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Audience with the Members of the Foreign Press Association in Italy

At 11.35 this morning, in the Clementine Hall of the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the members of the Foreign Press Association in Italy.

The following is the Pope's address to those present:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters,

With pleasure I welcome you, together with your family members, a few days after the celebration, in many countries, of World Communications Day. I thank the outgoing President, Mrs. Esma Çakir, and the new President, Mrs. Patricia Thomas, for the words they addressed to me.

I want to tell you first of all that I value your work; the Church esteems you, even when you put your finger on the wound, and perhaps the wound is in the ecclesial community. Yours is a valuable work because it contributes to the search for truth, and only the truth sets us free. In this regard, I like to repeat what Saint John Paul II said when he visited the headquarters of your Association 31 years ago: "The Church is on your side. Whether Christian or not, in the Church you will always find the right esteem for your work and the recognition of the freedom of the press" (17 January 1988: *Teachings* XI, 1 [1988], 135).

Yours is an indispensable role, and this also entrusts to you a great responsibility: it demands a particular care for the words you use in your articles, for the images you transmit in your services, for everything you share on social media. This is why today I renew to you an exhortation that applies to everyone in the digital age: as Benedict XVI said, sometimes "The mass media ... tends to make us feel like 'spectators', as if evil concerned only others and certain things could never happen to us. Instead, we are all 'actors' and, for better or for worse, our behaviour has an influence on others" (Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI in Piazza di Spagna, 8 December 2009). I therefore urge you to work according to truth and justice, so that communication is truly a tool

to build, not to destroy; to encounter, not to clash; to dialogue, not to monologize; to guide, not to disorientate; to understand each other, not to misunderstand; to walk in peace, not to sow hatred; to give voice to those who have no voice, not to be the megaphone for those who shout the loudest.

I was struck by the many references to humility present in your President's speech – after all, your headquarters is on Via dell'Umiltà! Humility is an essential virtue for spiritual life; but I would say that it can also be a fundamental element of your profession. Some of you might say to me: "Father, in our work there are other characteristics that count: professionalism, competence, historical memory, curiosity, writing skills, ability to investigate and ask the right questions, speed of synthesis, ability to make what happens comprehensible to the public at large ...". Certainly. Yet humility can be the keystone of your business.

Each of us knows how difficult the search for truth is, and how much humility it requires. And how much easier it is not to ask too many questions, to be satisfied with the first answers, to simplify, to remain on the surface, to appear; settle for the usual solutions, which do not know the tiresomeness of research able to represent the complexity of real life. The humility of not knowing everything first is what drives research. The presumption of knowing everything is what obstructs it.

To be a humble journalist does not mean to be a mediocre one, but rather to be aware that through an article, a tweet, or a live television or radio broadcast you can do good but also, if you are not careful and scrupulous, you can do harm to others and sometimes to entire communities. I am thinking, for example, of how certain clamorous headlines can create a false representation of reality. Correction is always necessary when one is wrong, but it is not enough to restore dignity, especially at a time when, through the Internet, false information can spread to the point of appearing authentic. Therefore, you journalists should always consider the power of the tool you wield, and resist the temptation to publish insufficiently verified news.

In a time when many tend to pre-judge everything and everyone, humility also helps the journalist not to be dominated by haste, but rather to try to stop, to find the time necessary to understand. Humility brings us closer to reality and to others with an attitude of understanding. The humble journalist tries to know the facts correctly and in their entirety before recounting and commenting on them. He or she does not nurture "excessive slogans that, rather than setting our thoughts in motion, quell them" (*Address to the Board of Directors and personnel of TV2000*, 15 December 2014). He does not build stereotypes. She is not satisfied with easy representations that portray individuals "as if they were able to resolve all problems, or on the contrary as scapegoats on whom to load all responsibility" (*ibid.*).

At a time when, especially in social media but not only, many use violent and derogatory language, with words that hurt and sometimes destroy people, it is necessary instead to measure language and, as your patron Saint Francis of Sales said in *Philothea*, to use the word how the surgeon uses the scalpel (see chapter XXIX). In a time of too many hostile words, in which speaking ill of others has become for many a habit, together with that of classifying people, it must always be remembered that every person has his intangible dignity, which can never be taken away. At a time when many spread fake news, humility prevents you from selling the spoiled food of misinformation and invites you to offer the good bread of truth.

The humble journalist is a free journalist. Free from conditioning. Free from prejudices, and therefore courageous. Freedom requires courage!

I listened with sorrow to the statistics on your colleagues killed while doing their work with courage and dedication in many countries, to inform others of what happens during wars and in the dramatic situations that so many of our brothers and sisters live in the world. Freedom of the press and of expression is an important indicator of a country's state of health. Let us not forget that one of the first measures that dictatorships take is to eliminate the freedom of the press or to "mask" it, to not leave the press free. "We need a journalism that is free, at the service of truth, goodness, and justice; a journalism that helps build a culture of encounter" (*Pontifex Tweet*, 3 May 2019). We need journalists who are on the side of the victims, on the side of those who are persecuted, on the side of those who are excluded, rejected, discriminated against. You and your work are needed to be helped not to forget many situations of suffering, which are often far from the spotlight, or have it

for a moment and are then returned to the darkness of indifference. There comes to my heart and to my memory a question that one of you asked me a short while ago: "What do you think about the forgotten wars?" Those wars that are ongoing but which people forget about, that are not the order of the day in the newspapers, in the media. Be careful: do not forget reality, because now "the blow has passed". No, reality continues, we continue. This is a good service. The wars forgotten by society, but which are still ongoing.

This is why I want to thank you for what you do. Because you help us not to forget the lives that are suffocated before they are even born; those who, as soon as they are born, are extinguished by hunger, hardship, lack of care, wars; the lives of child soldiers, the lives of violated children. Help us not to forget the many women and men persecuted for their faith or their ethnicity. If I may ask a question, who speaks today about the Rohingya? Who speaks today about the Yazidis? They are forgotten yet they continue to suffer. Help us not to forget that those forced – by calamities, wars, terrorism, hunger and thirst – to leave their homeland are not numbers, but faces, stories, a yearning for happiness. Your President spoke about migrants: we must not forget this Mediterranean, which is turning into a cemetery.

The humble and free journalist tries to tell the good, even if more often it is the evil that makes the news. What has always comforted me in my ministry as a bishop is to find out how much good there is between us, how many people sacrifice themselves – even heroically – to assist a parent or sick child, how many people engage in daily service to others, how many reach out their hands instead of turning away. Please continue to recount also that part of reality that, thanks to God, is still the most widespread: the reality of those who do not surrender to indifference, of those who do not flee before injustice, but build patiently in silence. There is a submerged ocean of good that deserves to be known, and that gives strength to our hope. In this recounting of life, women are very attentive, and I am pleased to see that the contribution of women is fully recognized in your Association. Women see better and understand better, because they are better at feeling.

In conclusion, I would like to assure you that I appreciate the effort with which you carry out your work, which, lived in a spirit of service, becomes a mission. During my apostolic trips I am able to understand the effort your work involves. Furthermore, you live far from your countries of origin and find yourselves as the mirror of the country in which you work, able to grasp the positive and negative aspects. I invite you to be a mirror able to reflect hope, to sow hope. And I hope you will be humble and free men and women, those who leave a good imprint in history.

Thank you for this meeting. I bless you, your loved ones and your work. And you too, please, pray for me. And I would like to give you all my blessing. I know that not all of you are believers, and for this reason I give my blessing in silence, for you all. God bless you all, bless all your hearts. Amen.
