

HOLY SEE PRESS OFFICE
OFICINA DE PRENSA DE LA SANTA SEDE



BUREAU DE PRESSE DU SAINT-SIEGE
PRESSEAMT DES HEILIGEN STUHLs

BOLLETTINO

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N. 160922a

Thursday 22.09.2016

Audience with the National Council Order of Journalists: journalism must not fuel fears of forced migration due to war or hunger

This morning in the Clementine Hall the Holy Father received in audience the National Council Order of Journalists. Following greetings from the president, Enzo Iacopino, the Pope addressed those present, emphasising the importance and influence of journalism in society, and inviting reflection on three key points of the profession: love for truth, professionalism, and respect for human dignity.

“The journalist has a role of great importance, and at the same time a great responsibility. In a certain sense you write the ‘first draft of history’”, began the Pope. “Times change, and the way of being a journalist changes too. Both print journalism and television are losing relevance compared to the new media of the digital world – especially among the young – but journalists, when they are professional, remain as a pillar, a fundamental element for the vitality of a free and pluralist society. The Holy See too, faced with changes in the world of the media, has experienced and is experiencing a process of renovation of its communication system, which will also be beneficial to you, and the Secretariat for Communication will be the natural point of reference for your valuable work”.

“Today I would like to share with you a reflection on some aspects of the profession of journalism, and how this can serve for the betterment of the society in which we live. ... I will focus on three elements: loving the truth, which is fundamental for all of us but especially for journalists; living with professionalism, something which goes far beyond rules and regulations; and respecting human dignity, which is much more difficult than one might think at first sight”.

“Loving the truth means not only affirming it, but rather living it, bearing witness to it in your work. ... The issue is not that of being or not being a believer”, he highlighted. “The issue here is being or not being honest with yourself and with others. ... In life nothing is black or white. In journalism too, it is necessary to know how to discern between the shades of grey in the events you are called upon to narrate. Political debates, and even many conflicts, are rarely the outcome of distinct and clear dynamics, in which it is possible to recognise precisely and unequivocally who is wrong and who is right. Comparison and conflict are indeed born of this difficulty of synthesis between different positions. And this is the difficult and at the same time necessary job – we might say even the mission – of the journalist: to arrive as close as possible to the truth of facts and never to say or write something that we know, in our conscience, to be untrue”.

“Living with professionalism means, first and foremost ... understanding and internalising the deep sense of one’s own work. This gives rise to the need not to submit one’s profession to the logic of partisan interests, be they economic or political. The task of journalism – I dare say, its vocation – is therefore to nurture the social dimension of man, favouring the building of true citizenship ... keeping at heart one of the pillars in the structure of a democratic society. We should always reflect that, throughout history, dictatorships – of every orientation and type – have always sought not only to take control of means of communication, but even to impose new rules on the profession of journalism”.

“Respecting human dignity is important in any profession ... because even behind the simple account of an event there are sentiments, emotions, and ultimately, people’s lives. I have often spoken about gossip as ‘terrorism’, of how it is possible to kill someone with the tongue. This applies to individual people, in the family or at work, but even more so to journalists, because their voice can reach everyone, and this is a very powerful weapon. Journalism must always respect the dignity of the person. ... Certainly, criticism is legitimate and, I would add, necessary, as is the denouncement of wrongdoing, but this must always be done with respect for the other, his life, and his affections. Journalism cannot be a weapon for the destruction of people or even populations. Nor must it fuel fears in relation to changes or phenomena such as forced migration due to war or hunger”.

“I hope that increasingly and everywhere journalism may be a tool for construction, a factor for the common good and for the acceleration of processes of reconciliation; that it may be able to resist the temptation to foment confrontation, with a language that stokes the flames of division, instead favouring a culture of encounter. You, journalists”, concluded the Holy Father, “can remind everyone every day that there is no conflict that cannot be resolved by women and men of goodwill”.
