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Vol. XXIV, Nos. 2 & 3
Feb & Mar 2009

43rd World Day of Communications

“New Technologies, New Relationships: Promoting a Culture of Respect, Dialogue and Friendship”

Sunday May 24, 2009

Dear Brothers and Sisters!

In anticipation of the forthcoming World Communications Day, I would like to address to you some reflections on the theme chosen for this year - *New Technologies, New Relationships: Promoting a culture of Respect, Dialogue and Friendship*. The new digital technologies are, indeed, bringing about fundamental shifts in patterns of communication and human relationships. These changes are particularly evident among those young people who have grown up with the new technologies and are at home in a digital world that often seems quite foreign to those of us who, as adults, have had to learn to understand and appreciate the opportunities it has to offer for communications. In this year's message, I am conscious of those who constitute the so-called *digital generation* and I would like to share with them, in particular, some ideas concerning the extraordinary potential of the new technologies, if they are used to promote human understanding and solidarity. These technologies are truly a gift to humanity and we must endeavour to ensure that the benefits they offer are put at the service of all human individuals and communities, especially those who are most disadvantaged and vulnerable.

The accessibility of mobile telephones and computers, combined with the global reach and penetration of the internet, has opened up a range of means of communication that permit the almost instantaneous communication of words and images across enormous distances and to some of the most isolated corners of the world; something that would have been unthinkable for previous generations. Young people, in particular, have grasped the enormous capacity of the new media to foster connectedness, communication and understanding between individuals and communities, and they are turning to them as means of communicating with existing friends, of meeting new friends, of forming communities and networks, of seeking information and news, and of sharing their ideas and opinions. Many benefits flow from this new culture of communication: families are able to maintain contact across great distances; students and researchers have more immediate and easier access to documents, sources and scientific discoveries, hence they can work collaboratively from different locations; moreover, the interactive nature of many of the new media facilitates more dynamic forms of learning and communication, thereby contributing to social progress.

While the speed with which the new technologies have evolved in terms of their efficiency and reliability is rightly a source of wonder, their popularity with users should not surprise us, as they respond to a fundamental desire of people to communicate and to relate to each other. This desire for communication and friendship is rooted in our very nature as human beings and cannot be adequately understood as a response to technical innovations. In the light of the biblical message, it should be seen primarily as a reflection of our participation in the communicative and unifying Love of God, who desires to make of all humanity one family. When we find ourselves drawn towards other people, when we want to know more about them and make ourselves known to them, we are responding to God's call - a call that is imprinted in our nature as beings created in the image and likeness of God, the God of communication and communion.

The desire for connectedness and the instinct for communication that are so obvious in contemporary culture are best understood as modern manifestations of the basic and enduring propensity of humans to reach beyond themselves and to seek communion with others. In reality, when we open ourselves to others, we are fulfilling our deepest need and becoming more fully human. Loving is, in fact, what we are designed for by our Creator. Naturally, I am not talking about fleeting, shallow relationships, I am talking about the real love that is at the very heart of Jesus' moral teaching: “You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength” and “You must love your neighbour as yourself” (cf. Mk 12:30-31). In this light, reflecting on the significance of the new technologies, it is important to focus not just on their undoubted capacity to foster contact between people, but on the quality of the content that is put into circulation using these means. I would encourage all people of good will who are active in the emerging environment of digital communication to commit themselves to promoting a culture of respect, dialogue and friendship.

Those who are active in the production and dissemination of new media content, therefore, should strive to *respect* the dignity and worth of the human person. If the new technologies are to serve the good of individuals and of society, all users will avoid the sharing of words and images that are degrading of human beings, that promote hatred and intolerance, that debase the goodness and intimacy of human sexuality or that exploit the weak and vulnerable.

The new technologies have also opened the way for *dialogue* between people from different countries, cultures and religions. The new digital arena, the so-called *cyberspace*, allows them to encounter and to know each other's traditions and values. Such encounters, if they are to be fruitful, require honest and appropriate forms of expression together with attentive and respectful listening. The dialogue must be rooted in a genuine and mutual searching for truth if it is to realize its potential to promote growth in understanding and tolerance. Life is not just a succession of events or experiences: it is a search for the true, the good and the beautiful. It is to this end that we make our choices; it is for this that we exercise our freedom; it is in this - in truth, in goodness, and in beauty - that we find happiness and joy. We must not allow ourselves to be deceived by those who see us merely as consumers in a market of undifferentiated possibilities, where choice itself becomes the good, novelty usurps beauty, and subjective experience displaces truth.

The concept of *friendship* has enjoyed a renewed prominence in the vocabulary of the new digital social networks that have emerged in the last few years. The concept is one of the noblest achievements of human culture. It is in and through our friendships that we grow and develop as humans. For this reason, true friendship has always been seen as one of the greatest goods any human person can experience. We should be careful, therefore, never to trivialize the concept or the experience of friendship. It would be sad if our desire to sustain and develop on-line friendships were to be at the cost of our availability to engage with our families, our neighbours and those we meet in the daily reality of our places of work, education and recreation. If the desire for virtual connectedness becomes obsessive, it may in fact function to isolate individuals from real social interaction while also disrupting the patterns of rest, silence and reflection that are necessary for healthy human development.

Friendship is a great human good, but it would be emptied of its ultimate value if it were to be understood as an end in itself. Friends should support and encourage each other in developing their gifts and talents and in putting them at the service of the human community. In this context, it is gratifying to note the emergence of new digital networks that seek to promote human solidarity, peace and justice, human rights and respect for human life and the good of creation. These networks can facilitate forms of co-operation between people from different geographical and cultural contexts that enable them to deepen their common humanity and their sense of shared responsibility for the good of all. We must, therefore, strive to ensure that the digital world, where such networks can be established, is a world that is truly open to all. It would be a tragedy for the future of humanity if the new instruments of communication, which permit the sharing of knowledge and information in a more rapid and effective manner, were not made accessible to those who are already economically and socially marginalized, or if it should contribute only to increasing the gap separating the poor from the new networks that are developing at the service of human socialization and information.

I would like to conclude this message by addressing myself, in particular, to young Catholic believers: to encourage them to bring the witness of their faith to the digital world. Dear Brothers and Sisters, I ask you to introduce into the culture of this new environment of communications and information technology the values on which you have built your lives. In the early life of the Church, the great Apostles and their disciples brought the Good News of Jesus to the Greek and Roman world. Just as, at that time, a fruitful evangelization required that careful attention be given to understanding the culture and customs of those pagan peoples so that the truth of the gospel would touch their hearts and minds, so also today, the proclamation of Christ in the world of new technologies requires a profound knowledge of this world if the technologies are to serve our mission adequately. It falls, in particular, to young people, who have an almost spontaneous affinity for the new means of communication, to take on the responsibility for the evangelization of this "digital continent". Be sure to announce the Gospel to your contemporaries with enthusiasm. You know their fears and their hopes, their aspirations and their disappointments: the greatest gift you can give to them is to share with them the "Good News" of a God who became man, who suffered, died and rose again to save all people. Human hearts are yearning for a world where love endures, where gifts are shared, where unity is built, where freedom finds meaning in truth, and where identity is found in respectful communion. Our faith can respond to these expectations: may you become its heralds! The Pope accompanies you with his prayers and his blessing.

From the Vatican, 24 January 2009, *Feast of Saint Francis de Sales*.

Benedictus PP XII

HOMILY NOTES AND RESOURCES

- The Message for World Communications Day 2009 is addressed in particular, albeit not exclusively, to young people - the so-called digital generation. The message celebrates the fact that the new communications technologies make it much easier for people to make and to maintain new forms of relationships.
- The Message recognises that, while the technologies may be new, the human desire for connectedness and relationship is as old as human nature. This natural and easily observed desire for connectedness is ultimately a manifestation of God's plan for his people. *The desire for connectedness and the instinct for communication that are so obvious in contemporary culture are best understood as modern manifestations of the basic and enduring propensity of humans to reach beyond themselves and to seek communion with others. In reality, when we open ourselves to others, we are fulfilling our deepest need and becoming more fully human. Loving is, in fact, what we are designed for by our Creator.*
- We remember that this desire for communion and for connectedness finds its ultimate fulfillment in the encounter with the living God. Only with God will the human heart find rest! The desire for friendship and union with others, that is so obvious in youth culture and that manifests itself in the popularity of texting, instant messaging and the social networks, can be seen as a sign of the fundamental need of young people for the Good News of the Gospel - the Good News that they are unconditionally loved by God and invited into relationship with him and others.
- Pope Benedict invites young Catholics to be missionaries in the new digital continent. It falls, in particular, to young people, who have an almost spontaneous affinity for the new means of communication, to take on the responsibility for the evangelization of this "digital continent". Be sure to announce the Gospel to your contemporaries with enthusiasm. You know their fears and their hopes, their aspirations and their disappointments: the greatest gift you can give to them is to share with them the "Good News" of a God who became man, who suffered, died and rose again to save all people. Human hearts are yearning for a world where love endures, where gifts are shared, where unity is built, where freedom finds meaning in truth, and where identity is found in respectful communion. Our faith can respond to these expectations: may you become its heralds! The Pope accompanies you with his prayers and his blessing.
- In countries where the **Feast of the Ascension** is celebrated and the Gospel of Mark (16: 15 - 20) is proclaimed, it would be most appropriate to highlight the missionary dimension of the Christian life. **Jesus said to his disciples: "Go into the whole world and proclaim the gospel to every creature."** The homilist could highlight the need for missionaries to understand the culture they seek to evangelize. In the early life of the Church, the great Apostles and their disciples brought the Good News of Jesus to the Greek and Roman world. Just as, at that time, a fruitful evangelization required that careful attention be given to understanding the culture and customs of those pagan peoples so that the truth of the gospel would touch their hearts and minds, so also today, the proclamation of Christ in the world of new technologies requires a profound knowledge of this world if the technologies are to serve our mission adequately. The homily should maintain a hopeful tone remembering the conclusion of the Gospel: **So then the Lord Jesus, after he spoke to them, was taken up into heaven and took his seat at the right hand of God. But they went forth and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the word through accompanying signs.** The homilist might also seek to develop the understanding of the Ascension as an invitation to mission. The Risen Lord distances himself from his immediate disciples and from the land where he has exercised his earthly ministry in order to be present to all people throughout history and in every corner of our world. The internet could be presented as a way of bringing his word and message to "new corners" of our world. Like the disciples, we must learn to bring our contemporaries to a greater sense of the Lord's abiding presence - in the words of the first reading: **"Men of Galilee, why are you standing there looking at the sky? This Jesus who has been taken up from you into heaven will return in the same way as you have seen him going into heaven."**
- In countries where the **Seventh Sunday of Easter** is celebrated and the Gospel of John (17: 11b - 19) is proclaimed, the homily could develop a reflection on the capacity of internet to sustain the sense of union between believers who may be geographically isolated or at a distance from their families and communities of belonging. *Jesus prayed saying "Holy Father, keep them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one just as we are one".*
- The homilist might also choose to develop the idea of "consecration in the truth". As young people turn more and more to the internet as a source of information and learning and as forum for dialogue and relationship, it could be appropriate to underline the need for them to be strengthened in their own basic belief and values. *They do not belong to the world any more than I belong to the world. Consecrate them in the truth. Your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, so I sent them into the world.* This notion of consecration would also link to the conclusion of the second reading: *God is love, and whoever remains in love remains in God and God in him.* The homilist might also wish to examine the theme of friendship in this context. Friends spontaneously share what is important to them - the desire to share the Good News of the Gospel can be understood as a natural consequence of friendship. The Message underlines the capacity of new technologies to stimulate and support new forms of relationships. It stresses the potential of these technologies to promote a culture of

respect, dialogue and friendship. The idea of friendship, which is a universally appreciated value, can serve to suggest an ethic for those who look to the new technologies as a means of meeting and learning about other people and their cultures. All our dealing with others must be marked by the characteristic of **respect** which is the hallmark of true friendship - *Those who are active in the production and dissemination of new media content, therefore, should strive to respect the dignity and worth of the human person. If the new technologies are to serve the good of individuals and of society, all users will avoid the sharing of words and images that are degrading of human beings, that promote hatred and intolerance, that debase the goodness and intimacy of human sexuality or that exploit the weak and vulnerable.* The same understanding of friendship requires that in our encountering of those who are different from us in terms of their beliefs, values and cultures we must engage in **respectful dialogue**. *Such encounters, if they are to be fruitful, require honest and appropriate forms of expression together with attentive and respectful listening. The dialogue must be rooted in a genuine and mutual searching for truth if it is to realize its potential to promote growth in understanding and tolerance.* Finally, the Message reminds us that friendship at its best always seeks to be **inclusive**; we must be attentive to assure ourselves that the new relationships and the networks of learning, information and socialization that are facilitated by the new technologies do not exclude or marginalize anyone. *We must, therefore, strive to ensure that the digital world, where such networks can be established, is a world that is truly open to all. It would be a tragedy for the future of humanity if the new instruments of communication, which permit the sharing of knowledge and information in a more rapid and effective manner, were not made accessible to those who are already economically and socially marginalized, or if it should contribute only to increasing the gap separating the poor from the new networks that are developing at the service of human socialization and information.*



READINGS

Scripture readings from the *Solemnity of the Ascension of the Lord* or *VIIth Sunday of Easter*.

PRAYERS OF THE FAITHFUL

CELEBRANT: God, our Father, with trust in your mercy and goodness, we address our prayers and petitions to you.

LECTOR: We pray for the Church, for the community of believers. Let our faith in the Risen Lord renew us in our mission to bring His Word to the ends of the earth. *Response:* _____

We pray for Pope Benedict: that the Lord will continue to bless him with strength and wisdom, so that through his journeying and his teaching the Good News of the Gospel will touch the hearts and minds of all people. *R/*

We pray for those who work in the Church's mission of communication. May the Lord grant them wisdom and insight so that they may put their knowledge and skills at the service of the proclamation of the Gospel. *R/*

We pray for civic and political leaders: that they will seek always to ensure that the means of communication are placed at the service of the good of the human community and that the human dignity and worth of all is respected. *R/*

We pray for young people. May they grow in appreciation of the possibilities offered to them by the new media to advance in knowledge and wisdom. Help them to create a culture of respect, dialogue and friendship. *R/*

We pray for those who work in the communications industry: that they will be guided by a commitment to truth and a desire to ensure that the blessings of the new technologies will be accessible to all. *R/*

CELEBRANT: Heavenly Father, hear our prayers - our spoken prayers and the silent prayers of our hearts. Grant these and all our needs through Christ, our Lord. Amen.