



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF POPE FRANCIS
TO PARTICIPANTS IN THE PLENARY ASSEMBLY
OF THE PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR THE LAITY**

*Consistory Hall
Saturday, 7 December 2013*

Your Eminences, Dear Brother Bishops and Priests, Brothers and Sisters,

It is a joy for me to meet with the Pontifical Council for the Laity which has gathered for its Plenary Assembly. As Blessed John Paul II loved to recall, with the Council “the hour of the laity has come”, and the abundant apostolic fruit gives increasing proof of the truth that statement. I thank the Cardinal for the words which he addressed to me.

Among the recent initiatives of your Dicastery I would like to mention the Pan-African Congress of September 2012, which was dedicated to the formation of the Laity in Africa, as well as the Seminar on the theme: “God entrusts the human being to the woman”, to mark the 25th anniversary of the Apostolic Letter *Mulieris dignitatem*. And we must study this point more deeply. In the cultural crisis of our time, woman finds herself on the front line of the battle to safeguard the human being. And lastly, together with you I thank the Lord for World Youth Day in Rio de Janeiro: a true celebration of faith. It was a true celebration. The Cariocans were joyful and gave us all joy. The theme of the Day: “Go and make disciples of all nations” highlighted the missionary dimension of Christian life, the need to go out to all those waiting for the living water of the Gospel, to the poorest and to the excluded. We have seen first-hand how mission flows from the contagious joy of an encounter with the Lord, which is transformed into hope for everyone.

For this Plenary you have chosen a topic that is very current: “Announcing Christ in the digital age”. This is a privileged field for the action of young people, for whom the “web” is, so to speak, connatural. The internet is a widespread and complex ever evolving reality, and its development raises the perennially relevant question of the relationship between faith and culture. Already during the early centuries of the Christian era, the Church wanted to measure up to the

extraordinary legacy of Greek culture. Faced with philosophies of great depth and an educational method of exceptional value, though steeped in pagan elements, the Fathers chose not to close themselves off to comparison nor did they compromise with certain ideas contrary to the Faith. Instead they were able to recognize and assimilate concepts of a higher order, transforming them from within by the light of the Word of God. They implemented what St Paul asked: “test everything; hold fast what is good” (1 Thess 5:21). Amid the opportunities and dangers of the internet, we need to “test everything”, knowing that we will certainly find false coins, dangerous illusions and traps to avoid. But, guided by the Holy Spirit, we will also discover precious opportunities for leading men and women to the luminous Face of the Lord.

Digital communication offers a number of possibilities, the most important of which is the proclamation of the Gospel. Certainly, though important, acquiring technical knowledge is not enough. Firstly it means encountering real women and men, who are often wounded or lost, in order to give them real reasons to hope. Proclamation requires authentic human relationships destined to culminate in a personal encounter with the Lord. Therefore, the internet is not enough, technology does not suffice. This, however, does not mean that the Church’s presence online is useless; on the contrary, her presence is indispensable, always with an evangelical style, in what for many, specifically young people, has become a kind of life environment, to stir up in hearts the insuppressible questions about the meaning of life, and to point to the way that leads to Him who is the answer: Divine Mercy made flesh, the Lord Jesus.

Dear friends, the Church is always on a journey, in search of new ways to proclaim the Gospel. Every day the contribution and the testimony of lay faithful has proven to be more and more indispensable. I therefore entrust the Pontifical Council for the Laity to the caring and motherly intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and with all my heart I bless you. Thank you.