



Pontifical Council for Social Communications

43rd World Day of Communications

Theme: *"New Technologies, New Relationships:
Promoting a Culture of Respect, Dialogue and Friendship"*

May 24, 2009

Homily Notes and Resources for World Communications Day 2009

- 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.*