

# First Friday Forum

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When I approach the topic of the Church and the media, I take JP II as our model. Pope John Paul II was a model communicator for the church during the age of communications. He mirrored the perfect communicator—Jesus Christ—The Word made flesh—in that his spoken and written message resounded in his living—and dying. He was a media personality.

By institutional media relations and public relations standards, he was a fine communicator. He spoke the truth loudly.

His message was clear; he repeated it often, and he told it using various means—to the point of revolutionizing the image of the pontificate and the relationship of the Vatican and the secular press. (e.g., interviews, world youth days, events around the world, letters, writings, web, messages, even text messages to journalists about his death!)

But the reason I take John Paul the Great as my patron in communications even before he is made venerable is that if you delved deeper into his media persona, he would have inevitably led you to Truth.

The medium of his life was the message. In this, he mirrored Christ, as I mentioned before. My effort in church communications is to make the truth in love known using every means of communications in a timely and appropriate fashion, that is through consistent and thoughtful relationships with media professionals and through the use of various Catholic communications tools.

My message today regarding media and the Church revolves around:

- The necessity of media
- The reality of media
- Our response to media
- Our engaging media

### **The necessity of the media**

There is a theology behind the necessity of the Church to engage media. Media are used to communicate.

The story of creation and salvation is a story of communication. From the creation of man and woman, to Yahweh's relationship with Israel—revealed so frequently through natural signs – to the cries of the prophets, and especially the Word made flesh in His teachings, His intimate conversations, His parables, miracles, and the sign of the Cross and the revelation of the new covenant written in blood - to the confirmation of the Word seen in the blood of the martyrs, the communication of grace in the sacraments and especially the Mass. God is in *communication* with us.

Whether we realize it or not, we were made for communion---with God and each other; in order to have communion, though, we need communication.

Not only is using media to communicate natural to us and an imitation of the communicative aspect of God, but we have also received the command to "Go into the whole world and proclaim the Gospel." (Mk 16:15)

We see the response to this call in the early Church—the speeches of Peter and Paul, the letters or epistles, the writing of the scriptures, and in the life of the Church through the centuries—

through art, music, literature, plays, homilies etc. Monks who transcribed books were the keepers of this patrimony. The printing press printed the Bible and spread it (which, by the way, also shows the potential danger of media—uncurbed) as the Protestant Reformation soon followed.

Modernity brought new technological means---a faster printing press, mass media through radio, TV, videos, phones, cell phones, computers, internet etc.... It is ever changing and with this ever changing and far-reaching media environment came new opportunities and new dangers.

Before the Second Vatican Council, the Vatican was writing about telecommunications and its strength and weaknesses. In the Second Vatican Council, “Inter Mirifica” was devoted entirely to mass media. Now, commentary has come from the Vatican on a yearly basis and from the pope quite frequently over the years. Pope John Paul’s last apostolic letter was on this very topic. It was called “Rapid Development.”

Church recognized the opportunities to not only promote the gospel but to promote dialogue and cooperation among peoples as well as the sharing of resources and the promotion of the common good. Of course, this would require a common concept of justice, peace and human dignity.

**The reality of media:**

The reality of the media is that it is a powerful and persuasive influence in culture. Don’t be duped!

Media are powerful. Media are persuasive. And media aren’t objective.

At best, they paint a balanced and fair representation of a situation, but the situation is always being observed from a certain

perspective and the final product is always a result of that perception and description.

Media get attention and they should invite us to go deeper—to seek the truth. Take, for example, the following:

- “The Da Vinci Code”
- The Statutes of Limitations issue in Colorado
- Immigration Reform issues

The danger lies in the partial truths often reported by a media which is often controlled by the powerful, rich, liberal opinion makers, and often steered by economics rather than the common good and Truth.

Keep in mind the following when viewing media portrayals: ...Shock value, controversy, curiosity, hidden agendas, story overload (viewers bombarded by too much information, quantity rather than quality, and no measure of truthfulness)...

**Our response to the media: Engage!**

I urge you to evaluate the media, seek quality, delve deeper to find truth and accuracy, participate by writing letters to editors wherein you challenge the facts. Write opinion pieces, and talk with others about the media you consume. And most of all, allow your own lives to be the medium for the message of truth and the Gospel.

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