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Audience with the participants in the Plenary of the Dicastery for Communication, with employees of the Dicastery

Address pronounced by the Holy Father

Address consigned by the Holy Father

At 8.45 this morning, in the Sala Regia of the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the employees of the Dicastery for Communication and the participants in the Plenary Assembly of the Dicastery, which is taking place in the Vatican from 23 to 25 September 2019.

After handing to those present the discourse prepared for the occasion, the Pope addressed some impromptu words to those present.

The following is the transcript of the address given by the Holy Father and the text prepared for the circumstance:

Address pronounced by the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters,

I have a speech to read... it's not that long, it's seven pages... but I'm sure that after the first one the majority of you will fall asleep, and I won't be able to communicate. I believe that what I want to say in this address will be well understood by reading it, in reflection. For this reason, I will give this address to Dr. Ruffini, whom I thank for the words he addressed to me, so that he may make it known to all of you. And I will allow myself to speak a little spontaneously, with you, to say what I have in my heart about communication. At least I think there won't be

many who will fall asleep, and we can communicate better!

Thank you for your work, thank you for this department, which is so numerous... I asked the Prefect: "But... does everyone work?" – "Yes", he said – to avoid that famous anecdote... [One day Pope John XXIII was asked, "How many people work in the Vatican?" and he answered: "About half of them"]. They all work, and they work with this attitude that expresses the desire for God: to communicate with oneself, in what theologians call the *perichoresis*: one communicates within oneself, and one communicates to us. This is the beginning of communication: it is not an office job, like advertising, for example. To communicate is precisely to take from the Being of God and to have the same attitude; not to be able to remain alone: the need to communicate what I have and I think that it is the true, the just, the good and the beautiful. Communicating. And you are specialists in communication, you are technicians in communication. We must not forget this. You communicate with the soul and the body; you communicate with the mind, the heart, the hands; you communicate with everything. The true communicator gives everything, he gives all of himself – as we say in my country, "he puts all the meat on the grill", he does not spare any for himself. And it is true that the greatest communication is love: in love there is the fullness of communication: love for God and among us.

But what should communication be like? One of the things you must not do is advertising, mere advertising. You must not behave like human business that try to attract more people... To use a technical word: you must not proselytize. I would like our communication to be Christian and not a factor of proselytism. It is not Christian to proselytize. Benedict XVI said this very clearly: "The Church grows not by proselytism, but by attraction", that is, by witness. And our communication must be *witness*. If you want to communicate just one truth without goodness and beauty, stop, do not do it. If you want to communicate a truth more or less, but without involving yourselves, without witnessing that truth with your own life, with your own flesh, stop, do not do it. There is always the signature of the witness in each of the things we do. Witnesses. Christians are witnesses, "martyrs". This is the "martyr" dimension of our vocation: to be witnesses. This is the first thing I would like to say to you.

Another thing is a certain resignation, which so often enters the hearts of Christians. Let's see the world...: it is a pagan world, and this is not a novelty. The "world" has always been a symbol of the pagan mentality. Jesus asks the Father, at the Last Supper, to guard His disciples so that they do not fall into the world and into worldliness (cf. *Jn 17: 12-19*). The climate of worldliness is not something new in the twenty-first century. It has always been a danger, there has always been temptation, it has always been the enemy: worldliness. "Father, safeguard these so that they may not fall into the world, so that the world may not be stronger than they are. And many, I see them, think: "Yes, we must close up a little bit, be a small but authentic church" – I am allergic to those words: "small but authentic": if something is authentic, it is not necessary to say so. I will come back to this. This is a withdrawal into oneself, with the temptation of resignation. There are few of us: but not like those who defend themselves because they are few and the enemy is greater in number; few like yeast, few like salt: this is the Christian vocation! We must not be ashamed of being few in number; and we must not think: "No, the Church of the future will be a Church of the chosen ones": we would once again risk the heresy of the Essenes. And so Christian authenticity is lost. We are a Church of a few, but as leaven. Jesus said so. Like salt. The resignation to cultural defeat – let me call it that – comes from bad spirit, it does not come from God. It is not a Christian spirit, the complaint of resignation. This is the second thing I would like to say to you: do not be afraid. Are there few of us? Yes, but with the desire for "mission", to show others who we are. With witness. Once again I repeat that phrase of Saint Francis to his brothers, when he sent them to preach: "Preach the Gospel, if necessary, also with words". That is, witness in the first place.

I look at this Lithuanian Archbishop here before me, and I think of the emeritus of Kaunas, who will now be made a cardinal: that man, how many years did he spend in prison? By his witness he did so much good! With pain... It is our martyrs, those who give life to the Church: not our artists, our great preachers, our custodians of the "true and complete doctrine" ... No, the martyrs. A Church of martyrs. And to communicate is this: to communicate this great richness that we have. This is the second thing.

The third thing I take from what I said earlier, which I am slightly allergic to: "This is something *authentically* Christian", "this is *truly* so". We have fallen into the culture of adjectives and adverbs, and we have forgotten the strength of nouns. The communicator must make people understand the weight of the reality of nouns that reflect the reality of people. And this is a mission of communication: to communicate with reality, without

sweetening with adjectives or adverbs. “This is a Christian thing”: why say authentically Christian? It is Christian! The mere fact of the noun “Christian”, “I am of Christ”, is strong: it is an adjectival noun, yes, but it is a noun. To pass from the culture of the adjective to the theology of the noun. And you must communicate in this way. “How, do you know that person?” – Ah, that person is like this, like that...”: immediately the adjective. First the adjective, perhaps, then, afterwards, what the person is like. This culture of the adjective has entered the Church and we, all brothers, forget to be brothers, by saying that this is “this type of” brother, that one is “the other” brother: first the adjective. Your communication should be austere but beautiful: beauty is not rococo art, beauty does not need these rococo things; beauty manifests itself from the noun itself, without strawberries on the cake! I think we need to learn this.

Communicating by witness, communicating by involving oneself in communication, communicating with the nouns of things, communicating as martyrs, that is, as witnesses of Christ, as martyrs. To learn the language of the martyrs, which is the language of the Apostles. How did the Apostles communicate? Let us read that jewel which is the Book of Acts of the Apostles, and we will see how it was communicated at that time, and how it is Christian communication.

Thank you, thank you so much! Then you have that [the written address] which is more “structured”, because the basis was made by you. But read it, reflect on it. Thank you for what you do, and continue with joy. Communicating the joy of the Gospel: this is what the Lord is asking of us today. And thank you, thank you for your service and thank you for being the first Dicastery headed by a layperson. Bravo! Keep on! Thank you.

Address consigned by the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters,

I welcome you and thank Dr. Paolo Ruffini, Prefect of the Department, who is presiding over the plenary assembly for the first time, for the words he has addressed to me on behalf of you all. Some of your faces are more familiar to me, as you accompany me in my daily work and in my apostolic journeys. I know, however, that there are many other people who also live their working week at the pace of the Pope’s commitments. But they do so “behind the scenes”, putting into their work, at the service of the Church, all their professionalism and creativity, their passion and discretion.

I am happy to be able to see you all together today and to thank you for what you are doing! Thanks to your work many people are encouraged in their journey of faith and many are invited to search for and encounter the Lord. Thanks to your work, the Pope speaks in almost forty languages – it is a true “Pentecostal miracle”! Thanks to you the Magisterium of the Pope and the Church is read on paper, listened to on the radio, seen on television networks and websites and shared through social media, in the vortex of the digital world.

It is the first time that I have met you all together since the beginning, four years ago, of the process of bringing together in a new department of the Roman Curia all the entities that, in different ways, dealt with communication (cf. *Motu proprio The current context of communications*, 27 June 2015). Reforms are almost always laborious, and so are those regarding Vatican media. There may have been some particularly difficult stretches on the path, there may have been some misunderstandings, but I am happy to see that the road goes ahead with foresight and prudence. I know of the effort you have made to make the best use of the resources entrusted to you, containing unproductive costs.

For the Church, communication is a mission. No investment is too great for spreading the Word of God. At the same time, every talent must be well spent, made to bear fruit. The credibility of what we say is also measured by this. Moreover, to remain faithful to the gift received, one must have the courage to change, never to feel that one has “arrived”, nor to be discouraged. You always have to get back in play, to leave behind your false security and to embrace the challenge of the future. To move ahead is not to extinguish the memory of the past, it is to keep its flame alive.

I have seen the work you have done. I see it every day. For this reason, today I would like to thank God together with you for the strength that He has given you and that He gives us. The grateful memory for all that has already been done and the awareness of the common effort fill you with the strength to move forward on this path.

In reality, our strength alone is not enough. Saint Paul VI said this 55 years ago when he received the members of the first plenary assembly of what was then called the Pontifical Commission for Social Communications. He recognized how limited our strength was in the face of this immense field of communication. But it is precisely because of this – he said – that it is necessary “to think of another order of strengths, another way of judging things; order and method, that we go to study at the school of the Lord. A thought of faith must therefore support the smallness of our humble efforts [...]. The more we become instruments in God’s hands, that is, small and generous, the more the probability of our efficiency will increase” (*Teachings II* [1964], 563).

We know that since then the challenges in this area have grown exponentially, yet our forces are still not enough. The challenge to which you are called, as Christians and as communicators, is truly great. And precisely for this reason it is beautiful.

I am therefore pleased that the theme chosen for this Assembly is “We are members of one another” (Eph 4: 25). Your strength lies in unity, in being members of one another. Only in this way will we be able to respond ever better to the demands of the Church’s mission.

In my Message for this year’s World Communications Day, which bears the same title, I wrote that “A community is that much stronger if it is cohesive and supportive”, the more it “pursues common objectives. The metaphor of the body and the members leads us to reflect on our identity, which is based on communion and on ‘otherness’. As Christians, we all recognize ourselves as members of the one body whose head is Christ”, and “we ... are called to manifest that communion which marks our identity as believers. Faith itself, in fact, is a relationship, an encounter, and under the impetus of God’s love, we can communicate, welcome and understand the gift of the other and respond to it”.

Communication in the Church can only be characterized by this principle of participation and sharing. Communication is truly effective only when it becomes witness, that is, a participation in the life that is given to us by the Spirit and enables us to discover we are, in communion with each other, members of each other.

Saint John Paul II wrote in his Apostolic Letter on Rapid Development: Communication both within the Church community, and between the Church and the world at large, requires openness and a new approach towards facing questions regarding the world of media. ... This is one of the areas in which collaboration between the lay faithful and Pastors is most needed, as the Council appropriately emphasized, “A great many wonderful things are to be hoped for from this familiar dialogue between the laity and their spiritual leaders. ... In this way, the whole Church, strengthened by each one of its members, may more effectively fulfil its mission for the life of the world” (*Lumen gentium*, 37) (12).

For this reason I encourage you to continue, in your daily work, to work increasingly as a team, in this cooperation between laypeople, religious and priests from many countries, of many languages, which is very good for the Church. May the very style of your work bear witness to communion.

I also encourage you, beyond the work of this plenary assembly, to seek with ingenuity and creativity all ways of strengthening the network with the local Churches. I encourage you in this to also encourage the formation of digital environments in which people communicate, and do not just connect.

I know that recently this Department has promoted some tangible instruments to ensure the circularity of communication at the service of all may grow between the local Churches and the Department itself. I know that you have new projects, which will certainly not lack the support of the Pope. Through your work you participate in the service of the unity of the Church and in the coordination of the communication of the whole Roman Curia. We must walk together. We must know how to interpret and orient our time. May ecclesial communication truly

be an expression of a single “body”.

Thank you to each of you, thank you also to your families and communities. I ask you, please, to pray for me, and from the heart I bless you.
