
WONDERFUL MISSION OF THE MASS MEDIA



February 8 marked the national Mass Media Day. To mark the occasion I presided the Sunday eucharist at the Immaculate Conception Cathedral and, as I have been doing these past four years, those people in charge of the local media were invited to the Diocesan Centre.

GRATITUDE

First of all I want to express gratitude, on behalf of the diocesan Church and in my own name, to all these men and women who ensure the quality of mass media communications, in our milieu. All we need do is consider all those who are involved in the printed and electronic press, in order to keep us abreast with what is happening elsewhere. What would our lives be like, if there were no newspapers, radio, television, films, telephone, or Internet? We are more than ever in close communion not only with our own people but also with the whole world. Examples that come to mind are the Acadia Games, the Pope's visit to Cuba, the funerals of Princess Diana and Mother Teresa, the Québec ice storms and the Saguenay and Manitoba floods, the Mass for Shut-Ins, and so many other timely topics.

POWER OF THE MASS MEDIA

No one doubts the power wielded by the mass media in the upbuilding of a world in communion and the creating of an ever more human and kind society: this is a truly marvellous mission. But in order for this to be achieved, it seems to me that there are certain indispensable elements that come into play in any kind of communication with the public, such as truth, justice, love, and liberty, all of which form the basis of any code of professional ethics and of any peace-building project. I commend those men and women whose profession is dictated by these values; they deserve our admiration and gratitude. On a daily basis they develop living bonds with the community. I hope that they shall continue on for a long time in such an irreplaceable service to their community.

DISASTROUS COMMUNICATIONS

If one or the other of the above elements were lacking, we would find ourselves in a type of communication that would cause major damage for both individuals and groups. When sensationalism, tabloid journalism, and the "scoop" are all that matter, stupidity, sarcasm, or ridicule become the fundamental law, when the "paparazzi" are out to delve into the private life of an individual, when the publication of partial information or half-truths risk to destroy the reputation of a person or a group, we are in the presence of an evil press. If because of freedom of the press and our own democratic system our institutions often bear the brunt of media polemics or controversy, there are countries where the Church seems to be an easy target. If such a situation is painful, we must more and more stand together in solidarity with the life and future of our Church. In the words of the prophet Micah (6:8), *"Do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with [our] God."* And this, for the cause of Christ, the Gospel and of the Church.

NOT BE AFRAID

In his intervention at the Synod of Bishops for America, Cardinal Jean-Claude Turcotte stressed that the role played by the media in society is so important that the Church cannot ignore them in its mission of proclaiming the Gospel: The Church must not be afraid to entrust the Gospel to the media. « *If Christians are not present to the media, they risk being absent from the modern world - a world that needs the Good News. Without a Church presence in this area, we risk being absent from the world. Yet, this same world is always in need of the Good News.* »

WITNESSES, MOSTLY

Noting that of all the media television is the most important to Canadians, that on average they watch 25 hours of television, weekly, the Cardinal points out that the picture media, especially, « *appeals particularly to the emotions, more than to the intellect* » and so benefits those who recount events more than those who try to explain them. The Archbishop remarked that television is not suited as much for courses in theory as it is for "living testimonies" such as Mother Teresa and Jean Vanier. Keeping this in mind, he talked about the potential for those involved in the faith, whether struggling for justice and working with the poor or offering stimulating ideas to major societal debates.


PROMOTING VALUES

« *Television shapes attitudes by sharing values, both good and bad,* » he said in calling for Christians on the American continent who are engaged in communications to collaborate in developing programming that « *promotes Christian values, social involvement solidarity, the family, and other important concepts.* » Concerning the Internet, he stated that it was rich in information, some credible and some questionable, and the possibility for dioceses and parishes to be present on the Internet with minimum training needed.

NEW LANGUAGES

The Archbishop of Montreal ended by reminding the Synod of the major role newspapers and periodicals have played and still play in the Church. The Cardinal also stated that the Church must acquire a new mentality and understanding when it comes to the electronic media. This will involve adopting a new language of expression, and learning the limitations of those media as a critical awareness of them and a creative vision are developed.

Have a good week!



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