A Homily on Romans 10:14-15

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How can the church carry the Good News to people in the modern-tech world of today?

by Fr. Dinh Vo

ABSTRACT:

In my studies within the course of Technology in Ministry, I was encouraged to use and promote the use of technology as a valuable means to proclaim the Good News to people where they are. In the "spirit" of Vatican II, the Church reaches out to her sons and daughters, especially the young, in an effort to make practical use of technology. Social media specifically comes into question when considering the use of high-tech communication to proclaim the Word. If we hold that the beauty of the feet of those who bring good news to the world from village to village is always a matter of significant value through the ages, how about the beauty of the hands and eyes of those who proclaim the Gospel of God through the use of this now ubiquitous technology? Can we indeed go so far as to state that the internet might be a divine gift, a means by which evangelization is made somehow more efficient and effective in the modern world?

SYNOD:

We are in a time when the church has begun the process presented to us by Pope Francis: The Synod of Synodality. It can be argued that this means of uniting Catholics around the world is an old form of community building in a Christian style. Optimistically, the local church will be encouraged to contribute its part to the global church by building a strong local community and giving feedback to make the universal church united and strong. How valuable can the current modern mediums be when seeking quality feedback, and creative and critical thought for the church? I wonder how the Church can encourage the younger generation to participate in the process. Will it be through the use of social media? Or, in order to be the Body of Christ, do we need to be intentionally engaged in person-to-person experiences? How seriously will we rely on things like instant communication to spread the Good News? Dare we think that ministers must enter into this cyberspace "meta-verse" with the presumption that we need to meet people where they are?

Before Jesus ascended to heaven, he left the church the Great Commission: "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation" (Mark 16:15). Jesus' great command to preach the Gospel to all nations has echoed in every Christian's heart down through the ages. Saint Paul, in his letter to the Romans, urges all Christians to go out beyond safety to preach the Good News. Saint Paul encourages the faithful in Rome to proclaim the Gospel to those who have never heard it when he asks: "How can people hear and believe in God if somebody does not go and preach to them?" Paul further promotes the preaching of Gospel truth by emphasizing the beauty of the feet of those who bring Good News to the world. Jesus' command and Paul's invitation compel us not to simply pray for the spread of the Gospel, but to ask God how we can use our feet to bring this Good News to the world. The question in our world today is how can Christians meet people in person to tell the Good News if everyone is on-line much of the time?

We know that Jesus, during his time on earth, went from village to village, all the while proclaiming the kingdom of God. His message was simply the truth of salvation, and the love of God for all people. "Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the Good News of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness" (Matthew 9:35). Jesus was physically, intentionally present with people. He sat beside them, ate with them, walked with them, and listened to their needs. His style of preaching the Good News entailed parables, stories, and even events in the Old Testament to teach and instruct people to know how to live according to God's commandments. It becomes evident that by recognizing the historical reality of Jesus, we have a powerful paradigm: a pattern to which we can always return. Likewise, Jesus' disciples, especially Saint Paul, followed their master's good example. They walked great distances on foot and traveled by boat to preach the Good News, moving around Israel, reaching out to Asia Minor, to Europe and, eventually, to all the corners of the known world. Clearly, Jesus and his disciples directly encountered many different cultures in order to meet people and preach the Gospel. How might this ancient example inform our methods today?

According to Philip N. Howard, "Understanding society online requires that we study media embeddedness - how new communication tools are imbedded in our lives, and how our lives are imbedded in new media."[1] Philip N. Howard seems to tell us that with the advent of modern technology, our world today can be viewed as two distinct but related cultures: one real culture and one online culture. In this sense, an online society is existing within a real society. If so, how can the church carry the Good News to people in the modern-tech world of today when most citizens in the society, especially the youth are online to work, to study and to play games? To implement this task of evangelization, the church and its ministers need to understand the Internet. The document of Social Communications states that "Since announcing the Good News to people formed by a media culture requires taking carefully into account the special characteristics of the media themselves, the Church now needs to understand the Internet."[2] It is hard to deny that most people, especially the younger generation, spend a lot of their time online. "As of January, 2021, there were 4.66 billion active internet users worldwide - 59.5 percent of the global population."[3] As a mother, the church must reach out and seek her children no matter where they are: whether it be off-line or on-line. People are on the internet for their work, for study, for recreation or simply to chat. To encourage the evangelization of the Gospel, the church should invite and encourage all Christians and religious organizations and communities to use technology including the internet, social media, and other internet tools to proclaim the Good News in the modern world. For instance, when asked about how the church might spread the Gospel by using technology, my friend, Andrew Jilani answered that "Online technology is popular among youth. Therefore, the church should use social media to contact the audience in question. The Gospel message must reach them where they are."

1   Philip E. N. Howard, and Jones, Steven, eds., (2003): 2. Society Online: The Internet in Context. Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications. Accessed 15 February 2022. ProQuest Ebook Central.

2   "The Church and Internet," no. 5. Accessed 15 February 2022. https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/pccs/documents/rc_pc_pccs_doc_20020228_church-internet_en.html.

3   Joseph Johnson, "Internet Users in the World 2021." Statista. Accessed 15 February 2022. https://www.statista.com/statistics/617136/digital-population-worldwide/.

Yes. The message of the Gospel must reach out to people where they are. By virtue of our shared baptismal covenant, Christians are all called to proclaim the Good News even in the most unimaginable circumstances. In much the same way, as a disciple of Jesus moved from one town to another in order to preach, a disciple today needs to use social media to move from one kind of social media to another as a most efficient means to tell the Good News of God. Email, as well as YouTube, Twitter, and Facebook could be efficiently and effectively used to help spread the Good News. Pope Saint John Paul II stated that "The Church willingly employs these media to furnish information about itself and to expand the boundaries of evangelization, considering their use as a response to the command of the Lord: "Go into the whole world and proclaim the Gospel to every creature" (Mk 16:15).[4] It is possible that technology can help to magnify the voice of those preaching the Gospel. A pastor can preach a sermon reaching hundreds, thousands, or even millions around the world by a video, or a YouTube presentation or Ted Talk. Technology also increases the number of channels or methods for distribution of the Gospel. Bishop Barron is a famous preacher online now with his channel and websites: *Word on Fire.* At a technology conference in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles 2017, titled *Utilizing Technology as a Modern-day Evangelization Tool* Bishop Barron "urged the educators, clergy, youth ministers and laity to start with the beauty of the Church when using technology as a means of propagating the faith in an evangelical way."[5] Seeing the media as an outcome of the historical scientific process by which humankind "advances further and further in the discovery of the resources and values contained in the whole of creation", the Church often has declared her conviction that they are, in the words of the Second Vatican Council, "marvelous technical inventions" that already do much to meet human needs and may yet do even more.[6]

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4   An Apostolic Letter: *The Rapid Development to Those Responsible for Communications*, no.7
5   Julie Schnieders, "Utilizing Technology as a Modern-Day Evangelization Tool | Angelus News," (September 1, 2017). Accessed 16 February 2022. https://angelusnews.com/local/la-catholics/ utilizing-technology-as-a-modern-day-evangelization-tool/.
6   "The Church and Internet," no.1

Undoubtedly, the church today needs "A Change of Mentality and Pastoral Renewal"[7] to spread the Gospel to the world. The church finds in the new devices of communication "a precious aid for spreading the Gospel and religious values". Evangelization should be implemented both offline and online and the feet of preachers today will be considered as beautiful as the feet of preachers in the past if they are encouraged to step into the online culture to proclaim the Good News of God for all people by employing the technology of our modern world.

The problem is how can we make God's evangelical call to all creatures? St. Paul urges us to proclaim the Gospel of God to those who are unaware of the Gospel. We should be actively using the modern technology available to us to spread the gospel to all corners of the earth. I would like to close this homily by sharing some ideas that Amy Wen, a fellow student at the School of Theology here at St. John's University, shared with me. In a conversation with Amy about how and what Christians should do to bring the Gospel of God to people where they are, she suggested some very practical virtual ways of technological evangelization including bible studies, (theological) movie nights, game nights, online conferences, among other things. I am thankful to Amy for her creative suggestions. We continue to ask the Holy Spirit to inspire the church and all Christians for the evangelization of the Gospel in the modern world. Amen.

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7   An Apostolic Letter: *The Rapid Development to Those Responsible for Communications*, no.7

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