

THE CARDINALS' FORUM
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on **“The Social Media Magisterium”:**
Where Popularity & Reliability Collide!

presentation by

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Thank you Fr. Dailey.

Social Media is essential in our day and age to keep up with our fast moving world. One simple Facebook post, for instance, and connect with thousands or even millions of people. Within my work as Director of Sacred Music, for instance, social media provides an avenue of communication which is unparalleled in speed and outreach. The question is how one uses the media and the eschatological goal in mind.

Ora et Labora: Electronic Salvation

*Ora et Labora.*¹ Saint Benedict’s famous words summarize the Christian life as prayer and work, an active participation in the goal of attaining Heaven. This evening, I would like to propose that this two-fold participation extends through the Liturgy, the “source and summit of the faith” and should inundate every aspect of our daily lives. Are we people of prayer? Do we work toward

¹ St. Benedict. Benedictine motto.

attaining Heaven, not only for ourselves and our family, but the salvation of those we encounter?

God has blessed me and my wife with six children, the oldest of which is a sophomore in high school. Although my children do not own their own multi-media devices, public and private school essentially requires their use, something of a challenge to our family, particularly from the aspect of “time management.” We find the devices extremely helpful in areas of pedagogical content delivery, submission, and obviously communication. However, weaknesses arise when one notices the use of devices for frequent sing-alongs, YouTube videos, movies, SMS, social media posts, etc. Certainly there were distractions back in my youth, as it took you 5 minutes to type a text message on an ancient flip phone, or to simply “dial-up” the internet through the blazing-fast 33.6k modem. In any case, social media and electronics can truly suck your time away.

Here I offer a daily challenge to watch the “screen time” not only of yourself, but of those God has placed in your care. Seminarians, you can help each other by holding one another to task in time management, as well as manner of speech. If you find yourself saying, “I saw on Facebook/Instagram, etc..., perhaps it is a clue to pick up a good book. Parents, I know from experience that children are drawn to devices, not necessarily because of their affinity to them, but more likely because they see you using them. We are perhaps a people claiming to be “so busy”, yet unaware of the hours and hours spent each day staring at a screen! What we are missing here is our “ora” and one needs to replace screen time with prayer. Perhaps a simple suggestion would be to replace much of our social media time with a prayer app, going to Mass, or even reading the daily scriptures. To quote what our Lord Jesus Christ said to Peter in the Garden of Agony: “Could thou not watch one hour?” We can watch one hour of TV, no problem, but can we say the Rosary for 15 minutes? Our Blessed Lady, come to our aid, especially in this area of time management.

A recent UK study was completed about young women and the time allotment to selfies. It said that on average, young women age 16-25 spend more than 5 hours per week—roughly 48 minutes per day—with prep, makeup, clothes,

getting the right angles and pics. What we are missing here is “labora” and one needs to replace idleness with work, for this can only be seriously damaging to an individual, focusing on self and not on God or neighbor. It sets up a false reality of the human person, desiring to create a new image of God’s creation, already infinitely beautiful and made in His likeness.

In another vein, are we merely seeking to “get” information, or are we actively pursuing virtue, truth, morality, and our Catholic tenets? It is easy to be extreme, yet often challenging to remain moderate, and use the information in moderation. Our prayer life and love of neighbor need to come first. Does this mean that we should simply refrain from all media content? I offer that perhaps a periodic fasting from it would do us all good, yet the Church calls us to take an active part. “All children of the Church should join, without delay and with the greatest effort in common work to make effective use of the media. They should anticipate harmful developments, especially where more urgent efforts to advance morality and religion are needed.”²

We are called to active, engaged holiness, each in our own vocation. We are called as St. Ignatius of Loyola rightly says, to use humanity to praise, reverence and serve God, and all other things of this world are gifts to help us love and save souls. But if any of these gifts become the center of our lives, they displace God and so hinder our growth toward our goal.³ The modern social media can easily fall into either category: glorious help or a daily hinderance. It shouldn’t be an end in and of itself, but should guide us toward holiness. “As [is] the case with ancient works of art, the name of the Lord may be glorified by these new discoveries in accordance with the Scriptures, namely the book of Hebrews “Jesus Christ, yesterday and today, and the same forever.”⁴

Ora et Labora: prayer and work, an eschatological plan to achieve our heavenly goal. As the Sacred Liturgy of Ordination tells each new vocation: May God who has begun good work in you, bring it to fulfillment. What is the good work? Truly it is your daily prayer and giving of self to others, your service. And the

² INTER MIRIFICA, Decree of St. Paul VI, Vatican II, 1963.

³ St. Ignatius of Loyola. *Spiritual Exercises*, 23.

⁴ Hebrews 13:8.

fulfillment is found within seeking a perfection in it, most especially the worship of God in the Sacred Liturgy. Rather than seeking division, we are all called to work together peacefully in the vineyard of the Lord, reaping a harvest for eternity.

Summary of *Inter Mirifica*, December 4, 1963.

On December 4, 1963, two documents were issued as foundations of the Second Vatican Council. Can you name them? What was the other document? Perhaps its my old age, but I was astounded to be reminded that it was a Decree of St. Paul VI on the Media of Social Communications, namely INTER MIRIFICA. If you haven't read the decree, I strongly encourage it, for it is as if every word was written for our present age! Allow me to briefly summarize.

It opens by stating that "Among the wonderful technological discoveries which men of talent...have made with God's help, the Church welcomes and promotes with special interest those which have a most direct relation to men's minds and which have uncovered new avenues of communicating most readily news, views and teachings of every sort. The most important of these inventions are those...called the media of social communication. The Church recognizes that these media, if properly utilized, can be of great service to mankind."

Now this opening statement asserts that the media not only influences individuals, but the very masses of the whole of human society...if properly utilized. This in turn infers that if *not* properly utilized, men can use the media in ways contrary to the plan of the Creator, inflicting evil, or as the document says causing "maternal grief." Holy Mother Church experiences pain at the harm "all too often done to society by their evil use."

Another aspect especially relevant to the children of today, it appears that in order to enter into the conversation, one must watch videos, view social media, in essence almost form our own opinion from the opinion of others, most often with a predetermined agenda or politicized view. Gone are the days when we can simply "listen to the news" or read it. "Since public opinion exercises the greatest power and authority today in every sphere of life...all must strive to form and spread sound public opinion...They must fully favor those presentations that are outstanding for their moral goodness, their knowledge and their artistic or technical merit."

Continuing with *Inter Mirifica*, it says, "Those who make use of the media, especially the young, should take steps to accustom themselves to moderation and self-control in their regard. They should, moreover, endeavor to deepen their understanding of what they see, hear or read." In this statement we find one of the keys of success. Do we simply take every word of what we hear or read as face value, or is it used to further research, discuss, and build up the people of God?