



The Holy See

MESSAGE OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II FOR THE 32nd WORLD COMMUNICATIONS DAY

"Sustained by the Spirit, communicate hope"

[Sunday, 24 May 1998] *Dear Brothers and Sisters*,¹ In this second of the three years leading to the Great Jubilee of the year 2000, we turn our attention to the Holy Spirit and to his action in the Church, in our lives and in the world. The Spirit is the "guardian of hope in the human heart" (*Dominum et Vivificantem*, 67). For this reason, then, the theme for the 32nd World Communications Day is "Sustained by the Holy Spirit, Communicate Hope." The hope in which the Spirit sustains believers is above all eschatological. It is hope for salvation - hope of heaven, hope for perfect communion with God. Such hope is, as the Letter to the Hebrews puts it, "a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner shrine behind the curtain, where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf" (Heb 6:19-20).² But the eschatological hope dwelling in Christian hearts is deeply related to the search for happiness and fulfilment in this life. Hope of heaven stirs genuine concern for the well being of men and women here and now. "If any one says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen" (1 Jn 4:20). Redemption, which is God's healing of the divine-human relationship, goes hand in hand with the healing of our relationships with one another; and the hope born of the redemption looks to this double healing. This is why it is so important that Christians prepare for the Great Jubilee of the dawn of the Third Millennium by renewing their hope in the final coming of the Kingdom of God, while also reading more perceptively the signs of hope found in the world around them. Among the signs of hope are these: scientific, technological and especially medical progress in the service of human life, a greater awareness of our responsibility for the environment, efforts to restore peace and justice where they have been violated, a desire for reconciliation and solidarity among peoples, particularly in the complex relationship between the North and South of the world. In the Church too there are many signs of hope, among them a more attentive listening to the voice of the Holy Spirit prompting the acceptance of charisms and the promotion of the laity, a deeper commitment to Christian unity and a growing recognition of the importance of dialogue with other religions and with contemporary culture (cf. *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, 46).³ Christian communicators will communicate hope credibly if they first experience hope in their own lives, and this will happen only if they are men and women of prayer. Empowered by the Holy Spirit, prayer enables us to be "ready always with an answer to everyone who asks a reason for the hope" they see in us (1 Pt 3:15). This is how the Christian communicator learns to present the message of hope to the men and women of our times with the force of truth.⁴ It can never be forgotten that communication through the media is not a utilitarian exercise intended simply to motivate, persuade or sell. Still less is it a vehicle for ideology. The media can at times reduce human beings to units of consumption or competing interest groups, or manipulate viewers and readers and listeners as mere ciphers from whom some advantage is sought, whether product sales or political support; and these

things destroy community. It is the task of communication to bring people together and enrich their lives, not to isolate and exploit them. The means of social communication, properly used, can help to create and sustain a human community based on justice and charity; and, in so far as they do that, they will be signs of hope.⁵ The means of social communication are indeed the new "Areopagus" of today's world - a great forum which, at its best, makes possible the exchange of truthful information, constructive ideas and sound values, and so creates community. This in turn challenges the Church in her approach to communications not only to use the media to spread the Gospel but actually to integrate the Gospel message into the "new culture" created by modern communications, with their "new languages, new techniques and a new psychology" (*Redemptoris Missio*, 37). Christian communicators need a formation which enables them to work effectively in a media environment of this kind. Such a formation will have to be comprehensive: training in technical skills; training in ethics and morality, with particular attention to values and norms relevant to their professional work; training in human culture, in philosophy, history, social sciences and aesthetics. But, before all else, it will have to be a formation in the interior life, the life of the spirit. Christian communicators need to be men and women of Spirit-filled prayer, entering ever more deeply into communion with God in order to grow in their ability to foster communion among their fellow human beings. They must be schooled in hope by the Holy Spirit, "the principal agent of the new evangelization" (*Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, 45), so that they can communicate hope to others. The Virgin Mary is the perfect model of the hope which Christian communicators seek to stir in themselves and share with others. "Mary gave full expression to the longing of the poor of Yahweh and is a radiant model for those who entrust themselves with all their hearts to the promises of God" (*Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, 48). As the Church takes her pilgrim path towards the Great Jubilee, we turn to Mary whose deep listening to the Holy Spirit opened the world to the great event of the Incarnation, the source of all our hope. *From the Vatican, 24 January 1998, the Feast of Saint Francis de Sales*

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