



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER
POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO THE PLENARY ASSEMBLY
OF THE PONTIFICAL COMMISSION
FOR SOCIAL COMMUNICATIONS**

Thursday 3 March 1988

*Dear Brothers in the Episcopate,
Brothers and Sisters in Christ, "The Lord be with you".*

1. This greeting is a familiar part of our liturgical celebrations. It itself, it is a beautiful prayer that those whom we address may truly be filled with the Spirit of God and may truly reflect in their lives the grace of Jesus Christ.

The liturgical salutation reminds us of another greeting offered to the Blessed Virgin Mary by the Angel Gabriel: "Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with you!" (*Luc. 1, 28*). Gabriel's greeting was not a prayerful hope, but the recognition of a fact: that the Lord truly was with Mary.

In this Marian Year, it is appropriate to recall with the members, consultors and staff of the Pontifical Commission for Social Communications during your annual plenary meeting that one of the most significant messages of all time was brought by the patron of communicators, the Angel Gabriel, to Mary - the news that she had been chosen by God the Father to be the Mother of his Son.

Let us examine the context and the content of that message to see what we can learn in our own work as communicators.

2. The Angel said, "Hail, full of grace!". By this greeting, he recognized the unique dignity of Mary as one who had been especially blessed by God. While it is true that only Mary had the privilege of being conceived free from sin and full of grace, it is equally true that every person is a child of God with a special destiny. Should not our communication and indeed all communication recognize the dignity and the transcendent destiny of every human being?

In all our work of communication, this means that we should tirelessly proclaim and defend the dignity of every person as a child of God destined for eternal life. We must join with all men and women of good will in defending the rights and dignity of every human being--the right to life from the moment of conception until natural death, the right to decent housing, education and a just wage for meaningful work, the right to practise and openly profess religious belief.

It is in the profession of religious belief, however, that we must go beyond the message offered by other persons of good will who do not share our faith, for we must publicly communicate the good news of Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Lord. The cost of proclaiming this message has always been great. Even in the infancy of Jesus, Simeon referred to him as a "sign that is spoken against" (*Luc. 2, 34*). Simeon likewise said to Mary: "A sword will pierce through your own soul also" (*Ibid. 2, 35*). The Apostles Peter and Paul paid the price of martyrdom for proclaiming the message of Jesus, and thereby have become models for thousands of followers of Christ throughout the ages who have offered their lives in witness to the Gospel. In this age, Blessed Titus Brandsma gave his life as a priest and as a journalist in defence of the rights and dignity of every person and in witness to his faith in Jesus Christ.

3. How should Catholic communicators imitate the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Apostles and the martyrs in their witness to the faith?

First, every Catholic communicator, like every member of the Church, should be a model of personal integrity. Each of us should proclaim the Gospel in our daily life by seeking to be truly "full of grace". Every Catholic communicator should also be a model of professional competence, for without such expertise there can be little positive impact in the competitive and demanding world of the communications media.

Second, I would also hope that every Catholic in the communications media will be fearless in the presentation and defence of truth - even when that truth may be unpopular at a particular time or in a particular place. The number of children deliberately killed before birth remains a terrible scandal in a world which professes to be civilized. It is a scandal which can easily be ignored unless there are people in the communications media who will make known this continuing tragedy. The death and suffering of so many innocent people due to violence, hunger and disease are situations which must also be made known through the communications media, so that those in need may be helped. The persistent denial of essential human rights, including the right to profess and practise religion publicly, is likewise a subject which deserves to be brought before the attention of the world so that the power of public opinion may help to break the chains of oppression.

Third, Catholics in the communications media can help to tell the good news as it is lived by millions around the world. The compassionate love of the Blessed Virgin Mary in visiting her cousin Elizabeth at her time of need is reflected over and over again in the lives of those who care

for the sick and the dying; who educate the poor and the handicapped, and who seek to be peacemakers in a troubled world. There are as many interesting stories as there are heroic but humble people in the world - and their unselfish lives will not remain hidden if there are communicators with the imagination and skill to bring their story to a world which needs examples of heroism and hope.

4. At the end of this year, we will mark the twenty-fifth anniversary of that landmark document of the Second Vatican Council "Inter Mirifica". The communications media are there described as among the marvels of technology which God has destined human genius to discover in creation. The communications media have the wonderful power to bring the people of the world together. The media can be messengers of the Good News of Jesus Christ, as the Angel Gabriel was to Mary, and can proclaim that message not just to one person but to multitudes. The power of the communications media is undoubtedly very great, and it depends on us to guarantee that they will always be instruments at the service of truth, justice and moral decency.

The task is indeed a challenging one. The Angel Gabriel however, also said to Mary: "The Lord is with you!" (*Luc.* 1, 28). We have the assurance of the continuing presence and help of Jesus in all that we do to communicate his truth and his love, in all that we do together with his Blessed Mother to proclaim the greatness of the Lord.

As a sign of that continuing help of the Lord, and invoking the intercession of his Virgin Mother, I willingly impart my Apostolic Blessing to you, your loved ones and all your associates in this important work of communications.