

52nd WORLD COMMUNICATIONS DAY TO BECOME A LAND AND A COUNTRY



In the book *The Moon and the Bonfires* by Cesare Pavese, an Italian writer and poet, the protagonist—an orphan—closes his eyes to see if, upon reopening them, the world before him has disappeared and been replaced by a better one. Perhaps many of us have done the same thing at one time or another.

And today's digital culture has made a decisive contribution to this yearning to escape. Contemporary human beings have truly reached the heights: they have "discovered America"—a world of seductive images, news and commentary that allows us to put even our most personal moments on public display. But the thrill of speed—in a car and in life—brings with it heavy risks. One can come to think that all content is equal, that there is little distinction between representation and reality, that one's beliefs count more than facts and that, at any rate, one can always eliminate the discordant elements.

Prejudices and stereotypes, suspicion and closure, all flourish against this background. It also becomes hard to recognize fake news, "false information based on non-existent or distorted data," yet very plausible and effective in its ability to capture and hold our attention.

Those who say that this is not a new phenomenon are right. What makes it so worrying is the number of persons it reaches today in a swift and unreliable way. Even though social networks are not the main cause of fake news, their *like* and *sharing* options facilitate its propagation, in keeping with a dynamism that rewards visibility of content more than its truthfulness.

In his Message for the 52nd World Communications Day, Pope Francis denounces "snake tactics"—deceptive language that manipulates the truth to the point of "robbing us of our interior freedom." He says that "even an impeccable argument, if used to hurt the other and discredit that person in the eyes of others, however correct it may appear, is not truthful."

At this point, what can be done?

"I had made a fortune in America," says the protagonist of Pavese's novel, "but when I got back home the faces, voices and hands that should have recognized and touched me were

gone. What was left was like a town square the day after a fair...."

But this outcome is not inevitable. Pope Francis—and with him the whole magisterium of the Church—confidently looks at our ability as human beings "to describe our own experiences and the world around us, and thus to create historical memory and the understanding of events."

It means rediscovering the importance of the journalistic profession since journalists are "protectors of news," and "the heart of news is not the speed with which it is reported or its audience impact, but persons." The Pope vigorously promotes a journalism of peace, at the service of those who have no voice; a journalism that strives to explore the underlying causes of conflicts.

At the same time, given the fact that we have all become not only consumers but also producers of news, Pope Francis underscores the responsibility of each person to communicate the truth, which means that we must all learn how to read, evaluate and understand better the information we receive and then teach others to do the same.

Moreover, truth is an irrepressible requirement in its relationship with reality. It cannot be limited to concepts or to bringing dark things to light. Truth is "something you can lean on so as not to fall," explains the Pope, who then adds: "We discover and rediscover the truth when we experience it within ourselves in the loyalty and trustworthiness of the One who loves us." Pavese would say: "Being a country means not being alone. It means knowing that something of you is in the people, in the plants and in the earth, and that even when you are not there it is still waiting for you."

In his Message, the Pope declares that in the last analysis "the only truly reliable and trustworthy One—the One on whom we can count—is the living God." And the Church sees him in the face of Jesus Christ, the final and full truth of the human being.

This is the foundation that is important to us, including in the realm of communication. This is the reason why we "come back." Because of this, like the protagonist in *La luna e i falò*, we never stop seeking: "I've traveled the world enough to know that all flesh is the same and that all of us are equal. But we grow weary and try to put down roots, to become a land and country, so that our flesh will be important and will last more than a common round of seasons."

Fr. Ivan Maffei
Director of the CEI National Office
of Social Communications