



The Holy See

MESSAGE OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II FOR THE 26th WORLD COMMUNICATIONS DAY

"The Proclamation of Christ's Message in the Communications Media"

[Sunday, 31 May 1992]

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

For the twenty-sixth successive year, in response to a directive given by the Second Vatican Council, the Church celebrates a World Day dedicated to social communications.

What is it that this Day celebrates? It is a way of acknowledging with gratitude a specific gift of God, a gift which has enormous significance for the period of human history in which we are living, the gift of all those technical means which facilitate, enhance and enrich communications between human beings.

On this Day, we celebrate the blessings of speech, of hearing and of sight, which enable us to emerge from our isolation and loneliness in order to exchange with those around us the thoughts and sentiments which arise in our hearts. We celebrate the gifts of writing and reading by which the wisdom of our ancestors is placed at our disposal and our own experience and reflection are passed on to the generations that follow us. Then, as if these wonders were of small account, we recognize the value of "marvels" even more wonderful: "the marvels of technology which God has destined human genius to discover" (*Inter Mirifica*, 1), inventions which in our time have immeasurably increased and extended the range over which our communications may carry and have amplified the volume of our voice so that it can simultaneously come to the ears of multitudes beyond counting.

The communications media - and we exclude none of them from our celebration - are the admission ticket of every man and woman to the modern marketplace where thoughts are given public utterance, where ideas are exchanged, news is passed around, and information of all kinds

is transmitted and received (cf. *Redemptoris Missio*, 37). For all of this we praise our Heavenly Father from whom comes "every good endowment and every perfect gift" (James 1:17).

Our celebration, while essentially one of gladness and thanksgiving, is of necessity tempered with sadness and regret. By the very media we are celebrating we receive constant reminders of the limitations of our human condition, of the presence of evil in individuals and in society, of the senseless violence and injustice human beings wreak upon one another under so many pretexts. Through the media we often find ourselves in the position of helpless spectators assisting at atrocities committed all over the globe, whether the reason for them be historical rivalries, or racial prejudices, a desire for vengeance, a lust for power, greed for possessions, selfishness, or a lack of respect for human life and human rights. Christians deplore these happenings and motivations. But they are called to do much more; they must endeavour to overcome evil with good (cf. Rom 12:21).

The Christian response to evil is, above all, to harken to the Good News and to make God's message of salvation in Jesus Christ ever more present. Christians have a "good news" to tell. We have Christ's message - and it is our joy to share it with every man and woman of good will who is prepared to listen.

We tell it first by the witness of our lives, for, as Pope Paul VI wisely said, "modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses" (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 41). We are expected to be like a city on a hill, like a lamp on a lampstand, visible to all, our light shining like a beacon signalling the safe channel to a peaceful haven (cf. Mt 5:13-14).

When our individual and community lives exemplify the beliefs and values we profess as Christians, this fact cannot fail to be brought to the attention of the world by all communications media that truly reflect the reality of things. Such a proclamation of Christ's message can already accomplish great good. How effective would be such a universal witness on the part of the members of the Church!

But, a still more explicit proclamation is also expected of Christ's followers. We are obliged to proclaim our beliefs "in the light of day" and "from the housetops" (Mt 10:27; Lk 12:3), without fear or compromise, adapting the divine message, naturally, "to people's way of talking and their patterns of thought" (*Communio et Progressio*, 11), and always with a sensitivity towards their actual beliefs and convictions equal to the sensitivity which we expect from them in regard to our own. Our proclamation must invariably be made with that twofold respect which the Church insists on: respect for all human beings without exception in their quest for answers to the deepest questions of their lives, and respect for the action of the Spirit, already mysteriously present in every human heart (cf. *Redemptoris Missio*, 29).

Christ, we remember, forced his teaching on no one. He presented it to all without exclusion, but left each one free to respond to his invitation. This is the pattern which we, his disciples, follow. We claim that all men and women have the right to hear the saving message which he left with us; and we claim for them the right to embrace it if it convinces them. Far from feeling any obligation to apologize for putting Christ's message at the disposal of all, we claim with full conviction that it is our right and obligation to do no less.

There exists a corresponding right and obligation to use for this purpose all the new media of communication which distinguish our times. Indeed "the Church would feel herself guilty before God if she did not avail herself of those powerful instruments which human skill is constantly developing and perfecting" (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 45).

It is clearly realized that these "powerful instruments" require specific skills and disciplines on the part of those who use them, and that to communicate intelligibly in these "new languages" there is a need for both special aptitudes and appropriate training.

It is in this connection that on World Communications Day I recall the activities of Catholics, individually and in a myriad of institutions and organizations, in this field. In particular I mention the three great Catholic Media Organizations: the International Catholic Office for Film and Cinema (OCIC), The International Catholic Press Union (UCIP), and the International Catholic Association for Radio and Television (Unda). It is to them in particular and to the vast resources of professional knowledge, skill and zeal among their extensive international membership that the Church hopefully and confidently turns as she seeks to proclaim Christ's message in a form adapted to the instruments now at her disposal and in language intelligible to the worldwide media-conditioned culture to which it must be addressed.

The great body of Catholic media professionals, lay men and women for the most part, must be reminded on this special day of the awesome responsibility which rests upon them, but they must also be made to feel that they enjoy the spiritual support and firm solidarity of the whole body of the faithful. I wish to encourage them to even greater and more urgent efforts, both to communicate the message through the media and to train others to do so. I appeal to all Catholic organizations, to Religious Congregations and ecclesial movements, but in a special way to Episcopal Conferences, both national and regional, to foster the Church's presence in the media and to work for greater coordination among the Catholic agencies involved. In fulfilling her mission, the Church needs to be able to count on a far-reaching and more effective use of the means of social communication.

May God be the strength and support of all Catholics involved in the world of communications as they re-dedicate themselves to the work which he so clearly requires of them. As a token of his divine presence and of his all-empowering help for their efforts, I gladly impart to them my Apostolic Blessing.

From the Vatican, 24 January 1992, the Feast of Saint Francis de Sales.

IOANNES PAULUS PP. II

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