



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO EMPLOYEES AND PARTICIPANTS IN THE
PLENARY ASSEMBLY OF THE DICASTERY FOR COMMUNICATION**

Clementine Hall

Saturday, 12 November 2022

[Multimedia]

Impromptu address

Prepared speech

The Holy Father's impromptu address

I thank Dr Ruffini for his kind words, and I greet all of you who are participating in the Plenary Assembly of the Dicastery for Communication, which has as its theme “Synod and communication: a journey to develop”. And this is the message, eight pages... If I begin to read them, by the time I reach the fourth one, you will have forgotten what I said earlier! And I think that it's better for you that you take this message with you. Dr Ruffini will make a copy available to each of you. And so I can tell you something more spontaneous and uncensored, which is more fun!”

When we talk about communication we are talking about a “back and forth”. There is no one-way communication. It comes and goes. It comes and goes back. And in this, there is also growth. Only parrots communicate one way, without a return, because they always say the same thing and it doesn't matter what the echo is that comes from the other side. A true communicator must be

attentive to the feedback, to what comes, to the reaction elicited by what I say. Because communication is a human connection. What is important is not what I say, but what I say to what the other tells me, to what I listen to. This is why the philosophy of the loudspeaker is not necessary. Rather, it is, let's say, the philosophy "of the telephone": one listens, one replies.

Dialogue: there can be no communication without dialogue and without movement, without moving. And this always brings risks. Because we have this rule of inertia, of inertia that pushes you, always perched on the same thing, saying things, giving the news and then being silent. No. You have to listen to how that was received and what reaction it elicits. And this is why there are some of you who touch me a great deal. For example, the enthusiasm of Monda [Director of *L'Osservatore Romano*]. Monda is not a journalist; he is a poet, a creator, because he communicates through poetry. With creativity he listens to what people say... And then *L'Osservatore* — yes *L'Osservatore* is a problem, we all know this — and instead of closing down *L'Osservatore*, he starts another one, *L'Osservatore di Strada*, and off you go! This is communicating, always seeking frontiers, other ones, other ones... Communicative restlessness. And this involves a certain disarray. The communicator is unable to keep everything in order. There is always some disorder because that is what we humans are like. And I see things like that among you.

For example — this is something else but I want to say it — I made two films with Fabio Marchese Ragona, and I saw in that communication the ability to create things that have reached a large audience because there was this seeking to go towards the other.

And actually, when I read something from you, for example an article by Gisotti: if you read Gisotti, he does not only make a reflection, no. He makes his reflection and creates inner tensions. To mention only some communicators... This is communicating; it is risking, it is creating, it is going beyond. A communicator who wants to have everything in order has chosen the wrong profession. Be an archivist, you will do it better! The communicator must always take risks, must always be on the road, always engaging with life.

This is to communicate. And I thank the Prefect [Dr Paolo Ruffini] — poor thing — he has the curse of being the first lay Prefect in the Curia! I thank him because he allows this, he allows growth. "Do I still have to grow more"? You know that better than me, but you permit growth. I thank you for this. This is what I see in your Dicastery. Communication in motion, creative.

Then communication of values. We cannot descend to communication without values. We have to communicate with our values. This does not mean that we have to pray a novena to a saint every day. Christian values, values that are behind, values that teach about going forward. The person who is in it for human values. For example, I see James Martin here. "Oh yes, this one works..." Yes, but he wrote a book called "Learning to Pray". Read it because it teaches you to pray. A man who has values, a communicator who also knows how to teach you the way to communicate with

God. This is being a communicator. To go, to walk, to risk, with values, convinced that I am giving my life with my values, Christian values and human values. I am suspicious of aseptic communicators, those who are pure technique. Yes, but technique on its own is not necessary. Technique helps you if there is a heart behind it, if there is a mind, if there is a man, a woman, who gives of him or her own self. Be attentive not to slip only on technique because this leads you to an aseptic communication, devoid of values and that can then fall prey to marketing or the ideologies of the moment.

And then a third thing I find with your Dicastery, Mr Prefect — and I thank you for this — is humanism. You have provided a human climate, and this must be preserved. A human communication, with human warmth, and not purely technical. Technique is necessary for development, but if there is the human. When you [addresses Sr Veronica Donatello] go to the deaf-mute and do this [sign language] — you know all the technique — but behind that communication is your human heart, of a woman, of a mother, of a sister. This is very important, communicating with the heart and with the human, with values, and moving forward.

These are the things I wanted to tell you, the things about you that most strike me. Let us hope that Monda does not make a third *L'Osservatore Romano*, because he is so enthusiastic that he will never stop! Thank you, thank you very much for everything, really, thank you! I am happy, and continue on, take risks, take risks, do not be afraid! Take risks, so as to encounter the other in communication.

And now let us ask the Lord to bless us all, because we are all in need of God's blessing, all of us.

Pope Francis' prepared speech

I thank Dr Ruffini for his kind words, and I greet all of you who are participating in the Plenary Assembly of the Dicastery for Communication, on the theme "Synod and Communication: a journey to develop".

The Synod is not a simple exercise in communication, nor is it an attempt to rethink the Church using the logic of the majorities and minorities who have to find an agreement. This type of vision is worldly, and follows the model of many social, cultural and political experiences. Instead, the essence of the synodal journey resides in a basic truth that we must never lose sight of: its purpose is to listen to, understand and put into practice God's will.

If, as a Church, we want to know God's will to make the light of the Gospel even more current in this time of ours, then we must return to an awareness that it is never given to the individual, but always to the Church in her entirety. It is only in the living fabric of our ecclesial relations that we

become capable of listening to and understanding the Lord who is speaking to us. Without “walking together”, we can become simply a religious institution, which has however lost the ability to let the *light* of its Master’s message shine, which has lost the ability to bring *flavour* to the different events of the world.

Jesus warns us against such a tendency. He repeats to us: “You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trodden under foot by men. You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hid. Nor do men light a lamp and put it under a bushel, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house” (*Mt* 5:13-15). This is why the synodal dimension is a constitutive dimension of the Church, and the reflection that we have been engaged with in these years aims to bring out strongly what the Church has always implicitly believed.

The Bible is full of stories of men and women whom, at times, erroneously, we imagine as solitary heroes. For example, Abraham, the first to whom God addresses his word, is not a solitary wayfarer, but a man who takes seriously the voice of God, who invites him to leave his own land, and he does this together with his family (*Gen* 12:1-9). The story of Abraham is the story of Abraham’s connections.

Moses too, the liberator of Israel, would not have been able to fulfil his mission were it not for the help of his brother Aaron, his sister Miriam, his father-in-law Jethro, and a host of other men and women who helped him to listen to the Word of the Lord and put it into practice for the good of everyone. He is a wounded man in his personal life, and has no oratorical skills; indeed, he stammers. We might even say that he is a man who has difficulty in communicating, but those around him compensate for his own inability (cf. *Ex* 4:10, 12-16).

Mary of Nazareth would not have been able to sing her *Magnificat* without the presence and friendship of her cousin Elizabeth (cf. *Lk* 1:46-55), and would not have been able to defend her child Jesus against the hatred of those who wanted to kill him had Joseph not been by her side (*Mt* 2:13-15, 19-23).

Jesus himself is in need of bonds with others, and when he has to face the definitive battle of his mission in Jerusalem, the night of his arrest he takes his friends Peter, James and John with him to the Garden of Gethsemane (cf. *Mt* 26:36-46).

The contribution of communication is precisely that of making possible this communal dimension, this relational capacity, this vocation to connections. And, therefore, we understand that it is the task of communication to promote closeness, to give a voice to those who are excluded, to attract attention to what we normally reject and ignore. Communication is, so to speak, the *craft of connections*, within which the voice of God resonates and makes itself heard.

I would like to indicate three things to you as possible avenues for future reflection in this area.

The first task of communication should be that of *making people less lonely*. If it does not diminish the sensation of loneliness to which so many men and women feel condemned, then that communication is merely entertainment; it is not the craft of making bonds as we said earlier.

In order to put such a mission into practice, one must clearly understand that a person feels less lonely only when he or she realises that the questions, the hopes, and the hardships he or she carries within find expression outside. Only a Church that is immersed in reality truly knows what lies in the heart of the contemporary person. Therefore, all true communication is made up first and foremost of genuine listening, it is made of encounters, faces, stories. If we do not know how to be in reality, we will limit ourselves to merely issuing from above directions that no one will heed. Communication should be a great aid to the Church, to dwell genuinely in reality, promoting listening and intercepting the great questions of the men and women of today.

Connected to this first challenge, I would like to add another: *giving a voice to the voiceless*. Very often we witness communications systems that marginalise and censor what is uncomfortable and what we do not want to see. The Church, thanks to the Holy Spirit, is well aware that it is her task to stay with the least, and her natural habitat is that of the existential peripheries.

But the *existential peripheries* are not only those that find themselves on the margins of society for economic reasons, but also those who are sated with bread but deprived of meaning; they are also those who live in situations of marginalization due to certain choices, or family failures, or personal events that have indelibly marked their history. Jesus was never afraid of the leper, the poor, the outsider, even though these people were marked by moral stigma. Jesus never ignored the *irregulars* of any kind. I wonder if as a Church we too know how to give a voice to these brothers and sisters, if we know how to listen to them, if we know how to discern God's will together with them, and in this way address to them a Word that saves.

Finally, the third challenge of communication that I would like to leave you is that of educating ourselves in the *toil of communicating*. Not infrequently, even in the Gospel, we find misunderstandings, slowness in understanding Jesus' words, and misinterpretations that at times become veritable tragedies, as happens to Judas Iscariot, who confuses Christ's mission with political messianism.

Therefore, we must also accept this dimension of "toil" in communication. Very often those who look at the Church from outside remain perplexed by the various tensions within. But those who know how the Holy Spirit acts are well aware that he loves to make communion among diversity, and to create harmony from confusion. Communion is never uniformity, but the capacity to keep very different realities together. I think we should be capable of communicating even this hardship without pretending to resolve or conceal it. Dissent is not necessarily an attitude of rupture, but it

can be one of the ingredients of communion. Communication must also make diversity of views possible, while always seeking to preserve unity and truth, and fighting slander, verbal violence, personalism and fundamentalism that, under the guise of being faithful to the truth, only spread division and discord. If it succumbs to these degenerations, communication, instead of doing much good, ends up doing much harm.

Dear brothers and dear sisters, the work of this Dicastery is not simply technical. Your vocation, as we have seen, touches the very way of being Church. Thank you for what you do. I encourage you to go forward in a decisive and prophetic way. To serve the Church means being trustworthy and also courageous in venturing on new paths. In this sense, always be trustworthy and courageous. I bless you all from my heart. And please, do not forget to pray for me.

L'Osservatore Romano, Weekly Edition in English, 18 November 2022