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Message for the 51st World Day of Social Communications

The Holy Father's message for the 51st World Day of Social Communications, to be held on Sunday 28 May this year on the theme "Fear not, for I am with you" (Isaiah, 43:5): Communicating Hope and Trust in our Time", was published today.

For the occasion, at 11 a.m., Msgr. Dario Edoardo Viganò, prefect of the Secretariat for Communication, was present in the Holy See Press Office to speak with journalists.

The following is the full text of the message:

Access to the media – thanks to technological progress – makes it possible for countless people to share news instantly and spread it widely. That news may be good or bad, true or false. The early Christians compared the human mind to a constantly grinding millstone; it is up to the miller to determine what it will grind: good wheat or worthless weeds. Our minds are always "grinding", but it is up to us to choose what to feed them (cf. St. John Cassian, Epistle to Leontius).

I wish to address this message to all those who, whether in their professional work or personal relationships, are like that mill, daily "grinding out" information with the aim of providing rich fare for those with whom they communicate. I would like to encourage everyone to engage in constructive forms of communication that reject prejudice towards others and foster a culture of encounter, helping all of us to view the world around us with realism and trust.

I am convinced that we have to break the vicious circle of anxiety and stem the spiral of fear resulting from a constant focus on "bad news" (wars, terrorism, scandals and all sorts of human failure). This has nothing to do with spreading misinformation that would ignore the tragedy of human suffering, nor is it about a naive optimism blind to the scandal of evil. Rather, I propose that all of us work at overcoming that feeling of growing discontent and resignation that can at times generate apathy, fear or the idea that evil has no limits. Moreover, in a communications industry which thinks that good news does not sell, and where the tragedy of human suffering

and the mystery of evil easily turn into entertainment, there is always the temptation that our consciences can be dulled or slip into pessimism.

I would like, then, to contribute to the search for an open and creative style of communication that never seeks to glamorise evil but instead to concentrate on solutions and to inspire a positive and responsible approach on the part of its recipients. I ask everyone to offer the people of our time storylines that are at heart “good news”.

Good news

Life is not simply a bare succession of events, but a history, a story waiting to be told through the choice of an interpretative lens that can select and gather the most relevant data. In and of itself, reality has no one clear meaning. Everything depends on the way we look at things, on the lens we use to view them. If we change that lens, reality itself appears different. So how can we begin to “read” reality through the right lens?

For us Christians, that lens can only be the good news, beginning with the Good News *par excellence*: “the Gospel of Jesus Christ, Son of God” (Mk 1:1). With these words, St. Mark opens his Gospel not by relating “good news” about Jesus, but rather the good news that is Jesus Himself. Indeed, reading the pages of his Gospel, we learn that its title corresponds to its content and, above all else, this content is the very person of Jesus.

This good news – Jesus Himself – is not good because it has nothing to do with suffering, but rather because suffering itself becomes part of a bigger picture. It is seen as an integral part of Jesus’ love for the Father and for all mankind. In Christ, God has shown His solidarity with every human situation. He has told us that we are not alone, for we have a Father who is constantly mindful of His children. “Fear not, for I am with you” (Is 43:5): these are the comforting words of a God who is immersed in the history of His people. In His beloved Son, this divine promise – “I am with you” – embraces all our weakness, even to dying our death. In Christ, even darkness and death become a point of encounter with Light and Life. Hope is born, a hope accessible to everyone, at the very crossroads where life meets the bitterness of failure. That hope does not disappoint, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts (cf. Rom 5:5) and makes new life blossom, like a shoot that springs up from the fallen seed. Seen in this light, every new tragedy that occurs in the world’s history can also become a setting for good news, inasmuch as love can find a way to draw near and to raise up sympathetic hearts, resolute faces and hands ready to build anew.

Confidence in the seed of the Kingdom

To introduce his disciples and the crowds to this Gospel mindset and to give them the right “lens” needed to see and embrace the love that dies and rises, Jesus uses parables. He frequently compares the Kingdom of God to a seed that releases its potential for life precisely when it falls to the earth and dies (cf. Mk 4:1-34). This use of images and metaphors to convey the quiet power of the Kingdom does not detract from its importance and urgency; rather, it is a merciful way of making space for the listener to freely accept and appropriate that power. It is also a most effective way to express the immense dignity of the Paschal mystery, leaving it to images, rather than concepts, to communicate the paradoxical beauty of new life in Christ. In that life, hardship and the cross do not obstruct, but bring about God’s salvation; weakness proves stronger than any human power; and failure can be the prelude to the fulfilment of all things in love. This is how hope in the Kingdom of God matures and deepens: it is “as if a man should scatter seed on the ground, and should sleep by night and rise by day, and the seed should sprout and grow” (Mk 4:26-27).

The Kingdom of God is already present in our midst, like a seed that is easily overlooked, yet silently takes root. Those to whom the Holy Spirit grants keen vision can see it blossoming. They do not let themselves be robbed of the joy of the Kingdom by the weeds that spring up all about.

The horizons of the Spirit

Our hope based on the good news which is Jesus Himself makes us lift up our eyes to contemplate the Lord in the liturgical celebration of the Ascension. Even though the Lord may now appear more distant, the horizons of hope expand all the more. In Christ, Who brings our human nature to heaven, every man and woman can now freely “enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way He opened for us through the curtain, that is, through His flesh” (Heb 10:19-20). By “the power of the Holy Spirit” we can be witnesses and “communicators” of a new and redeemed humanity “even to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:7-8).

Confidence in the seed of God’s Kingdom and in the mystery of Easter should also shape the way we communicate. This confidence enables us to carry out our work – in all the different ways that communication takes place nowadays – with the conviction that it is possible to recognise and highlight the good news present in every story and in the face of each person.

Those who, in faith, entrust themselves to the guidance of the Holy Spirit come to realise how God is present and at work in every moment of our lives and history, patiently bringing to pass a history of salvation. Hope is the thread with which this sacred history is woven, and its weaver is none other than the Holy Spirit, the Comforter. Hope is the humblest of virtues, for it remains hidden in the recesses of life; yet it is like the yeast that leavens all the dough. We nurture it by reading ever anew the Gospel, “reprinted” in so many editions in the lives of the saints who became icons of God’s love in this world. Today too, the Spirit continues to sow in us a desire for the Kingdom, thanks to all those who, drawing inspiration from the Good News amid the dramatic events of our time, shine like beacons in the darkness of this world, shedding light along the way and opening ever new paths of confidence and hope.

From the Vatican, 24 January 2017
