

THE MEDIUM AND MESSAGE OF AUTHENTIC COMMUNICATION



The Pope's Message for World Communications Day 2016 is part of a trilogy that should be read as a whole, not restricted to the framework of the Jubilee Year.

The relationship between communication and mercy was already present in the icon of the Good Samaritan: if we let it touch our hearts, we cannot help but take action, allowing it to make us multipliers of "closeness to others." But the initiative springs from the pleas of the other person, not from the fact that we are "good." God is always the priority. Mercy is not a case of "you must be" [a command] but "you should be" [an invitation]. It is a love that seizes us and takes us to places we wouldn't be able to reach under our own power.

Last year's Message, based on the icon of the Visitation, cast light on two other aspects of communication: to take the initiative to share the Good News, communicating it with one's whole being, and above all to realize that communication is possible because we are already "in relationship" even before being "individuals." Because of this, the maternal womb is the first school of communication and the family is the second.

This year's Message should be understood against the background of a truth deeply cherished by Pope Francis and that is ontological, anthropological and theological at one and the same time. Or, to put it even more briefly: it is mystical. And that truth is: "everything is connected" (*Laudato si*, 16).

It is the mercy of God, his "stooping down to us," that holds the world together. Without his

infinitely forgiving love, the world would not exist. And love, we read in the Pope's Message, is by its very nature communication. It "infects" people and sets things in motion, activating resources and energies. But it is possible for us to be merciful only because we have received mercy.

With mercy, communication shortens distances on the horizontal plane and is enriched with a new dimension: the vertical movement of God bending over us, which transforms radical distance into closeness. This is a revolutionary icon in a time that believes that every asymmetry is a premise for domination and that the sole alternative is an equality that eliminates every diversity. Pope Francis says something very different. He says that the alternative to domination is mercy—the greatest serving the least.

Mercy is a very specific response to the anthropological challenges of our times. For this reason, it is wrong to accuse mercy of being "hopelessly idealistic or excessively indulgent" because on the one hand it is very demanding, and on the other it is not an escape but a privileged portal to the flesh of reality. The capacity to take care of one another leads to a profound and concrete understanding that is capable of pointing out paths of action that are both respectful and effective.

Here are three more points I would like to briefly underscore:

First, mercy is the love of God for the human being in his/her entirety; it restores dignity to every dimension of the person. Its language is that of warmth and tenderness. Consequently, communication is always integral. It is not only a transmission of thought but the language of a "living body," immersed in a network of affection and directed to the whole person—the antithesis of a depersonalized and depersonalizing communication.

A second important aspect: to communicate in a relationship of closeness gives rise to "positive and creative boldness." Instead, negative communications "stoke the flames of mistrust, fear and hatred"; they create division and conflict; they dig pits and trenches; they betray the mandate to foster the growth of communion.

Finally, every last trace of "digital dualism" is eliminated, given that "even emails, text messages, social networks and chats can be fully human forms of communication. It is not technology that determines whether or not communication is authentic, but rather the human heart." Mercy takes on a power that is also political and contributes to building a healthy society that is open to sharing.

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