



WORLD COMMUNICATIONS DAY

1 June 2014

SUNDAY, 1 JUNE 2014, FEAST OF THE ASCENSION OF THE LORD

HOMILY NOTES

The theme of Pope Francis' message this year is:

"Communication at the Service of an Authentic Culture of Encounter"

In today's first reading (Acts 1, 1-11) there is a phrase which takes on a totally different meaning from the meaning it had twenty years ago: "then you will be my witnesses not only in Jerusalem but throughout Judaea and Samaria, and indeed to the ends of the earth". Who would have known decades ago what it would really be like to be able to write to someone elsewhere in the world and for them to be able to read what you wrote to them within seconds (when the machinery is working)? Who would have believed it? A mother and father can speak face to face to their daughter in Spain several times a week, and children in Texas regularly see their grandparents in Europe and chat with them!

Pope Francis begins his reflection for this year's World Day of Communications in awe of how small this makes the world, but he wants us to be aware of the negative contrasts this can reveal to us, too. He mentions the "scandalous gap between the opulence of the wealthy and the utter destitution of the poor" and encourages us to be wide awake to this sort of gap as we walk around our city streets.

The closeness we enjoy through the communications media contrasts with the distance we allow there to be between ourselves and other people, and today Pope Francis is urging us to use the communications media to bridge all those gaps. He is encouraging not just communication but good communication, which "helps us to grow closer, to know one another better, and ultimately, to grow in unity". He stresses how much contemporary media can do in terms of strengthening not just mutual knowledge but genuine solidarity. The acid test is the parable of the Good Samaritan, where there is the choice: we can pass by on the other side or we can communicate with a person in trouble - and what a difference the opening of that channel of communication makes! Communication leads in that case, as in so many others, to neighbourliness. This is much better than using social media to lock ourselves into a battle between people who hold differing or even contrary opinions. Besides, as Pope Francis says, "people only express themselves fully when they are not merely tolerated, but know that they are truly accepted".

None of that can happen unless we use the communications media with respect for people who are in the conversation with us, no matter what they think or believe. When things are not quite right in their lives, people have a knack of expressing themselves awkwardly and giving the wrong impression, especially on the digital highway, "a street teeming with people who are often hurting, men and women looking for salvation or hope". The Pope thinks that being available to people via the electronic media is akin to keeping the doors of our churches open, and he puts before us the challenge of letting people know for certain "that the Church is the home of all". When we in the Church slot into the sad caricature of an organisation that seems to enjoy finding fault with people and telling them where they have gone wrong - as if they needed to be reminded! - we are missing an opportunity that really needs to be exploited in every creative way we can find: the chance to convince people that it is wonderful to spend time with God, and to help them accept the fact that God really does bless all creation, including them, with goodness and beauty. Some of the people who "come in" when they realise they may have things to "sort out" with the Lord, but the main thing seems to be what Pope Francis says: we need to be "a Church capable of bringing warmth and stirring hearts".