



In his message for the World Day of Social Communications, published Wednesday, Pope Francis said that in a world of lightning-fast communication, **there is a responsibility to combat falsehood and misinformation with truth, treating journalism as a people-oriented mission.**

“In today’s world, [the work of journalists] is, in every sense, not just a job; it is a mission,” the Pope wrote in his message released Jan. 24.

“Amid feeding frenzies and the mad rush for a scoop, they must remember that the heart of information is not the speed with which it is reported or its audience impact, but persons.”

“Informing others means forming others; it means being in touch with people’s lives,” he continued. “That is why ensuring the accuracy of sources and protecting communication are real means of promoting goodness, generating trust, and opening the way to communion and peace.”

Francis’ message for the next World Day of Social Communications was released Jan. 24, the feast day of St. Francis de Sales, the patron saint of journalists.

The 52nd annual celebration will take place May 13, 2018, on the theme: “‘The truth will set you free’ (Jn 8:32). Fake news and journalism for peace.”

“In today’s fast-changing world of communications and digital systems, we are witnessing the spread of what has come to be known as ‘fake news,’” the Pope said.

“In this way, I would like to contribute to our shared commitment to stemming the spread of fake news and to rediscovering the dignity of journalism and the personal responsibility of journalists to communicate the truth.”

The best “antidote” to the spread of falsehoods in ‘fake news’ aren’t strategies, he stated, but people.

“People who are not greedy but ready to listen, people who make the effort to engage in sincere dialogue so that the truth can emerge; people who are attracted by goodness and take responsibility for how they use language.”

Everyone has the duty to counter the lies found in ‘fake news,’ he said. But an even weightier responsibility falls upon those whose job it is to provide the world with information, namely, journalists, the “protectors of news.”

Francis went on to encourage everyone to promote “a journalism of peace,” which he said doesn’t mean some saccharine or sentimental reporting that refuses to acknowledge the existence of real and serious problems.

Rather, he emphasized, a journalism of peace is journalism that is “truthful and opposed to falsehoods, rhetorical slogans, and sensational headlines. A journalism created by people for people, one that is at the service of all, especially those – and they are the majority in our world – who have no voice.”

A journalism, he continued, that is less focused on breaking news, and more on exploring the underlying causes of conflicts, so that it can promote a deeper understanding and contribute to resolutions “by setting in place virtuous processes” and offering alternatives to “shouting matches.”

The first ‘fake news,’ Francis said, was that created by the “crafty serpent” in the Book of Genesis, who used falsehood to tempt Eve into disobeying God.

“The strategy of this skilled ‘Father of Lies’ (Jn 8:44) is precisely mimicry, that sly and dangerous form of seduction that worms its way into the heart with false and alluring arguments,” he said.

Eve’s temptation by the serpent “brings to light an essential element for our reflection: there is no such thing as harmless disinformation.”

He pointed out how constant exposure to deceptive language can also have harmful consequences on our interior life, as illustrated by a quote from Fyodor Dostoevsky’s the *Brothers Karamazov*.

“People who lie to themselves and listen to their own lie come to such a pass that they cannot distinguish the truth within them, or around them, and so lose all respect for themselves and for others. And having no respect, they cease to love, and in order to occupy and distract themselves without love they give way to passions and to coarse pleasures, and sink to bestiality in their vices, all from continual lying to others and to themselves.”

So how do we defend ourselves from this evil, Francis asked. “The most radical antidote

to the virus of falsehood is purification by the truth,” which in Christianity is more than just a judgment of things as true or false, he said.

It’s also more than just revealing things that are concealed, he continued: “Truth involves our whole life.”

“Truth is something you can lean on, so as not to fall,” he said. “In this relational sense, the only truly reliable and trustworthy One – the One on whom we can count – is the living God. Hence, Jesus can say: ‘I am the truth.’”

“To this end, drawing inspiration from a Franciscan prayer, we might turn to the Truth in person,” he concluded, offering the following prayer:

“Lord, make us instruments of your peace.

Help us to recognize the evil latent in a communication that does not build communion.

Help us to remove the venom from our judgements.

Help us to speak about others as our brothers and sisters.

You are faithful and trustworthy; may our words be seeds of goodness for the world:

where there is shouting, let us practice listening;

where there is confusion, let us inspire harmony;

where there is ambiguity, let us bring clarity;

where there is exclusion, let us offer solidarity;

where there is sensationalism, let us use sobriety;

where there is superficiality, let us raise real questions;

where there is prejudice, let us awaken trust;

where there is hostility, let us bring respect;

where there is falsehood, let us bring truth.

Amen.”