



The Holy See

CONFERRAL OF THE RANK OF KNIGHT AND DAME OF THE GRAND CROSS OF THE PIAN
ORDER

TO MR. PHILIP PULLELLA AND MS. VALENTINA ALAZRAKI

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS

Consistory Hall

Saturday, 11 November 2021

[[Multimedia](#)]

Dear friends, good morning!

I am pleased to welcome you here, after the many times we have met in the aircraft corridor, during interviews at high altitude, or in passing during the various celebrations and appointments during the apostolic pilgrimages around the world. We are travelling companions! And today we are celebrating two experienced journalists, who have always followed the Popes, the information on the Holy See and the Catholic Church in general. One is your “doyenne”, Valentina Alazraki: for 47 years she has been on the Papal flights, as a journalist here – she came straight after her First Communion! When she was very young boarded the plane that took [Saint John Paul II to Puebla, in 1979](#), the first time, and gave the Pope a sombrero, one of those Mexican hats. The other is your “dean”, Phil Pullella, also a veteran and well-known protagonist of Vatican information. How many shared experiences, how many journeys, how many events you have experienced first-hand, recounting them to your viewers and readers! I would not wish to neglect one name, and I hold it in my heart because he was a good man: a Russian who has left us, [Aleksei] Bukhalov. A remembrance of him too at this time – a good travelling companion.

With the award given to Valentina and Phil, today I want to pay homage to your entire working community, to tell you that the Pope cares about you, follows you, esteems you and considers you precious. Journalism does not come about by choosing a profession, but by embarking on a

mission, a little like a doctor, who studies and works so that the evil in the world may be healed. Your mission is to explain the world, to make it less obscure, to make those who live in it less afraid of it and look at others with greater awareness, and also with more confidence. It is not an easy mission. It is complicated to think, to meditate, to study more deeply, to stop and collect ideas and to study the contexts and precedents of a piece of news. The risk, as you well know, is to be overwhelmed by the news instead of being able to make sense of it. This is why I encourage you to preserve and cultivate that sense of mission that is at the origin of your choice. And I will do so with three verbs that I believe characterise good journalism: *listen*, *investigate* and *report*.

To *listen* is a verb that concerns you as journalists, but it concerns us all as a Church, at all times and especially now that the synodal process has begun. For a journalist, listening means having the patience to meet face to face with the people to be interviewed, the protagonists of the stories being told, the sources from which to receive news. Listening always goes hand in hand with seeing, with being present: certain nuances, sensations, and well-rounded descriptions can only be conveyed to readers, listeners and spectators if the journalist has listened and seen for him- or herself. This means escaping - and I know how difficult this is in your work! - escaping from the tyranny of always being online, on social networks, on the web. The journalism of listening and seeing well requires time. Not everything can be told through email, the telephone, or a screen. As I recalled in this year's Message for Communications Day, we need journalists who are willing to "wear out the soles of their shoes", to get out of the newsroom, to walk around the city, to meet people, to assess the situations in which we live in our time. *Listening* is the first word that came to my mind.

The second, to *investigate*, is a consequence of listening and seeing. Every piece of news, every fact we talk about, every reality we describe needs to be investigated. At a time when millions of pieces of information are available on the web, and when many people obtain their information and form their opinions on social media, where unfortunately the logic of simplification and opposition sometimes prevails, the most important contribution that good journalism can make is that of in-depth analysis. Indeed, what more can you offer to those who read or listen to you than what they already find on the web? You can offer the context, the precedents, the keys to interpretation that help to collocate the fact that has happened. You know very well that, even when it comes to information about the Holy See, not everything said is always "new" or "revolutionary". I tried to document this in my recent address to the popular movements, when I indicated the references to the Social Doctrine of the Church on which my appeals were based. Tradition and the Magisterium continue and develop by facing the ever-new demands of the times in which we live and enlightening them with the Gospel.

To listen, to investigate, and the third verb, to *report*. I don't have to explain it to you, who have become journalists precisely because you are curious about reality and passionate about telling it. Reporting means not putting oneself in the foreground, nor setting oneself up as a judge, but allowing oneself to be struck and sometimes wounded by the stories we encounter, in order to be

able to tell them with humility to our readers. Reality is a great antidote to many “ailments”. Reality - what happens, the lives and testimonies of people - deserves to be told. I think of the books you write, Valentina, on women who suffer the tyranny of abuse. Today we are in great need of journalists and communicators who are passionate about reality, capable of finding the treasures often hidden in the folds of our society and recounting them, allowing us to be impressed, to learn, to broaden our minds, to grasp aspects that we did not know before. I am grateful to you for your effort to recount reality. The diversity of approaches, of style, of points of view linked to different cultures or religious affiliations is also a wealth of information. I also thank you for what you tell us about what goes wrong in the Church, for helping us not to sweep it under the carpet, and for the voice you have given to the victims of abuse: thank you for this.

And, please, remember also that the Church is not a political organisation with left and right-wingers, as is the case in parliaments. At times, unfortunately, our considerations are reduced to this, with some root in reality. But no, the Church is not this. It is not a large multinational company headed by managers who study at the table how best to sell their product. The Church does not build itself on the basis of its own project, it does not draw from itself the strength to move forward and it does not live by marketing strategies. Every time she falls prey to this worldly temptation – and at times she falls, or has fallen - the Church, without realising it, believes she has a light of her own and forgets that she is the “*mysterium lunae*” of which the Fathers of the early centuries spoke – she is authentic only in the light of Another, like the moon - and so her action loses vigour and serves no purpose. The Church, composed of men and women who are sinners like everyone else, was born and exists to reflect the light of Another, the light of Jesus, just as the moon does with the sun. The Church exists to bring the word of Jesus to the world and to make possible today the encounter with the living Jesus, making herself a vehicle for his embrace of mercy offered to all.

Thank you, dear friends, for this meeting. Thank you and congratulations to our two “deans”. Thank you all for the work you do. Thank you for your search for the truth, because only the truth sets us free. Thank you!

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