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Audience with the Presidents of the Episcopal Communication Commissions and Directors of the Communication Offices of the Episcopal Conferences

This morning, in the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the Presidents of the Episcopal Communication Commissions and the Directors of the Communication Offices of the Episcopal Conferences.

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

Address of the Holy Father

I am pleased to welcome you who carry out a service of leadership in the field of communications in your local Churches. It is good to see bishops, priests, men and women religious, lay men and women gathered here, called to communicate the life of the Church and a Christian worldview. Communicating this Christian worldview is beautiful.

We meet today, after celebrating the Jubilee of the World of Communications, to do an assessment together and also an examination of conscience. The Letter to the Hebrews reminds us that faith is the assurance of things hoped for and the conviction of things not seen (cf. 11:1). Motivated by this faith, let us take a moment to reflect on the concrete way we communicate.

Let us ask ourselves: what do we do to sow hope in the midst of all the despair that surrounds and challenges us? What do we do to overcome the virus of division that undermines our communities? Is our communication inspired by prayer? Or do we limit ourselves to communicating about the Church by merely following the rules laid down by corporate marketing? We should ask ourselves all of these questions.

Are we witnessing to the fact that human history is not tied to an inexorable destiny? What are we doing to encourage others to look forward to a future that is not predetermined? I like the expression "writing the future".

It is up to us to write the future. Are we capable of communicating that hope is not an illusion? Hope never disappoints. But are we communicating that? Are we capable of communicating that it is possible to improve the lives of those around us, and that we can play a part? Can I, for my part, bring beauty to the lives of others? Are we able to communicate and convince others that it is possible to forgive? This is very hard to do!

Christian communication is about showing that the kingdom of God is near. It is present here and now, like a miracle that can be experienced by every person and by every culture. A miracle that must be narrated by offering the hermeneutic necessary to look beyond the mundane, beyond evil, beyond prejudices, beyond stereotypes, beyond oneself. The kingdom of God is beyond us. The kingdom of God even comes through our imperfections and this is beautiful. The kingdom of God comes when we show attention to others and carefully analyse the world around us. It comes in the ability to recognize and spread the hope that goodness exists, overcoming a desperate fanaticism.

This may be an institutional service for you, but it is also the vocation of every Christian, of every baptised person. Every Christian is called to recognize and pass on the stories of good that bad journalism tries to erase by only focusing on evil. Evil exists. It must not be hidden, but it should stir us and lead us to produce questions and answers. This is why your task is so important: it demands that you step out of yourself, to dedicate yourself to a “symphonic” work that involves everyone, that values old and young, women and men and takes into account every language, through the use of words, art, music, painting and images. We are all asked to examine how and what we are communicating. Communicate, we must always communicate.

Sisters, brothers, this task is challenging. I therefore encourage you to increase your efforts to cooperate on both a continental and universal level so that we can build a different model of communication. The difference lies in the unlimited spirit, creativity and poetic power that flow from the Gospel. Communication is always original. When we communicate, we create languages and bridges. We become creators. It must be a model of communication that conveys harmony and proposes a concrete alternative to today’s towers of Babel. Think about this: the new towers of Babel. They all spoke but did not understand one other. Reflect on this image.

I leave you with two words: *together* and *network*.

Together. Only together can we communicate the beauty we have encountered: not because of our talents or because we have more resources, but because we love one another.

This is where we draw the strength to love even our enemies, to embrace those who have done wrong, to unite what is divided and to resist despair. And to sow hope as well. Do not forget about this: sowing hope. It is not the same as sowing optimism. Not at all. We must sow hope.

Communicating, for us, is not a tactic. It is not a technique. It is not the repetition of catchphrases or slogans, nor is it merely writing press releases. Communicating is an act of love. Only an act of selfless love can produce networks of goodness. These networks of goodness should be regenerated and restored every day, with patience and faith.

Network is the second word I invite you to reflect on. Today, we have forgotten the older meaning of this word, as if it were only linked to the digital world. In fact, it is an ancient word. Before making us think about social networks, it ought to remind us of the fishermen’s nets and of Jesus’ invitation to Peter to become a fisher of men. Doing this means putting skills, knowledge and resources into a network capable of providing adequate information and thus escaping the sea of despair and disinformation. This in itself is already a message, a lesson we can learn.

Let us think of how much we could accomplish together – thanks to the new tools of the digital era and to artificial intelligence – if instead of turning technology into an idol, we were more committed to networking. I have to admit something: what worries me, more than artificial intelligence, is natural intelligence, the intelligence that we must develop.

When we feel as if we have fallen into an abyss, we must look up, *beyond ourselves*. Nothing is lost. We can always start again by trusting in each other and, together, trusting in God. This is the secret of our power to communicate. Networking! Be a network! Instead of being seduced by the sterile sirens of self-promotion and the celebration of our own initiatives, let us consider how we can build together a tale of hope.

This is your task. It is rooted in antiquity. The greatest miracle Jesus wrought for Simon and the other disappointed and weary fishermen was not so much a net full of fish, but having kept them from falling prey to disappointment and discouragement in the face of defeat. Please, do not give in to that type of interior sadness. Do not lose your sense of humour, which is wisdom, everyday wisdom.

Sisters, brothers, our network is for everyone. For everyone! Catholic communication is not something isolated; it is not just for Catholics. It is not a fenced-in area where we can keep to ourselves, a sect where we can talk to each other. No! It is the open space of a living witness that knows how to listen to and interpret the signs of the kingdom. It is the welcoming place of true relationships. Let us ask ourselves: are our offices and our relationships like this? Our network is the voice of a Church that only finds itself and the reason for its hope by stepping out of herself. The Church must step out of herself. I like to think of that passage in the Book of Revelation when the Lord says, "I am standing at the door, knocking" (3:20). He says this because he wants to come in. But today the Lord often knocks from the inside because he wants us, as Christians, to let him out! Too often we keep the Lord to ourselves. We must let the Lord out – he is knocking at the door to be let out – and not keep him somewhat "enslaved" for own purposes. Do our offices, our relationships and our networks really resemble a missionary Church?

Thank you, thank you for your work! Go forward with courage and the joy that comes from evangelising. I bless you all from my heart. And please do not forget to pray for me. Thank you!
