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Audience with delegations from the Italian Federation of Catholic Weeklies; the Italian Periodical Press Union; the Corallo Association; and the “AIART Media Citizens” Association

This morning, in the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience delegations from the Italian Federation of Catholic Weeklies (FISC), the Italian Periodical Press Union (USPI), the “Corallo” Association and the “AIART Media Citizens” Association.

The following is the Pope’s address to those present at the audience:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning and welcome!

I am pleased to meet you, as members of the Italian Federation of Catholic Weeklies, the Italian Periodical Press Union, the “Corallo” Association and the “AIART Media Citizens” Association. I wish to appreciate my appreciation for your daily work in the world of communication. You deal with the press, television, radio and new technologies, with commitment to educating readers and listeners about the media. Your widespread roots testify to your desire to reach people with care and proximity, with humanity. Indeed, I would say that you well represent that “human geography” that animates the Italian territory. This, after all, is what communication is all about: bringing people together, weaving threads of communion, building bridges without raising walls. In recent years, various innovations have affected your sector, and this is why you must always renew your commitment to the promotion of the dignity of people, to justice and truth, to legality and educational co-responsibility. I would therefore like to invite you not to lose sight, in the context of today’s great communication highways, which are ever faster and more congested, of *three paths*, which it is good not to lose sight of and which must always be travelled.

The first is that of *formation*. It is not a simple task, but it is a vital issue. Indeed, the future of society is at stake. Formation is the way to connect generations, to promote dialogue between the young and the elderly, that intergenerational alliance that is fundamental today more than ever. But how to educate, especially the younger

generations immersed in an increasingly digital context? There is a passage from the Gospel that can inspire a good approach, when Jesus tells us to be “wise as serpents and innocent as doves” (Mt 10:16). Prudence and simplicity are two basic educational ingredients to navigate today’s complexity, especially the web, where it is necessary not to be naïve – not to be naïve – and at the same time, not to give in to the temptation to sow anger and hatred. Prudence, lived with simplicity of heart, is that virtue that helps to see far, that leads us to act with foresight, with forward thinking. And there are no courses for having prudence; one cannot study to have prudence. Prudence is exercised, it is lived, it is an attitude that is born from the heart and mind together, and then it is developed. Prudence, lived with simplicity of heart, always helps us to have foresight. The Catholic weeklies bring this wise outlook into the homes of the people: they do not only provide the news of the moment, which is easily burnt, but also convey a humane vision, a Christian vision aimed at forming minds and hearts, so that they do not allow themselves to be deformed by words that are shouted or by news items that, passing with morbid curiosity from black to pink, neglect the clarity of white. I therefore encourage you to promote an “ecology of communication” in territories, schools and families, among yourselves. You have a vocation to remind us, in a simple and understandable style, that beyond the news and scoops, there are always feelings, stories, flesh and blood people to be respected as if they were your own relatives. And we see from the sad news of these days, from the terrible news of violence against women, how urgent it is to educate to respect and care: to form men capable of healthy relationships. To communicate is to form people. To communicate is to form society. Do not abandon the path of education: it will take you far!

The second path is that of *protection*. The first is formation, the second is protection. “Digital communication wants to bring everything out into the open; people’s lives are combed over, laid bare and bandied about, often anonymously. Respect for others disintegrates, and even as we dismiss, ignore or keep others distant, we can shamelessly peer into every detail of their lives” (Encyclical Letter *Fratelli tutti*, 42). Therefore, it is fundamental to promote tools that protect everyone, especially the weakest, minors, the elderly and people with disabilities, and to protect them from the intrusiveness of the digital world and the seductions of provocative and polemic communication. Your entities, engaged in this sector, can enable the growth of a protected media citizenship; they can support safeguards to freedom of information and promote civic awareness, so that rights and duties are recognized in this field too. It is a question of *communicative democracy*. And please, do this fearlessly, like David against Goliath (cf. *1 Sam 17*): with a small slingshot he brought down the giant. Do not just play defensively but, remaining “small inside”, think big, because you are called to a great task: to protect, through words and images, the dignity of people, especially the dignity of the small and the poor, God’s favourites.

The third path is *witness*. I would like to indicate to you the example of Blessed Carlo Acutis: “Carlo was well aware that the whole apparatus of communications, advertising and social networking can be used to lull us, to make us addicted to consumerism and buying the latest thing on the market, obsessed with our free time, caught up in negativity. Yet he knew how to use the new communications technology to transmit the Gospel, to communicate values and beauty” (Apostolic Exhortation *Christus vivit*, 105). That young man did not fall into the trap, but became a witness of communication. Witness is prophecy, creativity, that liberates and drives us to roll up our sleeves, to come out of our comfort zones to take risks. Yes, fidelity to the Gospel presupposes the capacity to risk for goodness. And to go against the grain: to speak about fraternity in an individualistic world; about peace in a world at war; about attention to the poor in an intolerant and indifferent world. But this can be done credibly only if you first bear witness to what you say.

Dear friends, thank you for your visit, and I invite you to continue. I entrust your efforts to Saint Francis de Sales and to Blessed Carlo Acutis, that they may guide your steps on the paths of formation, protection and witness. I bless you from my heart. And please, do not forget to pray for me. Thank you!
