

SHARING THE JOY OF THE GOSPEL WITH THE MEDIA AND THROUGH THE MEDIA



(photo of Fr. Thomas Rosica by Rev. Gregory Fairbanks)

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Archbishop Chaput, Bishop Senior, Dear Friends:

Thank you for the privilege of addressing you this evening in this lecture series in memory of a great friend and mentor, the late Cardinal John Foley. I wish to thank Fr. Thomas Dailey, OSFS, who heads up the Foley Chair of Social Communications and the Cardinal Foley Lecture series here at St. Charles Borromeo Seminary in Philadelphia. Your hospitality and kindness these past few days is much appreciated! You have invited me to speak about ***“Sharing the Joy of the Gospel: With the Media and Through the Media”***, a very fitting topic for the man after whom this series is named. For that is exactly what Father, then Archbishop, then Cardinal Foley did his entire life: he lived and shared the Gospel of joy with the media and through the media to the entire world.

First let’s take a panoramic view of how people have communicated the faith through the ages. Beginning with the oral tradition, including the teaching ministry of Jesus, and continuing

through the formation of the Biblical canon to modern telecommunications, human beings have recorded, shared and communicated their faith. The history of faith is a history of communication. For Christians, the Word did not become a divine oracle from some distant heaven, a FAX, an e-mail, an SMS or text message, a probe, a prompt, a quick like, or some other new fangled way to grab our attention. Through Mary, the Word became flesh and pitched his tent among us. The Word became close to real, human beings in real time. The Word became a person to be followed, enjoyed and loved! From that moment onward, anyone who really understands that God has become human will never be able to speak and act in an inhuman way. In Jesus, the message and the messenger are united. The medium is indeed the message, and the life and witness of the messenger is itself a vital part of the message.

In every age the Church has used whatever media are available to spread the good news. St. Augustine practically invented the form of the autobiography; the builders of the great medieval cathedrals used stone and stained glass to teach us a powerful lesson about God's dwelling place among us; Renaissance popes used not only papal bulls but colorful frescoes; Hildegard of Bingen wrote one of the first operas; Francis de Sales wrote thousands of letters to people; the early Jesuits used theater and stagecraft to put on morality plays for entire towns; Dorothy Day founded a newspaper that still exists today: *The Catholic Worker*; Jesuit Fr. Daniel Lord, jumped into radio; Bishop Fulton Sheen used television to a stunning effect; Bishop Robert Barron has dazzled us all with his masterful teaching videos, and now we have popes, cardinals, bishops, priests, sisters and brothers and tons of Catholic laity blogging and tweeting like mad! How sad it would be if we did not use the latest tools available to us to communicate and share the Word of God!

New Floodgates of Communication

In nearly three years at the helm of the Roman Catholic Church, Pope Francis has opened the floodgates of communication in an institution that has been somewhat cloistered for centuries. Yes, his two immediate predecessors, St. John Paul II and Benedict XVI communicated through the media, but something new is afoot with Francis. Pope Francis is now among the top global newsmakers of our time. He has brought renewed visibility to the papacy and to the Church. While it is no exaggeration that a pope has never been so widely quoted by the secular press, it could also be said that the pope's intentions have never been so widely misinterpreted. He is not quite "conservative" nor entirely "progressive". His message is filled with paradoxes because life is a paradox and Christian life is a great paradox. The world is listening to him because Francis models a solid consistency: the one between his words and deeds, and that between its current papal mission and life eternal. People listen to him because he walks the talk and walks the walk. He speaks our talk. Francis is the world's shepherd and a beautiful model and example of the new evangelization in action.

What is the most important achievement of Pope Francis? He has rebranded Catholicism and the papacy. Prior to Pope Francis, when many people on the street were asked: "What is the Catholic Church all about? What does the pope stand for?", the response would often be, "Catholics, well they are against abortion, gay marriage and birth control." "They are known for the sex abuse crisis that has terribly marred and weakened their moral authority and credibility."

Today, the response is somewhat different. What do they say about us now? What do they say about the Pope? People are speaking about our leader who is unafraid to confront the sins and evils that have marred us. We have a pope who is concerned about the environment, about mercy, compassion and love, and a deep passion, care and concern for the poor. Pope Francis has won over a great part of the media. By no means is this an indication that the teachings of the Church and message of the Gospel have been fully understood or received by all. Nevertheless, something has shifted in terms of Church-media relations. Many of my colleagues in the “secular” media industry have said that Francis has made it fun to be a religion reporter and journalist again. He has changed the image of the church so much that prestigious graduate schools of business and management are now using him as a case study in rebranding. He has also ruffled many feathers and upset some folks because of his free-flowing, unscripted remarks at times, and he raises a few eyebrows now and then!

Initially perhaps many of us (myself included) may have thought that Pope Francis’ accessibility, free-flowing interviews, homilies and quotes are more a source of consternation and frustration than opportunities to deepen knowledge about the Church, her founder and her message. But Francis has chosen many different opportunities to speak and encounter the world. Now matter how fraught with the potential or real confusion and misinterpretation those methods may sometimes be, the world is now listening to the Pope in ways that have not happened for a long, long time. No longer can we simply attribute this interest to an initial fascination, a “honeymoon period”, or other cynical ways of trying to dismiss what is really happening. The world is listening because Francis and the Church have something solid to say and to offer to a world plunged in chaos, war, terror, violence, moral deprivation, despair and darkness. Francis has given us an opportunity to teach, catechize and evangelize those establishments, agencies and individuals that bring us the news and the consumers of that news.

The inability of commentators to pigeonhole Francis into a single category is frustrating to some people. Francis does not compromise on the hot-button issues that divide the Church from the secular West – a gap that liberals would like to close by modernizing doctrine. Yet he is also not a pope for the Catholic Right. For him contrasting positions, held together in tension, loyal to fundamentals but open to the action of the Holy Spirit, are necessary to forge a new, better consensus and the differences make for an honest, open discussion.

Look at **what** Pope Francis said to the special session of the US Congress last September and **how** he said it. He didn’t scold, chastise, excoriate, condemn or excommunicate those powerful women and men sitting before him – many of them Catholics! Rather he urged lawmakers to build on their great history, to draw from their deepest principles. He reminded them of the good they have done in the past, which serves as an example of the good they can and should do in the future:

“Our response must instead be one of hope and healing, of peace and justice. We are asked to summon the courage and the intelligence to resolve today’s many geopolitical and economic crises. Even in the developed world, the effects of unjust structures and actions are all too apparent. Our efforts must aim at restoring hope, righting wrongs, maintaining commitments, and thus promoting the well-being of individuals and of peoples. We must move forward

together, as one, in a renewed spirit of fraternity and solidarity, cooperating generously for the common good.”

This was hardly a call to overthrow the system that the pope’s more radical-minded fans would have us believe. Instead, he asked us to call on all that is best, good, and true in our society. The other day, in a taxi ride from downtown Philadelphia to the seminary, when the driver realized where he was taking me, he remarked: “Hey buddy, this is the Pope’s house in Philly!” I smiled and told him I knew that. He then immediately asked me if I had watched the Pope’s televised address to the US Congress last September. I said that I certainly did! He remarked: “You know what he did that day, he called for our better angels!”

Francis’ words to congress in that historic gathering in the Chamber of the House of Representatives that morning did not fall on the deaf ears of the media and the millions who watched that historic event. Tenor and tone, eye-contact and gesture, kindness, gentleness and firmness all met together and did indeed call forth our better angels. What a profound moment of evangelization that September morning! We owe a debt of gratitude to the public media of this country and many other countries who brought us the stunning, wall-to-wall coverage and the powerful messages of the Pope last September in Cuba and in America. And here I must honestly admit that the secular media of this country, in particular the major networks did a far better job in allowing the Pope to speak to us rather than having that message filtered, distorted, editorialized and minimized by some commentators claiming to represent, faithful Catholic communication networks. I teased my colleagues at CNN, with whom I worked closely those days that they should have been called the Catholic News Network during the blessed days the Pope was among us.

One of the critiques of Francis’ Petrine Ministry and teaching heard in these parts is that the Pope is not speaking out enough against abortion. I hear this criticism often. I assure you that Pope Francis is profoundly Pro-Life. He offers to the Church and the world a **consistent ethic of life**, from its earliest moments of conception to natural death, from womb to tomb. Pope Francis is doing what the Bishop of Rome and successor of Peter should do, positioning the evil of abortion within its proper moral context, the failure to recognize the dignity of every single human person at every age and stage of life. Procured abortion is only one of the poisonous fruits from the rotted tree growing in the corrupted garden of a culture of death.

Over the past years, Pope Francis has strongly denounced efforts to redefine marriage, and issued a thundering condemnation of abortion, euthanasia, and in-vitro fertilization, calling them “sins against God.” As late as January 22 of this year, he addressed the Roman Rota with these words: “The Church... can show the unfailing merciful love of God to families - especially those wounded by sin and the trials of life – and, at the same time, proclaim the essential truth of marriage according to God’s design.” Pope Francis avoids any opportunity that can lend itself to political manipulation of his person and his words. He is very clear in giving positive messages even in the most complex situations. He is never “against” someone. He understands the Church to be of the people and not of political or cultural elites.

We are unlikely to forget Pope Francis' magnificent, unscripted reflection at the great vigil of the World Meeting of Families on Benjamin Franklin Parkway in this very city, the night of September 26, 2015. It was a stunning catechesis on marriage and family life:

“When the man and his wife went astray and walked away from God, God did not leave them alone. Such was his love. So great was his love that he began to walk with mankind, he began to walk alongside his people, until the right time came and then he gave the greatest demonstration of love: his Son. And where did he send his Son? To a palace, to a city, to an office building? He sent him to a family. God came into the world in a family. And he could do this because that family was a family with a heart open to love, a family whose doors were open.”

I would like to consider three ways that the Pope is joyfully communicating to us, often through the media, core teachings of our faith, foundational principles of Catholic life: Joy, Ecology and the Environment, and Mercy.

Joy, the weapon of mass construction

In *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis invites and challenges all of us to move beyond our “comfort zones.” He asks us to rediscover the joy of being Christian.

“Consequently, an evangelizer must never look like someone who has just come back from a funeral! Let us recover and deepen our enthusiasm, that “delightful and comforting joy of evangelizing, even when it is in tears that we must sow... And may the world of our time, which is searching, sometimes with anguish, sometimes with hope, be enabled to receive the good news not from evangelizers who are dejected, discouraged, impatient or anxious, but from ministers of the Gospel whose lives glow with fervour, who have first received the joy of Christ”. [EG #10]

Francis wants us to be warm, welcoming and forgiving as Jesus has modeled to us on every page of the New Testament. This morning in Rome at the Jubilee of Consecrated Life, Pope Francis reminded thousands of religious women and men that we have a Lord and Master “who shared in the joy of the spouses in Cana of Galilee and the anguish of the widow of Nain; a Lord and Master who enters into the house of Jairus, touched by death, and the house of Bethany, perfumed with nard. He took upon Himself illness and suffering, to the point of giving His life in ransom. Following Christ means going where He went; taking upon oneself, like the good Samaritan, the wounded we encounter along the road; going in search of the lost sheep. To be, like Jesus, close to the people; sharing their joys and pains, showing with our love the paternal face of God and the maternal caress of the Church.”

Francis wants us to eat with tax collectors and sinners; he wants us to forgive the woman caught in adultery (while admonishing her to sin no more); he wants us to welcome and respect foreigners (even our enemies), and, above all, not to judge others. He has spoken simply, powerfully and beautifully about returning to lost unity, a desire to achieve a missing fullness, a disarming invitation to simply come together to witness to the beauty of the love of Christ. He wants to build bridges that everyone can cross. He is especially conscious of the poor and those who have been marginalized – social outcasts kept on the fringes of society.

On being close to the people he writes: “An evangelizing community gets involved by word and deed in people’s daily lives; it bridges distances, it is willing to abase itself if necessary, and it embraces human life, touching the suffering flesh of Christ in others.”

Pope Francis models that “a church which ‘goes forth’ is a church whose doors are open.... Often it is better simply to slow down, to put aside our eagerness in order to see and listen to others, to stop rushing from one thing to another and to remain with someone who has faltered along the way.”

Evangelization must be an invitation to respond to God’s love and to seek the good in others, he says. “If this invitation does not radiate forcefully and attractively, the edifice of the church’s moral teaching risks becoming a house of cards, and this is our greatest risk. It would mean that it is not the Gospel which is being preached, but certain doctrinal or moral points based on specific ideological options.”

The church’s internal “wars” – the tendency to form groups of “elites,” to impose certain ideas and even to engage in “persecutions which appear as veritable witch hunts” – are all a counter-witness to evangelization. “Whom are we going to evangelize if this is the way we act?”

In his meeting with the United States Bishops in St. Matthew’s Cathedral in Washington, DC, on September 23, 2015, Francis said:

“It is not about preaching complicated doctrines, but joyfully proclaiming Christ who died and rose for our sake. The “style” of our mission should make our hearers feel that the message we preach is meant “for us”. May the word of God grant meaning and fullness to every aspect of their lives; may the sacraments nourish them with that food which they cannot procure for themselves; may the closeness of the shepherd make them long once again for the Father’s embrace. Be vigilant that the flock may always encounter in the heart of their pastor that “taste of eternity” which they seek in vain in the things of this world. May they always hear from you a word of appreciation for their efforts to confirm in liberty and justice the prosperity in which this land abounds.”

He reminded his brother bishops: “...*We are promoters of the culture of encounter. We are living sacraments of the embrace between God’s riches and our poverty. We are witnesses of the abasement and the condescension of God who anticipates in love our every response. ...Dialogue is our method, not as a shrewd strategy but out of fidelity to the One who never wearies of visiting the marketplace, even at the eleventh hour, to propose his offer of love (Mt 20:1-16).*”

And he took leave of them with these words:

“...Only a Church which can gather around the family fire remains able to attract others. And not any fire, but the one which blazed forth on Easter morn. The risen Lord continues to challenge the Church’s pastors through the quiet plea of so many of our brothers and sisters: “Have you something to eat?” We need to recognize the Lord’s voice, as the apostles did on the shore of the lake of Tiberius (Jn 21:4-12). It becomes even more urgent to grow in the certainty

that the embers of his presence, kindled in the fire of his passion, precede us and will never die out. Whenever this certainty weakens, we end up being caretakers of ash, and not guardians and dispensers of the true light and the warmth which causes our hearts to burn within us (Lk 24:32)."

These words are not only addressed to the shepherds and pastors of the American Church but to each and each one of us here tonight. What he says and how he says it offers us a unique model of authentic communication and connection with people.

Ecology and the Environment

Pope Francis' tone in his recent encyclical ***Laudato Si*** is passionate, personal and urgent. He has drafted this major letter with the mind and heart of a disciple of Jesus and the pen and voice of a prophet who has seen and personally experienced the grave injustices and ugliness that human beings can cause on this earth. The encyclical ***On the Care of our Common Home*** is addressed to "everyone living on this planet" and calls for a new way of looking at things. We face an urgent crisis, when the earth has begun to look more and more like, in the Pope's vivid image, "an immense pile of filth". Still, the document is hopeful, reminding us that because God is with us, all of us can strive to change course. We can move towards an "ecological conversion" in which we can listen to the "cry of the earth and the cry of the poor". This is a deeply uncomfortable encyclical because it is not content simply to face up to the institutional and moral issues of climate change and environmental degradation, but addresses the deeper tragedy of humanity itself.

Never before has the public media spoken so much about what many have wrongly called "The Climate Change Manifesto!" More than any other encyclical, "*Laudato Si*" draws from the experiences of people around the world, referencing the findings of bishops' conferences from Brazil, New Zealand, Southern Africa, Bolivia, Portugal, Germany, Argentina, the Dominican Republic, the Philippines, Australia, Canada and the United States.

What is the story within the story of "Laudato Si"? It is an overview of the environmental crisis from a religious point of view. Until now, the dialogue about the environment has been framed mainly using political, scientific and economic language. Now, the language of faith enters the discussion - clearly, decisively and systematically.

When the environmental world and many people not of our faith or tradition welcome the Pope as a powerful ally and the religious Right dismisses him as a disingenuous radical, socialist or a communist, these have missed the essential point. This is the Gospel call, as disconcertingly direct today as was Jesus's confrontation with the rich young man, the scribes and the Pharisees, or the moneychangers in the Temple. That's the unique quality of the encyclical. It is not just the declaration of assent to a program of international environmental action, but also the prophetic voice of the Church. It is therefore far more fundamentally disturbing and uncomfortable, demanding an individual response that will change our lives forever.

Laudato Si is a perfect example of how the Church, at the highest level, understands the modern world, enters into a profound dialogue with the world, and repeats again her age-old message of

salvation in a new way. *Laudato Si* is rooted in the concrete realities of our times. With *Laudato Si* Pope Francis is laying the groundwork for a new Christian humanism, rooted in the simple and beautiful image of Jesus that he presents for the world's consideration. For in the end, it is in the name and mission of Jesus of Nazareth that the Pope issues his call to conversion – a compelling invitation to each of us to look at the earth and all of its creatures with the loving eyes and heart of Jesus Christ. With *Laudato Si*, we learn to cherish the world God so loved and adore the Son given to us by the Father.

Mercy

In the well-known programmatic Jubilee text of Luke 4, we read that Jesus "stood up to read, and they handed him the scroll of the prophet Isaiah. Unrolling the scroll he found the place where it is written: The spirit of the Lord has been given to me..." (Lk 4:16-18; Is 61:1). Very significantly the last line of Isaiah read by Jesus says: "to proclaim the Lord's year of favour" (Lk 4:19; Is 61:2), and immediately afterwards, Jesus' message was a declaration that precisely "this text" was being fulfilled on that day. The expression of Isaiah 61:2 "year of the Lord's favour" clearly refers to the prescriptions in the Book of Leviticus on the Jubilee Year (Lev 25:10-13). Therefore at Nazareth Jesus was proclaiming a Jubilee Year.

But there is something very odd about the Isaian quotation on Jesus' lips. The Gospel does not quote the whole phrase of Isaiah, which includes two compliments of the object after the verb "proclaim" in Is 61:2. The Gospel quotes only the first "the Lord's year of favor" neglecting the second which is "a day of vengeance for our God". The quotation of Isaiah foresees two aspects of divine intervention, the first being the liberation of the Jewish people, the other punishment of her enemies. The Gospel has not retained this opposition! The omission has two consequences: a) the message contains nothing negative; b) it is implicitly universal. There is no suggestion of distinction between Jews and non-Jews. This is discreet preparation for the universal nature of the Gospel message, which will become explicit after the death and resurrection of Jesus: when the most fundamental liberation, from sin will be proclaimed "in his name to all people" (Lk 24:47). Universal openness is an essential character of the proclamation of the Good News and the sharing of our story.

On March 13 last year, Pope Francis surprised the world by announcing a Jubilee of Mercy that began this past December. Francis wants this jubilee to go deeper spiritually and to be a far-reaching Christian witness of mercy to the world. Mercy is a theme very dear to Pope Francis, in his episcopal motto: *miserando atque eligendo*, literally, "Chosen Through the Eyes of Mercy." During the first Angelus after his election to the See of Peter, Pope Francis stated: "Feeling mercy, this word changes everything. This is the best thing we can feel: it changes the world. A little mercy makes the world less cold and more just. We need to understand properly this mercy of God, this merciful Father who is so patient" (March 17, 2013).

For Pope Francis, mercy is the interpretative key to the Gospel of Jesus. Francis had his first profound experience of God's mercy at age 17, when on his way to a high school dance, he went to confession and felt the call to the priesthood. Throughout his priestly ministry, he has sought to give concrete expression to God's mercy by word and deed because he believes, as he wrote

recently: **“Mercy is not just a pastoral attitude; it is the very substance of the Gospel message.”**

What is the story within the story of the Jubilee of Mercy? Pope Francis wants to bring the whole church, starting with the cardinals, bishops, priests and consecrated persons, to open themselves to God’s mercy and to find concrete, creative ways to put mercy into practice in their areas of ministry.

As Bishop of Rome, he is blazing the trail by word and deed, showing what mercy means in relation to the poor, the homeless, prisoners, immigrants, the sick and the persecuted. They are for him “the flesh of Christ.” In this same optic of mercy, he has called for the abolition of the death penalty and life-imprisonment “the hidden death penalty”.

In his homily to new cardinals on February 15 last year, Pope Francis recalled that “the church’s way, from the time of the Council of Jerusalem, has always been the way of Jesus, the way of mercy and reinstatement.” This means “welcoming the repentant prodigal son; healing the wounds of sin with courage and determination; rolling up our sleeves and not standing by and watching passively the suffering of the world.”

Pope Francis’ art and style of communicating

For the **48th World Communications Day message in 2014**, Pope Francis wrote: *“How, then, can communication be at the service of an authentic culture of encounter? What does it mean for us, as disciples of the Lord, to encounter others in the light of the Gospel? ...How can we be “neighborly” in our use of the communications media and in the new environment created by digital technology? I find an answer in the parable of the Good Samaritan, which is also a parable about communication. Those who communicate, in effect, become neighbors. The Good Samaritan not only draws nearer to the man he finds half dead on the side of the road; he takes responsibility for him. Jesus shifts our understanding: it is not just about seeing the other as someone like myself, but of the ability to make myself like the other. Communication is really about realizing that we are all human beings, children of God. I like seeing this power of communication as “neighbourliness”.”*

In his **2015 Message for the World Day of Communications**, Francis reminded us that “modern media, which are an essential part of life for young people in particular, can be both a help and a hindrance to communication in and between families.”

“The media can be a hindrance if they become a way to avoid listening to others, to evade physical contact, to fill up every moment of silence and rest, so that we forget that “silence is an integral element of communication; in its absence, words rich in content cannot exist.” The media can help communication when they enable people to share their stories, to stay in contact with distant friends, to thank others or to seek their forgiveness, and to open the door to new encounters.”

In this year’s message for the **2016 World Day of Communications**, Francis writes:

“Communication has the power to build bridges, to enable encounter and inclusion, and thus to enrich society. How beautiful it is when people select their words and actions with care, in the effort to avoid misunderstandings, to heal wounded memories and to build peace and harmony. Words can build bridges between individuals and within families, social groups and peoples. This is possible both in the material world and the digital world. Our words and actions should be such as to help us all escape the vicious circles of condemnation and vengeance which continue to ensnare individuals and nations, encouraging expressions of hatred. The words of Christians ought to be a constant encouragement to communion and, even in those cases where they must firmly condemn evil, they should never try to rupture relationships and communication.”

“Our primary task is to uphold the truth with love.”

“It is not technology which determines whether or not communication is authentic, but rather the human heart and our capacity to use wisely the means at our disposal. Social networks can facilitate relationships and promote the good of society, but they can also lead to further polarization and division between individuals and groups.”

Field Hospitals

Let me conclude by taking up one of Pope Francis favorite images which has certainly been seized by the media: the powerful image of the “field hospital.” This expression is not unique to Francis, but is drawn from the Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius of Loyola. When Francis speaks of the church as a “field hospital after a battle” he appeals to Ignatius’ understanding of the role of the church in light of God’s gaze upon the world: “so many people ask us to be close, that ask us for what they were asking of Jesus: closeness, nearness.” It is the opposite image of a fortress under siege. The image of a church as a field hospital is not just a simple, pretty poetic metaphor; from this very image we can derive an understanding of both the church’s mission and the sacraments of salvation. Field hospitals by their very nature indicate a battleground, a struggle, suffering, confusion, emergency and they foster dialogue and encounter, conversation and meeting, consolation, compassion and the binding of wounds. Because my topic this evening is specifically about communications and media, I would like to indicate two areas where field hospitals are badly needed. And not only hospitals but caregivers willing to step into the battle and bring healing.

New Media and Young People

There is no question that the Church has entered the whole world of New Media with bravado and great zeal. I am concerned at times that we do so without careful reflection on what is really happening in this new universe. Does the use of new media serve to deepen our attentiveness to the presence of God, to the risen Christ to the living Spirit, to the community gathered about us, and to the world in which we are called to minister? In the digital world, no matter how hasty, undigested, unreflected the responses may be from our audience, our patient listening must always triumph. Internet culture conditions us to think that quick, instant responses to complex questions are the most valuable responses. It is then that we teachers and pastors become choreographers of immediacy rather than midwives of a slower wisdom.

Many times in the new media culture, our flight from conversation can mean diminished chances to learn skills of self-reflection. It's hard to do anything with 2000 intimate Facebook friends except connect. We think constant connection will make us feel less lonely. Many times the opposite is true. If we are unable to be alone, we are far more likely to be lonely.

Most of all, we need to remember – in between text messages, tweets, probes, likes, prompts, e-mails and Facebook posts – to listen to one another, even to the boring conversations, because it is often in unedited moments, moments in which we hesitate, stammer, stutter, cry and go silent, that we reveal our deepest selves to one another.

In today's schools, universities and workplaces, so many people who have grown up fearing conversation show up at school or on the job wearing earphones. Walking through big newsrooms of the TV or Radio networks, visiting journalists at major newspapers, strolling through university and seminary libraries and sleek downtown offices or at times even through our Salt and Light Television studios, one sees the same thing: we are together, but each of us is in our own bubble, furiously connected to keyboards and tiny touch screens. We are working away quietly at workstations with a whole array of technologies spread before them: laptops, iPads, iPods, and multiple cell phones. No one dares to break the silence with a greeting of "Hello!" "How are you?" "How was your weekend?" In the silence of supposed connection, people are carefully kept at bay. We keep one another at bay. We seem almost willing to dispense with people altogether. It is our role to tell people to look up, look at one another, and to start the conversation again. The Word became flesh... not an e-mail, text or prompt or probe!

Pope Francis warns us: *"some people... want their interpersonal relationships provided by sophisticated equipment, by screens and systems which can be turned on and off". He continues, "the Gospel tells us constantly to run the risk of a face-to-face encounter with others, with their physical presence which challenges us, with their pain and their pleas, with their joy which infects us."* (EG #88)

The Digital World and Catholic Blogosphere

Let me identify a second battleground where a field hospital is badly needed. We can each name a country or land where blood, terror and violence seem to have the upper hand. But the big battlefield before humanity is also the digital world: one that requires no passport and travel ticket to enter. You only need a keyboard, a screen or a hand-held device. It is in that universe that many wars are waged each day and where many wounded souls live, walk or troll. It is an immense battleground that needs many field hospitals set up to bind wounds and reconcile warring parties.

In the wild, crazy world of the blogosphere, there is the challenge of accountability and responsibility. On the Internet there is no accountability, no code of ethics, and no responsibility for one's words and actions. It can be an international weapon of mass destruction, crossing time zones, borders and space. In its wake is character assassination, destruction of reputation, calumny, libel, slander and defamation.

Many of my non-Christian and non-believing friends have remarked to me that we “Catholics” have turned the Internet into a cesspool of hatred, venom and vitriol, condemnation and excommunication all in the name of defending the faith! The character assassination on the Internet by those claiming to be faithful Catholics and Christians has turned it into a graveyard of filth and of corpses strewn all around.

What view do others have of us when they view our blogs? If we judged our identity based on certain “Catholic” websites and blogs on the Internet, we would be known as the people who are against everyone and everything! If anything, we should be known as the people who are for something, something positive that can transform lives and engage and impact the culture. To what degree are our blogs and websites really the expression of the wealth of the Christian patrimony and successful in transmitting the Good News that the Lord has asked us to spread?

In Vianney Hall this evening, there are dozens of field hospital workers ready for deployment. On these new battlefields today, the Church must shine with the light that lives within itself, it must go out and encounter human beings who – even though they believe that they do not need to hear a message of salvation – often find themselves afraid and wounded by life. In one of his well-known poems, Blessed Cardinal J.H. Newman wrote about a “kindly light.” The light of Christ reflected in the Church must not become the privilege of only a few elect who float enclosed within a safe harbor: this would be a “church clique” or a “personal blog” or “chat room” more than an ecclesial community.

Cardinal John Foley

If Vatican Communications are undergoing a massive reform at present, so much of this is due to the quiet, painstaking, often hidden and underappreciated, groundbreaking work of the late Cardinal Foley. Everything I have said in this presentation was found in the life of Cardinal Foley, especially in the 23 years that he headed the Pontifical Council for Social Communications. His goodness, kindness, humanity and humor, genuine interest in others and compassion for them, was the joy of the Gospel for countless people who encountered him, especially for tens of thousands of journalists and media personnel who had the privilege of interacting with him. John Patrick Foley of Philadelphia won the hearts of tens of thousands of people because he opened doors for them, listened, smiled, accompanied, laughed and shared their lot. He admonished when necessary, but did it in charity.

Three things Cardinal Foley taught me will always remain with me. As I prepared to lead World Youth Day 2002 in Canada, he told me to be sure to spend much time with journalists, leading them by the hand, never dismissing foolish questions, challenging where necessary, answering when possible, and thanking them always when they did a good job. I remember well one of his mantras to me: “We are very good at criticizing, complaining and writing people off when they have done a poor job in covering a story or smearing us. We do a terrible job in thanking them when they got it right.”

Second, the Cardinal told me that every single encounter with journalists must be considered a moment of catechesis and evangelization. Even though we may not use those words explicitly, he said: “Use every opportunity as a teaching moment.” Always be kind. Always express

gratitude for their interest in us, even though some of it is misplaced, misguided or misinformed.”

Thirdly, the Cardinal told me at the height of the hoopla over the DaVinci Code back in 2004, “When well meaning Catholics demand that we protest booksellers, writers, movie houses for presenting negative or even false images of the Church, don’t join those crusades. They only help to increase sales of books and break box office sales records! Rather, seize the opportunity to present the alternative story which is the truth.”

Cardinal Timothy Dolan described the late Cardinal with these accurate words during his very moving homily at Cardinal Foley’s funeral on December 16, 2011 here in Philadelphia:

[His] was “A courtesy that was so impeccable and the thoughtfulness that was so unfailing that we might not be surprised to find his photograph in the "pictionary" for the entry on "gentleman." “A holiness in "His Foleyness" that was evident without being overbearing; A depth to his intellect which could express itself with warmth and childlikeness”

Cardinal John Patrick Foley laid the groundwork for Pope Francis’ dynamic, creative and successful outreach to the world through the media. Over 23 years of often hidden work at our headquarters on the Tiber, John Patrick Foley sowed the seeds for a new springtime of evangelization in the Church. May this good shepherd of Philadelphia rest in peace, intercede for us, continue to inspire us and show us how to be good communicators, how to work closely with the media, and through them, to teach the world.

FR. THOMAS ROSICA, CSB

Ordained a priest in the Congregation of St. Basil in 1986, Fr. Thomas Rosica, a native of Rochester, New York, holds advanced degrees in Theology and Sacred Scripture from Regis College in the University of Toronto, the Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome and the Ecole Biblique in Jerusalem. Fr. Rosica has lectured in Sacred Scripture at Canadian Universities in Toronto, Windsor and London and served as Executive Director of the Newman Centre Catholic Chaplaincy at the University of Toronto from 1994-2000.

In June 1999, he was appointed by the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops as the Chief Executive Officer and National Director of the World Youth Day and the Papal Visit of Pope John Paul II, that took place in Toronto during July, 2002. On July 1, 2003, Fr. Rosica became the founding Chief Executive Officer of Salt and Light Catholic Media Foundation, Canada's first national Catholic Television Network.

Appointed by Pope Benedict XVI to the Pontifical Council for Social Communications in 2009, Fr. Rosica also served as Media Attaché at four Synods of Bishops at the Vatican in 2008, 2012, 2014 and 2015. Since the Papal Transition in 2013, he has been English language Assistant to Holy See Press Office. Fr. Rosica a member of several Boards of Governors of Institutions of Higher Learning, including the Board of the Gregorian University Foundation in Rome.