



Homily Notes for World Communications Day 2022

When we think of communications, most of us look at it from the point of view of the person who is speaking. We think about the best ways to address our audience. In his message for World Communications Day this year, however, Pope Francis looks at communication from the perspective of the person who is addressed.

His theme is listening. He reminds us that communication is a two-way process, involving a speaker and a listener. Communication is effective when each partner has an opportunity to speak and to listen.

When we focus on listening rather than speaking we notice things that might otherwise escape us. We recognise how strong in all of us is the desire to be listened to and understood. Pope Francis speaks of the universal and “boundless desire to be heard”. This passionate desire explains in part why people find social media so appealing, and how destructive its effects can be.

It gives ordinary people who would otherwise never find people to listen to them the opportunity to speak and be heard. Unfortunately, they will find themselves not listened to, but judged, mocked and condemned without a hearing. It does not help people to communicate but only to shout at one another. The result is that people then confine their communication to people with whom they agree. They do not seek the truth but trade in their own version of it.

Pope Francis sees listening as a gift that we need to nurture, not something that we do naturally and can take for granted. Nor does taking it in turns to speak guarantee that we shall listen to the other person. In our homes as well as in public conversation in Parliament, newspapers and on television, communication can degenerate into serial monologues in which no one listens and all go away dissatisfied.

Good listening does not take place only through the ears but also through the heart. We treasure what we hear in our hearts, making space in silence to be touched and surprised by what we hear and so to enter the other person’s world and life with compassion.

We often speak of God’s Word and imagine God’s communication as one in which God speaks and we listen. Actually, in our relationship with God, God spends most of the time listening, hoping we might leave a silent space when we are open to hear God’s still voice.

Sunday Readings

Acts 15:1-2, 22-29

The leaders and communities of the early Church were divided by a heated debate whether new Christians not from a Jewish background had to be circumcised and to obey the

detailed laws given by God to Moses. The way in which they dealt with and came to a decision was a model of good communication. Paul and Barnabas who had been preaching outside the Jewish communities had made many converts, and were sent to Jerusalem to raise the matter with the Apostles and elders. At the end of the debate in Jerusalem Peter was joined by James, who worked only among converted Jews, in seeing that it was God's will to spread the Gospel throughout the world. People should not be required to be circumcised, but only to adopt some Jewish practices. Paul and his companions were then sent back to communicate this decision to the new Churches. In this case, communication involved strong initial differences of opinion, careful listening, a common decision, and clear personal communication of it.

Revelation 21: 10-14, 22-23

The reading from the *Book of Revelation* concludes the book with the vision of a transformed world at the end of titanic struggles. It does so through the image of a Church and world in which Christ is everything. It reminds us that when communicating images and pictures are often more effective than words. Words lead to listening. Images lead to wonder.

John 14:23-29.

In this reading from John's Gospel, Jesus reminds his disciples that God speaks through Jesus' words. So, listening means keeping and treasuring Jesus' message. Jesus also reminds us that the Spirit makes Jesus' words and actions in the Gospel come alive. He also reminds us that a central feature of our listening to God's Word is that it brings peace. Words that come from and feed anxiety are not from God.

Homily notes prepared by Fr Andrew Hamilton SJ for the Australian Catholic Media Council.