



53RD WORLD COMMUNICATIONS DAY MESSAGE

**TO BE READ/PUBLISHED/DISTRIBUTED AT ALL
MASSES ON THE 7TH SUNDAY OF EASTER**

1ST/2ND JUNE 2019

My Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ

From a *like* to an *Amen* –

From social network communities to the human community

In his message for World Communications Day this year, Pope Francis returns to the theme of the internet and the world of social communications, reminding us that no matter what technology might offer us *the human person does not want to be left isolated and alone*. I urge you to read his text in full, which is available on the website of the Catholic Media Office at www.scmo.org.

In his letter, Pope Francis draws our attention to an ambivalence in social media that we have begun to experience ourselves. We appreciate greatly that online sources represent an extraordinary possibility of very speedy access to knowledge and information. Just think, for instance, of how we use the internet to travel. At the same time, we have also awakened to the fact that through social media we may be *exposed to disinformation and to the conscious and targeted distortion of facts*. Hence, the widely used term 'fake news'. Sadly, it seems, the shared data that helps us to connect can all too easily be manipulated in order to gain political or economic advantages.

As Pope Francis points out, this is a complex scenario. The Holy Father advises that the positive potential of social media is based upon two of its original reference points: the net and the community. The internet was invented to connect human beings together in a supportive network and in a closer community. A community that is life-giving and healthy will be animated by feelings of trust. It will pursue objectives that benefit everyone. The responsible use of language and means of communication will be pivotal to the good of the community linked by internet and social media.

As we now know, however, online identities and communications are all too often based on opposition to the other, on de-legitimising the other, and on severely limiting their freedom of speech. We have learned from sad experience that the internet and social media can be misused to define ourselves by what divides us rather than by what unites us, giving rise to suspicion, to bullying, and to the venting of every kind of prejudice.

The internet and social media should provide an opportunity to promote encounter with others, but, as we know, they can also increase our sense of isolation, with young people most exposed to the illusion that the social web can completely satisfy them on a relational level.

This dramatic situation reveals a serious rupture in the relational fabric of society, one we cannot ignore, raising various questions and challenges. While our governments seek legal ways to regulate the web and to protect the original vision of a free, open and secure network, we all have a responsibility to promote its positive use.

The positive use of the internet and social media depends on respectful communication. Respectful communication speaks the truth in charity. If every user of social media spoke the truth in charity, many people, including young people and children, would be happier, safer and better informed.

In other words, speaking the truth in charity, and allowing the truth to be spoken, is a recognition that we are part of a community. Lies, on the other hand, divide us, and, as Pope Francis points out, are *a selfish refusal to recognize that we are members of one body; lies are a refusal to give ourselves to others, thus losing the only way to find ourselves.*

Realising that we are part of one Body, whose Head is Christ, will help us to see others as our neighbours not our competitors. It is important to remember always that online communications should complement, not replace, actual encounters and interaction with others.

Technology should pave the way for dialogue and a culture of respectful and civilised communications. It will then serve the interests of humanity and the plan of our creator, that we should love one another as He loves us.

On this Communications Sunday, I ask you...

- to promote a culture of respectful and civilised communications;
- to become discerning consumers of news media;
- to be regular readers of our catholic press and generous supporters of the Church's dedicated communications staff; and
- to donate generously to today's collection which funds our Scottish Catholic Media Office.

Yours devotedly in Christ

+ Philip Tartaglia

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