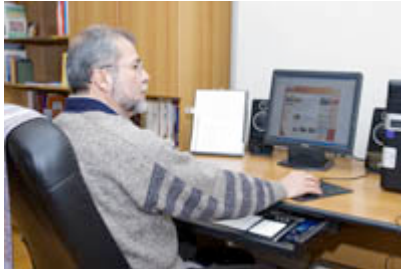


January 25, 2010 – Salesian GHQ – The priest and the Salesian in the digital world



(ANS – Rome) – Fr. Filiberto Gonzalez, councilor for communications, gives his commentary on the message of Pope Benedict XVI for the 44th World Communications Day, "The Priest and Pastoral Ministry in a Digital World: New Media at the Service of the Word."

Fr. Filiberto writes:

With his letter for the 43rd World Communications Day for 2009, the Pope invited people to reflect on the new technologies and the consequent relationships which have arisen. In the short document he dealt with three principles for encounter: respect, dialogue, and friendship, entrusting to the young the evangelization of their peers in the "digital continent."

As I see it, that letter had a strong Salesian flavor, because of the theme, the people it was mainly aimed at, and the confidence with which the Pope gave the young people the task of evangelizing their friends in their "native/virtual" environment.

The theme of the message this year follows the same lines and continues along the path the Church is following in this Year of the Priest. It focuses attention on the important and sensitive pastoral area of digital communications, in which priests can discover new possibilities for carrying out their ministry to and for the Word of God.

Referring to St. Paul, to the evangelizing mission, the Pope mentions the two Letters of the Apostle to the Romans and to the Corinthians to provide the incentive not to neglect the new technologies. In the message we read: "The Scripture says, 'No one who believes in him will be put to shame.... Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.' But how can they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how can they believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone to preach? And how can people preach unless they are sent? (Rom 10:11, 13-15)." Elsewhere he says: "Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel" (1 Cor 9:16).

On this account the presence of the priest and the religious in this field is not a question just of personal taste or capacity, but of an ecclesial mission: 'Jesus said to them: Go out into the whole world and preach the Gospel to the whole creation' (Mark 16:15). Even though we may not know where it will take us, we are called to evangelize this newly emerging digital world inhabited by new creatures, the digital natives.

This needs formation. The Pope says that it is necessary to link together how to use these technologies in a competent and appropriate way, shaped by sound theological insights and reflecting a strong priestly spirituality grounded in constant dialogue with the Lord. Yet priests present in the world of digital communications should be less notable for their media savvy than for their priestly heart, their closeness to Christ. This will not only enliven their pastoral outreach, but also will give a 'soul' to the fabric of communications that makes up the 'Web.'

For us Salesians, the invitation coming from this message of the Pope is joined with that which the Rector Major offers with the strenna for 2010. Listen to what the young want: 'Sir, we want to see Jesus.' Imitating Fr. Rua, the first successor of Don Bosco, we are called to be authentic disciples and zealous apostles in bringing the Gospel to the young. And nowadays this cannot be done without using the languages and technologies they are so fond of.

We have strong reasons calling us to be Salesian evangelizers, educators, and communicators. Nothing should keep Christ shut up in the tomb of the past; he is alive, risen and present in history.

We need to look at the new culture with the eyes of hope; it is an opportunity, a gift we have received from God. Don Bosco and Fr. Rua would certainly have moved into this new digital world.

The 44th World Communications Day will be kept on Sunday, May 16, 2010.

The full text of Pope Benedict's message:

http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/messages/communications/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20100124_44th-world-communications-day_en.html.