

(English translation)

Castel Gandolfo, 6 June 2003

NetOne – International Seminar on Communications

Mary, a Role Model for Communicators

Chiara Lubich: Dear professionals in the field of communication,

Today an international preparatory seminar has begun here at Castel Gandolfo in view of a future congress on communications.

And so gathered here in this meeting hall are people involved in what we have called an “*inundation*”, adapting an expression of St. John Chrysostom, this one being the *inundation* of communications.

The *inundations* are a result of a particular form of dialogue, a cultural dialogue which the Focolare Movement has for some time begun between the wisdom which the charism of unity has to offer and the various fields of human knowledge and endeavor, such as philosophy, education, the various human and natural sciences, art, medicine, law, and so on. And here we have the field of communication.

It is not hard to understand that these *inundations* maintain their true identity only if they are constantly animated, inundated by the light which derives from the gift of God. If not, we fall back into merely human ways of thinking and acting.

This is the reason why we will begin this seminar with a brief spiritual message entitled: “Mary, a role model for communicators”.

Through God’s providence, this seminar on the media is taking place in the year that the Holy Father has dedicated to Mary, the gentle Virgin, Mother of the Word of God, the Word who became life. And it is in her honor, to her glory, that the Catholic Church for several months now has been promoting varied initiatives all over the world.

We too, as the Focolare Movement, have had the intimate joy of raising a special hymn of praise to Mary by organizing here in this Center an unforgettable Congress entirely dedicated to her.

It was on that occasion that the media revealed once again their extraordinary capacity to increase and multiply that which is good, with a live transmission of the congress for three full days all over the world.

And this was a source of great joy to us for, as you may already know, there is a very special relationship between Mary and our Movement, which aims to be – inasmuch as possible – a presence of hers, almost a continuation of Mary here on earth.

If in the sixty years of our Movement’s history she has made known many facets of her lofty calling, as an extraordinary creature set in a way that is unique to her within the Trinity, we hope that now she will bring forth a ray of light into this present NetOne seminar.

Three years ago we focused on that terrible yet fascinating mystery of Jesus’ cry on the cross: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Mt 27:46). The great communicator, Jesus, who had attracted crowds, found himself not only betrayed and ignored by his followers, but abandoned also by his Father, whose closeness had always sustained him.

What had happened?

Having taken upon himself our limits, our mistakes, our separation from God and from our fellow human beings, he offered himself to experience all this to heal the serious wound of our disunity.

And he cried out. He cried out at the abandonment of his Father, and yet with a strength that was more than merely human, he abandoned himself to the Father again. In doing so he paid the price of our unfaithfulness, reuniting us as sons and daughters to the Father, and as brothers and sisters to one another. In this way, he worked as a divine Mediator (medium) and communicator.

For Mary as for Jesus, there is a culminating point: it is her desolation, her abandonment. When Jesus from the cross indicated John who represented us all, saying: "Woman, this is your son" (Jn 19:26), these words resounded as a kind of substitution. Mary goes through the trial of losing Jesus not only through his death, but also because someone else was taking his place. She accepted this. And with this new "yes" at the foot of the cross in giving up Jesus, she became the mother of us all, acquiring the motherhood of countless men and women.

Mary Desolate is the epitome of Motherhood. We have always perceived her desolation as the fulfillment of God's plan for her life in a climax of love and suffering that is beyond words.

There at the foot of the cross Mary became the mother not only of Jesus but of his Body which is the Church. She is the universal mother who binds together all people (her children) with her love, making them brothers and sisters to one another, as earthly mothers in their own way also do. She is the mother of unity, the bond of unity with all her children, because it was through her desolation that she acquired her spiritual maternity.

For this reason we have always connected Mary Desolate to communication, this aspect of love which is indispensable for reaching unity, making her the protectress of our various forms of communication.

In the preceding congress, thinking of Mary, we said that all communicators who draw inspiration from the charism of unity know the qualities of a mother. They comprehend that a mother sees further than others because she is enlightened by love. And from this they learn how to better understand people and situations, in order to communicate a truer picture that is deeper and wider than that which is usually given, a picture in which the negative aspects of people and circumstances are not hidden, yet where greater emphasis is given to the positive dimensions. For this is the nature of love: it knows reality, with its many shadows, but it is able to transform it in order that goodness may triumph in all.

If Jesus forsaken appeared to us as the pupil of God's eye open onto the world, we could say that Mary Desolate was for us something like the inside of a camera, collecting all the negative side of the world. But as the negative film in a camera is developed into a positive image, Mary knows how to transform situations in such a way that the positive can also be seen in what is negative.

Mary is the prototype and form of the Church, and so it is evident that in such a sublime creature all Christians can see their model. But I think that in Mary Desolate professionals in the field of communication can find in a particular way their model of perfection.

From the beginning of our Movement Mary appeared to us under two aspects: as a masterpiece of virtue and as an icon of the deepest law of the Gospel which is "knowing how to lose". "For whoever would save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake," says Jesus, "will save it" (Lk 9:24).

When Mary stood at the foot of the cross (Jn 19:25), in a bitter sea of anguish, she became the highest expression of all the heroic virtues ever lived by a human being.

In her, we can see faith and hope triumph through that charity which impassioned her throughout her life, and which totally enveloped her in that moment in which she actively participated in the Redemption.

She is a mother who holds a lifeless God in her arms, and still she continues to believe, hope and love. What greater model for communicators? What greater source of support? They, too, in their job of transmitting news, must often witness events that in different ways are a reminder of the abandonment the Son of God experienced on the cross.

By imitating Mary in her faith, and in her hope against all hope, media professionals will have the strength to face the dramatic situations humanity experiences and report on them with the greatest respect for the truth and, above all, for the persons involved. By “being” love as Mary was, they will be able to discern the golden thread that links people and circumstances. They will offer a truer and more profound vision of reality, a vision that perceives God’s Love as a force that transcends the complex unfolding of human history and events.

Their words will resemble those of Mary, who sang the *Magnificat*. In it she saw beyond the events and foretold the marvels that God would work through his Son, establishing a way of life in which abuses would be overcome and justice reached with love.

At the foot of the cross, Mary appeared meek. She lived poverty to the point of losing even her Son who is God. These qualities, too, are also extremely necessary for communicators, who often need to assume a role of dialogue and mediation with efficiency and discretion.

Mary in her desolation is the just one. She did not complain when she was deprived of her Son who had been given to her by God’s favor. She is the pure one, detached from her own Son who is God. She lived fortitude by remaining close by – standing – watching her Son die in the way he did.

She could be an example to media professionals who have to look at events objectively and remain staunch in their service to the truth, even when this may be unsettling, uncomfortable or even, perhaps, dangerous.

Mary, adorned in her sorrow with every virtue, also teaches communicators to have patience, perseverance, simplicity and silence so that during the dark moments of their lives, the light of God within them may shine forth in the world.

Just as every painting needs a background, every word must rest upon silence. If professionals in the field of communication silence their purely natural impulses and let the Spirit of the Lord speak out, then they will become always more like Mary who was a pure reflection of God. In this way their words will not be words alone. The Word (God) will speak upon their silence, upon their being! It will be Love!

Media professionals will then acquire the prudence they need to evaluate the situations they must report on and to verify the sources of their information. Even if they are called to be in the limelight, which at times could dazzle and blind them, they will remain humble and deeply aware of the limits of their knowledge. They will possess that wisdom which is essential for broadcasting the news and events without distorting reality.

They will display good counsel and the gift of discernment to communicate only what is worthwhile, especially in times like ours where there is a rising flood of information.

The Gospel presents Mary to us as the one who “treasured all these things in her heart”, says Luke (Lk 12:51). Yet no one ever spoke as she did when she gave life to the incarnate Word, and then gave him up on Golgotha.

When Mary stood at the foot of the cross, seemingly suspended in thin air, as Jesus was when he felt forsaken by the Father, she was in a way the embodiment of communication. Something similar happens when the communicator becomes such a perfect channel, or “medium,” that he or she almost disappears. It makes you think of something “transparent,” something that doesn’t seem to exist, but is actually there. “It is” because “it is not” – this is a characteristic of love. And this is one of the highest qualities of a mediator, of a communicator. The media themselves become perfect when the public forgets they are there.

As I have already said, throughout our history Mary has appeared to us not only as a masterpiece of virtue but also as an icon of the deepest Gospel law of knowing how to lose, to let go. But love, Gospel love, knows how to lose because it knows how to give. And because it gives, it also receives.

Mary at the foot of the cross, in order to do God’s will, for God, gave up Jesus himself... who was her masterpiece. But precisely since she let go of him, she found him again many times over. For that Jesus whom she had lost, her return could not be many “*half-Jesuses*,” but only authentic “*other Jesuses*” with his light and with his love, like him.

But Mary’s “desolation” did not come about all at once at the last moment of Jesus’ life. She had had an intense preparation for it throughout her entire life.

At the Annunciation it seemed she will have to change her own life plans. She would become the Mother of Jesus, although remaining a virgin.

Later she presented Jesus in the Temple where she hears her own future suffering being fore-announced: “And a sword will pierce through your own soul also” (Lk 2:35). These words diminished the joy she had experienced at the birth of her Son. Their echo will accompany her throughout her life, giving a rare sense of detachment to all she did.

When Jesus was 12 years old she lost him in Jerusalem. Together with Joseph, full of anguish, she searched for him and found him in the temple. But the explanation he gave them: “How is it that you sought me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?” (Lk 2:49) showed her clearly that he did not belong to her.

At the wedding feast of Cana, Jesus treated her with apparent severity: “Woman, what concern is that to you and me?” (Jn 2:4), calling her to an even greater love.

Then Mary followed Jesus in the difficult struggles of his fruitful public life, bright with glory, embittered by the gall of human ingratitude.

And at the foot of the cross, as we have said, on Calvary she pronounced her final “yes” in her desolation, in an abyss of suffering beyond all human capacity. There she stood firm (*stabat*) because of a special grace, which she merited through her life-long training in preparation for that hour. And so it was that Mary, preparing herself throughout her life to be alone, became the Mother of us all, of everyone in the world.

In looking to her, the icon of the deepest law of the Gospel which is knowing how to lose, experts in the field of communication can reach the fullness of their calling. In fact if we truly want to be receptive to people and events we must always be ready to lose everything, as Mary did at the foot of the cross, by setting ourselves aside before everything and every neighbor, by emptying ourselves. Only nothingness can receive everything into itself.

And so Mary Desolate will be an encouragement and example for us to be channels, pure messengers, true communicators.

Once again, I ask her – who made her heart a communicative space where God who is Love could speak His Word – to make each one of you, in this special Marian year, *new* men and women capable of starting and developing a form of communication in accord with the heart of God.

(Applause)