

Archbishop of Kota Kinabalu



MESSAGE IN CONJUNCTION WITH 54TH WORLD COMMUNICATIONS DAY

Today the Church celebrates the 54th World Communications Day. The theme this year is of storytelling: “That you may tell your children and grandchildren” (Ex 10:2).

In his message, the Holy Father says that life is a continuous process of communication, of relating with each other the good stories that speak of ourselves and of the beauty around us, stories that help us rediscover our roots and the strength to move forward together, stories that remind us of our interconnectedness as a human society.

But he warns us that not all stories are good if they are aimed to exploit, to deceive and to strip others of their human dignity. He therefore urges us to seek for wisdom, courage, patience and good discernment in order to reject what is false and evil.

The Pope’s message was written prior to the Covid-19 pandemic but is relevant to what we are currently facing. With the enforcement of the Movement Control Order (MCO) many people have to stay at home. It is a blessing in disguise because family bonds are strengthened or restored. Many resort to the use of social media to maintain relationships and/or to pass time.

It is said that social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter, Youtube, Instagram, WeChat, Weibo) have seen a sharp increase in usage. Facebook, for instance, reported over 50 per cent increase in overall messaging in the month of March. Whatsapp reported a 40 per cent increase, while the use of Zoom since the start of the pandemic has seen a noticeable increase.

For the first time, live streaming Masses are the only alternatives to our meeting with the Eucharistic Lord. We also see many creative video clips, blogs, online talk shows and catechesis, virtual choirs and so forth to communicate faith, hope and love, as well as to read the signs of time.

The surge in social media usage shows that people hunger to communicate, to share stories and to get updates. However, the “coronavirus infodemic” as the World Health Organization (WHO) describes it, has brought about large-scale confusion as

to which stories are authentic and which are unverified rumours and exaggerated claims regarding the pandemic.

It is understandable that during times of emergency and crisis, critical questions are asked, which demand immediate response. Often time accurate information could not be given fast enough. It is said that in our digital age, the time needed to analyze, assess and communicate information cannot compete with the instantaneous spreading of misinformation on social media platforms. One has to be extra vigilant not to be taken in by unverified news and stories which go viral every other second.

On this World Communication Day, let us first of all be thankful to God for the gift of social media in enhancing communication, connecting relationships and sharing knowledge. It is a gift to humankind who rely on stories to make life interesting and meaningful.

Nevertheless, as in the case of everything man-made, this gift is subjected to abuse and misuse that could generate fear, distrust and despair.

Our Holy Father reminds us on this World Communication Day of our God who is both creator and narrator. His story of love in the Bible assures us of His presence in our journey of life. The life stories of heroic saints such as Mother Mary and St Paul who went through crisis after crisis too are our ideal models of faith.

Let us optimize the usage of social media to communicate such stories to our children and grandchildren, to those far and near, and especially to people who are negatively impacted by Covid-19 pandemic.

Let us ride on this technology to share truth, justice and righteousness for the common good and moral buildup of our society.

And let our personal stories bear witness to our faith in the Living God who never abandons His children in times of crisis.

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24 May 2020