

SOCIAL WEBS: NOT COBWEBS BUT NETWORKS



From *Like* to *Amen*. The Message for the 53rd World Communications Day is a wake-up call that invites us to discard the logic of *like* and welcome the logic of the truth because relationships are not founded

on emotions or ideals but on who a person truly is.

"We are members one of another" (Eph. 4:25). *From social network communities to the human community*. This is the title of the Message for World Communications Day 2019. In it, the Pope once again emphasizes that communication—including digital communication—serves to create relationships. When we post our messages online, do we truly feel the need to enter into relationship with others? Or do we do it only and always to put ourselves on display? Pope Francis clearly says that social networks have become a showcase for exhibiting personal narcissism.

We need to go back and reread the meaning of the word "net" because the Internet and social media are real and true nets. "The Net functions because all its elements share responsibility," says the Holy Father. He then goes on to clarify that right now social networks are not expressions of communion. Instead of being nets that unite, they have become cobwebs that divide and entrap.

Too many *"I's"*—*I am, I do, I think*—have tainted the significance of the Net as communion. "We define ourselves starting with what divides us rather than with what unites us, giving rise to suspicion and to the venting of every kind of prejudice (ethnic, sexual, religious and other). This tendency nourishes unbridled individualism, which sometimes ends up fomenting spirals of hatred. In this way, what ought to be a window on the world becomes a showcase for exhibiting personal narcissism." It is evident that in the hearts of most people there reigns a sadness and dissatisfaction that leads them to act and communicate badly, often very badly.

As a Church, it is absolutely essential to ask ourselves: *How can we find our true communitarian identity, aware of the responsibility*

we have toward one another, including online? The answer is: speak the truth, witness to the truth, seek the truth and stop lying.

"Therefore, putting away falsehood, speak the truth, each to his neighbor, for we are members one of another" (Eph. 4:25). St. Paul urges us to eliminate lying from our ways of communicating and to cultivate the habit of speaking the truth.

When the members of a parish, the priests of a diocese, and men and women religious use social networks, they must adopt Paul's logic of never belying the mutual relationship of communion. Online, therefore, we *must not put ourselves on display* but instead reinforce relationships by witnessing to the fact that we are all part of the same body.

The Pope concludes his Message by highlighting the positive aspects of social networks, saying that they are not "demons" to be avoided (as unfortunately many people today still believe). Let us read his words very carefully:

"If the Net is used as an extension or expectation of [encountering others], then the network concept is not betrayed and remains a resource for communion. If a family uses the Net to be more connected, to then meet at table and look into each other's eyes, then it is a resource. If a Church community coordinates its activity through the network, and then celebrates the Eucharist together, then it is a resource. If the Net becomes an opportunity to share stories and experiences of beauty or suffering that are physically distant from us, in order to pray together and together seek out the good to rediscover what unites us, then it is a resource."

It is true that Facebook and Instagram function through *likes*, and it is also true that everything we post is in view of receiving *likes*. But we cannot continue to use the Net solely with this logic, which is an expression of inner discomfort. Instead, we must adopt another logic, another "why." Let us post content and pictures that express the truth about ourselves, about others and about the world. Content and actions that create communion and mutual acceptance, even though we might not all think alike. Social networks were born to help us nurture relationships. Let's see to it that we don't forget this or change their "why."

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