

# **"The greatest communication is love"**

Address of Pope Francis on 23 September 2019 to the plenary assembly of the Dicastery for Communication.

09/25/2019

*Dear brothers and sisters,*

I have a speech to read... it's not that long, it's seven pages... but I'm sure that after the first one the majority of you will fall sleep, and I won't be able to communicate. I believe that

what I want to say in this address will be well understood by reading it, in reflection. For this reason, I will give this address to Dr. Ruffini, whom I thank for the words he addressed to me, so that he may make it known to all of you. And I will allow myself to speak a little spontaneously, with you, to say what I have in my heart about communication. At least I think there won't be many who will fall asleep, and we can communicate better!

Thank you for your work, thank you for this department, which is so numerous... I asked the Prefect: "But... does everyone work?" – "Yes", he said – to avoid that famous anecdote... [One day Pope John XXIII was asked, "How many people work in the Vatican?" and he answered: "About half of them"]. They all work, and they work with this attitude that expresses the desire for God: to communicate with oneself, in what

theologians call the *perichoresis*: one communicates within oneself, and one communicates to us. This is the beginning of communication: it is not an office job, like advertising, for example. To communicate is precisely to take from the Being of God and to have the same attitude; not to be able to remain alone: the need to communicate what I have and I think that it is the true, the just, the good and the beautiful.

Communicating. And you are specialists in communication, you are technicians in communication. We must not forget this. You communicate with the soul and the body; you communicate with the mind, the heart, the hands; you communicate with everything. The true communicator gives everything, he gives all of himself – as we say in my country, “he puts all the meat on the grill”, he does not spare any for himself. And it is true that the greatest communication is love: in

love there is the fullness of communication: love for God and among us.

But what should communication be like? One of the things you must not do is advertising, mere advertising. You must not behave like human business that try to attract more people... To use a technical word: you must not proselytize. I would like our communication to be Christian and not a factor of proselytism. It is not Christian to proselytize. Benedict XVI said this very clearly: "The Church grows not by proselytism, but by attraction", that is, by witness. And our communication must be *witness*. If you want to communicate just one truth without goodness and beauty, stop, do not do it. If you want to communicate a truth more or less, but without involving yourselves, without witnessing that truth with your own life, with your own flesh, stop, do not do it. There is always the

signature of the witness in each of the things we do. Witnesses.

Christians are witnesses, “martyrs”. This is the “martyr” dimension of our vocation: to be witnesses. This is the first thing I would like to say to you.

Another thing is a certain resignation, which so often enters the hearts of Christians. Let's see the world...: it is a pagan world, and this is not a novelty. The “world” has always been a symbol of the pagan mentality. Jesus asks the Father, at the Last Supper, to guard His disciples so that they do not fall into the world and into worldliness (cf. *Jn* 17: 12-19). The climate of worldliness is not something new in the twenty-first century. It has always been a danger, there has always been temptation, it has always been the enemy: worldliness. “Father, safeguard these so that they may not fall into the world, so that the world may not be stronger than they are.

And many, I see them, think: “Yes, we must close up a little bit, be a small but authentic church” – I am allergic to those words: “small but authentic”: if something is authentic, it is not necessary to say so. I will come back to this. This is a withdrawal into oneself, with the temptation of resignation. There are few of us: but not like those who defend themselves because they are few and the enemy is greater in number; few like yeast, few like salt: this is the Christian vocation! We must not be ashamed of being few in number; and we must not think: “No, the Church of the future will be a Church of the chosen ones”: we would once again risk the heresy of the Essenes. And so Christian authenticity is lost. We are a Church of a few, but as leaven. Jesus said so. Like salt. The resignation to cultural defeat – let me call it that – comes from bad spirit, it does not come from God. It is not a Christian spirit,

the complaint of resignation. This is the second thing I would like to say to you: do not be afraid. Are there few of us? Yes, but with the desire for “mission”, to show others who we are. With witness. Once again I repeat that phrase of Saint Francis to his brothers, when he sent them to preach: “Preach the Gospel, if necessary, also with words”. That is, witness in the first place.

I look at this Lithuanian Archbishop here before me, and I think of the emeritus of Kaunas, who will now be made a cardinal: that man, how many years did he spend in prison? By his witness he did so much good! With pain... It is our martyrs, those who give life to the Church: not our artists, our great preachers, our custodians of the “true and complete doctrine” ... No, the martyrs. A Church of martyrs. And to communicate is this: to communicate

this great richness that we have. This is the second thing.

The third thing I take from what I said earlier, which I am slightly allergic to: “This is something *authentically Christian*”, “this is *truly* so”. We have fallen into the culture of adjectives and adverbs, and we have forgotten the strength of nouns. The communicator must make people understand the weight of the reality of nouns that reflect the reality of people. And this is a mission of communication: to communicate with reality, without sweetening with adjectives or adverbs. “This is a Christian thing”: why say *authentically Christian*? It is Christian! The mere fact of the noun “Christian”, “I am of Christ”, is strong: it is an adjectival noun, yes, but it is a noun. To pass from the culture of the adjective to the theology of the noun. And you must communicate in this way. “How, do

you know that person?” – Ah, that person is like this, like that...”: immediately the adjective. First the adjective, perhaps, then, afterwards, what the person is like. This culture of the adjective has entered the Church and we, all brothers, forget to be brothers, by saying that this is “this type of” brother, that one is “the other” brother: first the adjective. Your communication should be austere but beautiful: beauty is not rococo art, beauty does not need these rococo things; beauty manifests itself from the noun itself, without strawberries on the cake! I think we need to learn this.

Communicating by witness, communicating by involving oneself in communication, communicating with the nouns of things, communicating as martyrs, that is, as witnesses of Christ, as martyrs. To learn the language of the martyrs, which is the language of the Apostles.

How did the Apostles communicate? Let us read that jewel which is the Book of Acts of the Apostles, and we will see how it was communicated at that time, and how it is Christian communication.

Thank you, thank you so much! Then you have that [the written address] which is more “structured”, because the basis was made by you. But read it, reflect on it. Thank you for what you do, and continue with joy. Communicating the joy of the Gospel: this is what the Lord is asking of us today. And thank you, thank you for your service and thank you for being the first Dicastery headed by a layperson. Bravo! Keep on! Thank you.

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