**53rd World Communications Day - Resources**
*Sunday, 2 June 2019*

In this year’s message for World Communications Day, Pope Francis asks us to focus on positive and negative aspects of the relationships we have with the people we encounter through social media, and in the world of the internet generally. He homes in on three images, which are useful ways of seeing how constructive (or destructive) those relationships are.

***The Internet***

"The Net is a source of knowledge and relationships that were once unthinkable". This may be obvious, but it is not banal. Knowledge and relationships carry responsibilities. We cannot pretend that all internet users share our values or our standards, and this superb technological tool can be used for all sorts of purposes. The Pope’s message is about using it to build and support relationships that are respectful and truthful. We now know how information about people and organisations is used and abused for political purposes; one sad fact is that "among young people one in four is involved in episodes of *cyberbullying"* - but don’t forget: that includes perpetrators as well as victims.

Nets work precisely because they do not depend on a central control point: their lines intersect in a way that creates strength and stability, and strong nets can hold all sorts of things - think of the enormous variety, symbolised by the number 153, of fish hauled aboard by the Apostles in Chapter 21 of Saint John’s Gospel. A net is strong because every part of it contributes to that overall strength. In the same way, the Internet "works because all its elements share responsibility". It is powerful and strong, but that power and strength go awry when people use it selfishly or forget that they have responsibility towards other users.

***Communities***

One of the most appealing elements of the internet is the creation of communities, but it is vital not to let this image run away with us. The key is to remember the human communities that mean so much to us, which can be the standard by which we judge internet communities. My community, where I belong, is an assortment of people who make me feel at home, even if they occasionally must put me in my place. Internet communities are not like this but can allow people to pour insults - and sometimes even rage and contempt - on people they have never met. This is an abuse of the word 'community'. Pope Francis is asking us to use the term more carefully.

In the best cases, "*virtual communities* are able to demonstrate cohesion and solidarity, but often they remain simply groups of individuals who recognise one another through common interests or concerns characterised by weak bonds". People often join communities based on shared opposition to others who do not share their opinions: "we define ourselves starting with what divides us rather than what unites us, giving rise to suspicion and to the venting of every kind of prejudice". Exclusive groups frequently foment "spirals of hatred". As Pope Francis says, this is no longer a window on the world but "a showcase for narcissism".

***We are members one of another (Ephesians 4,25)***

Pope Francis offers us an image from Saint Paul which can help us to keep the others in balance. The idea of being a member of the Body of Christ encourages me to look with love at other members of the Body of Christ, whose experiences and views of the Church and of faith can be very different from my own. The fact that we all belong to the Body of Christ gives us a special responsibility towards each other. What happens to other members of the Body automatically affects me, and what I do automatically affects them.

The concluding sentences of the message encourage us to think of the people we encounter on the net precisely as persons - it helps if we can see a face rather than an idea or a label. Life "becomes more human insofar as its nature becomes less individual and more personal", moving from seeing other people as rivals to seeing them as travelling companions.

 ***Homily Suggestions***

This Message will speak very directly to people who use the internet every day, particularly to people who use or even write blogs. It may be quite remote from the lives of people of a certain age, or the many people who have no idea how to use a computer. Many of the points the message makes apply not only to cyberspace but to life around the parish pump, too.

It could be good to start with, or to end with, or even to focus on, the quotation in the Message from Saint Basil’s *Detailed Rule for Monks:* "Nothing… is as specific to our nature as entering into a relationship one with another, having need of one another".

If there are families or teachers listening, it could be good to use the phenomenon of *cyberbullying* as a springboard for encouraging respect and responsibility in the way we speak and view other people, and obviously the way we use the internet.

If there are [ecclesiastical] bloggers, university students or seminarians present, it may be appropriate to prod consciences with questions about how personal their views of their adversaries on the net are. Are they really aware of the image and likeness of God even - or perhaps particularly! - in those who see life quite differently. It could help to quote Hans Urs von Balthasar’s warning that it is easy to destroy but incredibly difficult to rebuild, especially when it comes to a person or a person’s reputation.

The variety of fish in *John* 21 speaks of opening our minds and hearts to the fact that the Body of Christ is built of members who have different functions, different gifts, different experiences. It is probably wiser to speak in terms like this than in terms of 'diversity', which could cause people to close their minds and ears, thinking they are about to get another lecture like the one they had at work last week. This fits with the section in the message on the Body of Christ, which uses terms from personalist philosophy about seeing the face of another person as the doorway to more human communication. The philosopher Levinas said looking into another person’s face is the starting-point of ethics, because when we look at each other we see that we have responsibility for each other.

The final encouragement in the Message is to move from approving and disapproving of other people with 'likes' and 'dislikes', to accepting that "the Church is a network woven together by Eucharistic communion, where unity is based not on 'likes', but on the truth, on the 'Amen', by which each one clings to the Body of Christ and welcomes others".

***Suggestions for the General Intercessions***

***Leader***

Christ told His followers they would be His witnesses "to the ends of the earth". Our task is to bring the Good News about Him to everyone, everywhere. Let us ask God to help us in this task.

***Reader***

Let us pray for those who have been ordained to preach the Gospel.

May God give them the courage and wisdom to proclaim His Word to everyone they meet.

Let us pray for parents, catechists and teachers in our Catholic schools.

May God’s Holy Spirit guide them to understand their own faith and to pass it on with joy.

Let us pray for Christians whose jobs influence public opinion and morality.

May God help them bear witness to their faith in all that they say and do.

Let us pray for people who do not know Jesus Christ.

May God send them preachers, teachers and guides who will bring them closer to Him.

Let us pray for our families and friends, especially those who no longer follow Christ.

May God make us effective signs of His presence in the world.

***Leader***

Lord, in humility we ask you to hear these prayers and to answer them, through Christ Our Lord

<http://www.catholicnews.org.uk/wcd19-pope-message>