

GIVING OUR WORDS A NEW DIRECTION



The worst punishment we can inflict on another person is to say: “I’m not speaking to you anymore!” because in this case silence serves to exclude the other person from our life. It is not a way of chastising the person nor is it mutism. Instead, it is a profound negation of the other person’s existence; it is to no longer perceive that individual as alive and present, whether he or she be good or bad. “I’m not speaking to you anymore!” is the opposite, the antithesis, the anti-human response to the reality that “the Word became flesh and lived among us” (Jn. 1:14). “I’m not speaking to you anymore!” means not giving Meaning to someone’s existence.

“What John calls in Greek *ho logos* (translated into Latin as *Verbum* and into English as *the Word*) also means *the Meaning*. ‘The Meaning’ that became flesh is not merely a general idea inherent in the world; it is a ‘Word’ addressed to us. The *Logos* knows us, calls us, guides us. It is not a universal law within which we play some role, but rather a Person who is concerned with every individual human being. It is the Son of the living God who took on human existence in Bethlehem” (Benedict XVI, General Audience, 17 Dec. 2008).

The Meaning is “the Good News—the Gospel—that has been ‘reprinted’ in numerous editions in the lives of the saints, who became icons of God’s love in this world” (Francis, Message for the 51st World Communications Day), who serve as “channels” for continuing in the world the work of proclaiming the Word in human words.

MEANING IN THE DIGITAL PERIPHERIES

Those who find Meaning do not go looking for it elsewhere. They live a new life in which the dark and anonymous aspects of the world of virtual communications have no part.

We often behave like people who have been shipwrecked, clinging fanatically to selfies and sterile communications that often push the limits of vulgarity and even go beyond it. We have only to think of the banalization of videos and pictures, tweets and thoughts for the day posted on the Internet, where the cut-and-paste method dominates and no effort is made to double-check the reliability of one’s sources, and where natural things can become seductive and pornographic. People might eventually reach the point of thinking of God in technological and digital terms, reducing their faith to shreds and denying that it is a gift proclaimed by the lives of resurrected witnesses who have passed from death to life in the risen Christ.

THE MEANING GIVES MEANING AND SUBSTANCE TO ELEMENTS THAT NEED CONVERSION

In contemporary usage, conversion usually means “a change of life.” But the Hebrew word is more profound—it means *to point one’s feet in a new direction*. In reference to the digital world, we can say that conversion means “changing the direction in which one is navigating, that is to say, to take charge of the computer’s ‘tiller’ and steer it in a direction not always perceptible to the senses. But virtual reality always makes an impact on concrete reality.

GIVING A NEW DIRECTION TO THE WORDS WE DIGITIZE

To do this, Jesus Christ must take center stage and we must thrust our words—give them a good shove!—into the dark twists and turns of a humanity strongly marked by confusion and lack of meaning. In this way, we will give meaning and flesh to those submerged areas where the Word is able to close the gulf of dependence that isolates individuals immersed in a sea of globalization, deceived by the green lights of Internet chat rooms, where no one ever says, “Hi, how are you?”

Deceptive and lying words will always be present on the Web, but our behavior can toss them into a virtual wastebasket, where they can be deleted.

The Truth will make us free, and Love—which is never digital—can give meaning to a humanity that cannot take the risk of becoming embroiled in a war between false identities and the true humanity of people aware of their weaknesses.

Fr. Fortunato Di Noto

Founder and President of the *Meter Onlus* Associa-