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Audience with Managers and Staff of the RAI-Italian Radio Television

This morning, in the Paul VI Hall, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the managers and staff of the RAI – Italian Radio Television.

The following is the address delivered to those present by the Holy Father:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear friends, good morning and welcome!

I greet the Chief Executive Officer, the Director General, the members of the Board of Directors, the managers, the journalists, the employees, the artists, the technicians, and your families. It is good that you are here as a large community. I am pleased to meet you and I wish you all a happy anniversary!

Seventy years of television, one hundred of radio: a dual birthday, which on the one hand invites you to look back at your history, so intertwined with that of Italy; and on the other, challenges you to look ahead, to the future, to the role you will have in a time that is still to be built, where every life is increasingly linked with others at a global level. In addition, we are in the Vatican, and many of you know these places well, because ever since its birth the RAI has always closely followed the steps of the Successor of Peter.

However, in all these years, it has not merely been a witness to the processes of change in our societies: it has in part also constructed them, and as a leading player. Indeed, the media influence our identities, for better and for worse. And therein lies the meaning of the *public service* you perform. Therefore, I would like to reflect with you precisely on these two words – *service* and *public* – because they describe very well the foundation of your mission: communication as a gift to the community.

The first word, on which I will dwell the most, is *service*. It is a word we often reduce to its instrumental meaning,

ending up confusing service with serving, dedication with use.

Instead, your work is intended above all to be a response to the needs of the citizens, in a spirit of universal openness, with action capable of extending throughout the territory without becoming localist, respecting and promoting the dignity of each person. A contribution to the truth and the common good that assumes precise features in information, entertainment, culture and technology.

In the field of information, serving essentially means *seeking and promoting the truth*, all the truth, for example by countering the spread of fake news and the devious plans of those who seek to influence public opinion in an ideological manner, lying and disintegrating the social fabric.

The truth is one, it is harmonic, it cannot be divided with personal interests.

It means avoiding any misleading reduction, remembering that truth is “symphonic” and is grasped best by learning to listen to the variety of voices – as in a choir – rather than always shouting one’s own idea alone. I wanted to highlight this.

Furthermore, it means serving the right of citizens to correct information, transmitted without prejudice, without rushing to conclusions but taking the necessary time to understand and to reflect, countering cognitive pollution, cognitive pollution, because information too must be “ecological”, that is, human.

Finally, it means ensuring a respectful pluralism of different opinions and sources because, as Saint John Paul II asserted, “even when the truth has been reached – and this can happen only in a limited and imperfect way – it can never be imposed. The truth is proposed, never imposed. Respect for a person’s conscience, where the image of God Himself is reflected (cf. *Gen 1:26-27*), means that we can only propose the truth to others, who are then responsible for accepting it” (*Message for the 35th World Peace Day*, 1 January 2002). Therefore, I urge you to foster dialogue, weaving threads of unity, and to foster dialogue it is necessary to listen. Very often we see that listening is preparing oneself to give an answer: it is not true listening, thinking of one’s own position without receiving that of others.

However, your public service does not relate only to information. Pluralism also relates to the languages of communication. I think of cinema, fiction, TV series, cultural programmes and entertainment, sports broadcasting, children’s programmes. In this regard, in our time, rich in technology but at times poor in humanity, it is important to promote the pursuit of beauty, to initiate dynamics of solidarity, to safeguard freedom, to work to ensure that every artistic expression may help each and every person to be uplifted, to reflect, to be moved, to smile and even to weep with emotion, to find meaning in life, a prospect of good, a meaning that is not that of yielding to the worst.

With regard to the technical and technological, then, there are many questions that challenge us. In particular, today “there is a need to act preventively, by proposing models of ethical regulation, to forestall harmful, discriminatory and socially unjust effects of the use of systems of artificial intelligence and to combat their misuse for the purpose of reducing pluralism, polarizing public opinion or creating forms of groupthink” (*Message for the 58th World Day of Social Communications*, 24 January 2024).

So, all this referred to *service*. Now we come to the second word: *public*. Service; public. The second word: public. It highlights first of all that your work is connected to the common good, the common good of all and not just of some. It involves first of all a commitment to consider and give voice especially to the last, the poorest, the voiceless, the discarded.

Furthermore, it implies the vocation to being an instrument for growth in knowledge, to cause people to reflect and not alienate – to reflect and not to alienate, to enter into orbit – to open new glances at reality and not to feed bubbles of self-centred indifference, to educate young people to dream big, with their minds and with their eyes open. This word can frighten us – to dream. Never lose the capacity to dream, but dream big!

The entire media system, in this sense, at a global level, needs to be provoked and stimulated to come out of itself and to question itself, to look farther, beyond. And you cannot shrink from this responsibility if you wish to keep the level of communication high. You must not chase ratings to the detriment of content: it is rather a matter of building, through your offering, a widespread demand for quality. After all, communication, precisely because it is dialogue for the good of all, can also play a fundamental role in our times in reconstituting socially vital values such as citizenship and participation.

Dear brothers and sisters, RAI enters many Italian homes every day, practically all of them, and it is good to think of its presence not as a “lecture by know-it-alls”, no, but rather like a group of friends that comes knocking at the door as a surprise, and do not forget this: true communication is always a surprise, it surprises you! You expect something and it surprises you; bring a surprise, make a surprise. Knock on the door to offer companionship, to share joys and sufferings, to promote unity and reconciliation, listening and dialogue in the family and in society, to inform and also to listen, respectfully and humbly. I encourage you to journey on this path, it is good!

I invoke God’s blessing upon you, entrusting every one of you to the maternal intercession of Mary Most Holy. And please, do not forget to pray for me. Thank you!

After the blessing:

Once upon a time the Popes used the gestatorial chair; today things have moved on and I use this, which is very practical...
