. For this reason, today I would like to thank God together with you for the strength that he has given you and that he gives us. May the grateful memory for all that has already been done and the awareness of the common effort fill you with strength to move forward on this path.

In reality, our strength alone is not enough. [Paul VI](#) said this 55 years ago when he received the members of the first Plenary Assembly of what was then called the Pontifical Commission for Social Communications. He recognized how limited our strengths were in the face of this immense field of communication. But it is precisely because of this — he said — that it is necessary "to think

of another order of strengths, another way of judging things; order and method, that we go to study at the school of the Lord.... A thought of faith must therefore support the smallness of our humble efforts [...]. The more we become instruments in God's hands, that is, small and generous, the more likely our effectiveness will increase" (*Insegnamenti* II [1964], 563).

We know that since then the challenges in this area have grown exponentially, yet our efforts are still not enough. The challenge to which you are called, as Christians and as communicators, is truly great. And precisely for this reason it is beautiful.

I am therefore pleased that the theme chosen for this Assembly is "*We are members one of another*" (*Eph* 4:25). Your, and our strength, lies in unity, in being members of one another. Only in this way will we be able to respond ever better to the demands of the Church's mission.

In my [Message for this year's World Communications Day](#), which bears the same title, I wrote that "A community is that much stronger if it is cohesive and supportive", if it "pursues common objectives.... The metaphor of the body and the members leads us to reflect on our identity, which is based on communion and on 'otherness'. As Christians, we all recognize ourselves as members of the one body whose head is Christ", and we "are called to manifest that communion which marks our identity as believers. Faith itself, in fact, is a relationship, an encounter; and under the impetus of God's love, we can communicate, welcome and understand the gift of the other and respond to it".

Communication in the Church cannot but be characterized by this principle of participation and sharing. Communication is truly effective only when it becomes witness, that is, participation in the life that is given to us by the Spirit and reveals us in communion with each other, members of one other.

Saint [John Paul II](#) wrote in his [Apostolic Letter on Rapid Development](#): "Communication both within the Church community, and between the Church and the world at large, requires openness and a new approach towards facing questions regarding the world of media... This is one of the areas in which collaboration between the lay faithful and Pastors is most needed, as the Council appropriately emphasized, 'A great many wonderful things are to be hoped for from this familiar dialogue between the laity and their spiritual leaders... In this way, the whole Church, strengthened by each one of its members, may more effectively fulfil its mission for the life of the world'" (*Lumen gentium*, 37) (12).

For this reason I encourage you to continue, in your daily work, to work increasingly as a team, in this cooperation between lay people, religious and priests from many countries, of many languages, which is very good for the Church. May the very style of your work bear witness to communion.

I also encourage you, beyond the work of this Plenary Assembly, to seek with ingenuity and creativity all ways of strengthening the network with the local Churches. I encourage you in this to also support the formation of digital environments in which people communicate, and not simply connect.

I know that recently this Department has advanced several tangible instruments to ensure that the circularity of communication at the service of all may increase between the local Churches and the Department itself. I know that you have new projects, which will certainly not lack the support of the Pope. Through your work you participate in the service of the Church's unity and in the coordination of the communications of the entire Roman Curia. We must walk together. We must know how to interpret and direct our time. May ecclesial communication truly be an expression of a single "body".

Thank you to each of you; my thanks also to your families and communities. I ask you, please, to pray for me, and I bless you wholeheartedly.

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