

**“The Ears of All Are Turned Upon You”:
The Vocation of Catholic Radio in the New Evangelization**

To Participants in the Global Catholic Radio Conference
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My friends, my brothers and sisters in Christ: How good it is to be here with you!

I'm grateful for this chance to talk to you about your vocation as Catholic radio operators. What a vital and noble apostolate you are engaged in! You share in the mission of the Church, the mission Christ gave to his apostles. You are servants of the gospel, servants of the Word of God.

Through your work, the voice of Christ, and the teachings of his Church, continue to sound throughout the Americas. Through your work, the Word of God remains living and active, searching the depths of human hearts, making known the mystery of God's love, calling men and women to his salvation.

More than 500 years after the gospel was first proclaimed in the New World of North and South America, you are the new evangelists of the Americas!

I come to you from San Antonio, one of the first fruits of America's first evangelization. In fact, this year we're celebrating a Jubilee in honor of the 275th anniversary of our San Fernando Cathedral. San Fernando is one of the first Catholic churches in North America, established in 1731, one year before the first president of the United States was even born.

Spanish-speaking missionaries—priests and families—founded our diocese. Even the name, *San Antonio*, reflects our city's Hispanic origins. It was named that because the Holy Eucharist was first celebrated along the riverbank there on the Feast of St. Anthony, in 1691.

Think about that, my brothers and sisters: the Word of God and the Eucharist were established in this land generations before the writing of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. How much of our country's history is shaped by our Hispanic Catholic heritage! It is even reflected in our geography. All you need is a map to see it. How many places, especially in the Southwest, are named in Spanish for saints, sacraments, and articles of our faith—*Santa Fe, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Corpus Christi, the Sangre de Cristos Mountains*.

Catholic Radio and the Secular Media Culture

I want to speak to all of you today about your vocation in Catholic radio. God calls each of us. This is the literal meaning of the word *vocation*. It is a "calling." It is a communication from God. While our Creator calls each of us, our individual callings are different—each of us plays a different part in God's plan of salvation, and each vocation poses its own unique challenges.

Catholic radio, as I said at the outset, shares in the mission that Christ gave to his Church—to preach his gospel to the ends of the earth. The gospel has already reached our shores; our country has already heard the good news—at least three centuries ago. But our country needs to hear the good news of the gospel again—and in a new way.

Many of our brothers and sisters have lost their way from the straight and narrow path of our Lord, Jesus Christ. Many admire the man, Jesus of Nazareth, but they don't believe he is *the Christ*, the son of the living God. They don't believe he came to found a Church, a Church in which he remains present until the end of the age in Word, Spirit, and sacrament. Many others are content to go about their days as if God doesn't exist.

In our consumer culture, faith in Jesus Christ is reduced to one of many lifestyle options in a vast marketplace of images and ideas, filled with false idols, false paths, false promises of happiness and redemption. This marketplace is the creation of the mass media— television, radio, movies, and, increasingly, the Internet.

This secular media culture is the broad arena in which you are called to fulfill your vocations as Catholic radio operators. You are called to transform this media culture, to reclaim it for Christ. If at times this seems like a David vs. Goliath struggle, never lose heart! If God is for us, who can stand against us? (Rom. 8:31)

Our first task must be to better understand this secular media culture, and how this culture is shaping our society and even our personalities.

What we think about and talk about as a society, and the terms of our public discourse, are largely determined by this media culture. People take their cues from the media to tell them what's important, and even what's true and real. Voices and viewpoints that aren't heard in the media—those of the poor, the elderly, the immigrant, and the unborn—are presumed to be unimportant, not worthy of our time.

Religion is either ignored or scorned in this media culture. Rarely do we hear about the faith of people in the news or characters on television or in the movies. When religion is mentioned, it's usually being mocked or criticized as old-fashioned, as reactionary, as something that takes the fun out of life. If religion is mentioned positively, it is said to be something private and personal, that a person has no business talking about his faith in public, especially not in political discussions.

This treatment of religion, in turn, has a deep effect on our Catholic people. Most Catholics, unfortunately, don't get their information about the faith from Catholic radio or the Catholic press. They get it from the secular media. Is it any wonder, then, that their understanding of the faith and the Church's teachings is often confused and distorted? Is it any wonder that Catholics in public life often offer an ambivalent witness to the faith?

The Culture of Constant Personal Communication

While molding opinions and lifestyles, this secular media culture is also changing the way we relate to one another.

On the one hand, these new technologies open fascinating new possibilities for the spread of the gospel. Many of you, I know, “stream” your broadcasts over the Internet. These new technologies enable your programs today to be heard around the world. Radio, once purely local, is now, thanks to Internet and satellite technology, a national and even global medium. And with the advent of portable media devices, people can now go anywhere and have access to your programs.

But my brothers and sisters, I worry about this new culture of constant personal communication. Is it a good thing that we are always “on call,” that we don’t have any “downtime”—any time when we’re not accessible by phone, or surfing the web and answering e-mail? Are we becoming a people who cannot be alone with our own thoughts, which have an obsessive need to be amused or entertained?

We don’t go anywhere anymore without our cell phones, BlackBerrys, iPods, and laptops. And we hardly notice, perhaps, that everywhere we go—stores, office buildings, even parish offices and chanceries—there is always some “soundtrack” playing, background music or the radio. There are televisions everywhere, in the most unlikely places. You can even watch TV while having your teeth cleaned at the dentist!

I worry that this constant barrage of sights and sounds is crowding out our capacity for contemplation, for prayer and conversation with God, for true community.

Our Holy Father, Benedict XVI, has said that men and women today receive so many communications that it seems impossible that they have room in their minds and hearts to hear the message of the gospel.

But that is the challenge of your vocation! In this media culture, you must find new ways to communicate the urgency and the appeal of the gospel.

In Benedict's words, you must communicate that the gospel is "not one bit of information among others . . . but rather *the key*, a message of an entirely different sort from the plethora of information that assaults us day after day" ("Communication and Culture," in *On the Way to Jesus Christ*, p. 43).

Jesus Christ is the "Key" Message

Jesus Christ is that key that the Holy Father speaks of! The Word you proclaim is not like any other message that assaults us in our media culture. In the new culture of the media, you bear the only message that can change people's lives and destinies, forever. There is no greater message that this medium of radio can deliver than the personal encounter with Jesus Christ!

In your programs, I urge you, keep the face of Christ ever before your listeners. Help them to open their hearts to the mystery of God, the mystery of the God who is love, the God who revealed his face in Christ Jesus. Help your listeners understand that Jesus Christ is the true Word that they've been searching for, whether they realize it or not. He alone tells us the truth about who we are and how we are to live.

It is important, too, that in your broadcasts, you teach the essential and indivisible bond that unites Jesus to his Church. There is a bad tendency today to treat Jesus as if he was merely a historical figure, a holy man perhaps, but not the Son of God. And there is an equally bad tendency to treat the Church as merely a venerable old institution, guided by human prejudices and weakness.

It is our job, the work of the new evangelization, to proclaim anew the divinity of Christ, and also the supernatural character of the Church. Jesus is the Word made flesh, the only son of the Father. The Church is the spouse and the body of Christ, joined as one flesh to him on the cross and in the Eucharist. And what God has joined we should let no one in this culture divide.

It is important to stress that the Church lives in constant dialogue with Jesus Christ, that she is always pondering and praying over the Word of God, that she is always guided by his Holy Spirit. And when the Church speaks on the issues of the day, she speaks with the voice of Christ. “He who hears you, hears me,” he told his disciples (Luke 10:16).

We need to insist upon this truth. Only the real Jesus—true God and true man—can save us. And he has chosen to speak and to save through his Church. The Church has no authority but the authority of Christ. The Church has no power but the power of Christ. And it is only through the Church—through her teachings and sacraments—that men and women can meet Jesus Christ and experience his saving power.

There is a crucial need to re-educate our Catholic people in the basic “content” of our faith. This is an important part of your mission as Catholic broadcasters. You must help fight not only religious indifference, but also religious *ignorance*. In the face of false teachers and bad examples, especially in the secular media, many Catholics, unfortunately, no longer know what they believe or why they hold their beliefs. In the face of a culture that denies the existence of moral truths, many of our people are confused about how to live.

The new evangelization, then, means finding new ways to communicate the truths of the faith so they can be understood by the people of our time. To this end, I urge you to promote prayer among your listeners. Daily prayer will get people into the habit of living and thinking about their lives in light of Christ's saving truths. I urge you also to encourage our people to learn the *Catechism*. The publication of the new *National Adult Catechism* and the new *Compendium of the Catechism* should mean that every Catholic has access to the truths of the faith in a format they can easily understand.

Remember that you have a great responsibility for forming men and women in the faith. This formation is not only a matter of providing facts or information. You are helping to form them in the ways of God, helping them grow in their knowledge and love of Jesus, helping them become the men and women that God created them to be. The new evangelization must always be about deepening your listeners' friendship and discipleship with Jesus Christ.

The True Light and Life of the World

I also hope that in your programs you will show people the light of Christ.

There is much that is sad and dark in our world. But we cannot dwell there; we can't let the darkness of the culture dictate our agenda. The new evangelization is not about cursing the darkness. It's about proclaiming the light that shines out in the darkness, the light that is the life of the world, the true light that enlightens every man and woman (John 1:5, 9; 8:12).

Our faith in Christ and his Church is not a refuge, a hiding place, from the darkness. Our faith is not simply a “no” to what is crooked and perverse. Our faith is a “yes” to Christ and to the promises of God (2 Cor. 1:20).

We hear again and again in the media that the Church is simply a negative, reactionary force, that it only says “no.” But we proclaim good news, the best news that anyone could ever hope to hear.

In your programs, be bearers of glad tidings. Tell your listeners how in Jesus Christ they can find the answers to their deepest yearnings. Present for them the simple joys of Christian living, of finding God in the ordinary and the everyday, in worship, and in caring service to our families and neighbors. Show them the beauty and dignity, the holiness that is to be found in living as a child of God.

Let them know the beauty and richness of our tradition—all the centuries of great Catholic art, music, and literature, our contributions to science and the world of culture; the heroism and holiness of our saints. And help your listeners to understand that God is calling each of them to great things, too—to holiness and to share in the mission of building up his kingdom on earth as it is in heaven.

In this media culture you can perform a great positive service. All around us we see the images and hear the sounds of what I call a growing “culture of revenge.” Your medium, especially, is dominated by talk shows. But unlike your programs, most of these talk shows manipulate emotions, foment divisions, and stir up anger and resentment. If you had only talk radio to go by, you would think that our culture is in a constant state of bitter argument.

This infects our politics and our society as well. We no longer seem to have conversations aimed at reaching mutual understanding or a peaceful resolution of differences. Instead we have shouting matches, with people trying to punish or humiliate their opponents by dirty tricks or just abusive and insulting language.

In this poisonous environment, you are called to bear witness to the gospel of peace, mercy and forgiveness.

It is natural to seek our own selfish interests. It is natural to be angry with those who have hurt us. It is even natural to wish them harm or even to try and inflict harm upon them. But you are bearers of a *supernatural* message, that we can transcend our human natures, that by grace we are capable of the heights of love—and that special form of love, forgiveness.

You must bring to the airwaves the spirit of forgiveness and reconciliation. From the rich storehouse of the Church's tradition, present them with examples and lessons of forgiveness and mercy. Use your position to teach people how to heal and rebuild relationships, how to support one another. Remind them that Christian love requires that we have hearts ready to forgive.

In fact, we can only forgive those who have trespassed against us because God forgives our trespasses. And our Lord has presented us with a stark truth, that we will be judged as we judge others, that if we do not forgive others, we cannot expect the Father to forgive us (Matt. 6:15).

Hold Fast to the Word of Life

Finally, I want to speak to you about your own holiness, about your own interior lives.

The apostle Paul said that Christians must “shine as lights in the world, holding fast to the Word of life” (Phil. 2:15-16). Are you holding fast to the Word of life? Does the Word that you so boldly proclaim to others in your apostolate, dwell richly in your own hearts? (Col. 3:10; Eph. 3:17).

You who work in direct service of the Lord and his Church face unique spiritual pressures and temptations. When you work, as you do, airing news and other programs about the Word of God, about events and figures in the Church, the Word can lose its savor and its power for you. You can start to grow complacent. You can be tempted to think “you’ve heard it all before,” that this Word is meant more for the people you serve and not so much for you. You can be tempted to think that you don’t have to pray as much or to learn more about your faith because you’re engaged with these issues all day long at work.

There is another problem, too. In your work, you see the Church at its best *and* at its worst. You see its saints *and* its sinners. You confront the very real “human” element in the Church. In this you can become frustrated, and be tempted to forget the true, divine character of the Church, that God is still working through the Church, despite our human weakness and failings.

These are natural temptations; they naturally afflict anyone who works for the Church, in a parish or a chancery office, or in any apostolate of service.

That's why it's important for you to always keep in mind the great dignity of your vocation. As Catholic communicators you play an instrumental role in God's plan of salvation, a plan that extends back to the beginning of the world. God communicated by word and deed to Adam and Eve, to Abraham, to Moses. He spoke to Israel through his prophets, and in the inspired words of sacred Scripture. Finally, in Jesus, the Word of God was made flesh.

As Pope John Paul II said, "The communication between God and humanity . . . reached its perfection in the Word made flesh" (*The Rapid Development*, Apostolic Letter to those Responsible for Communications, no. 5)

The mission that Jesus gave to his Church is to continue that divine communication with humanity—to proclaim his gospel from the rooftops. This communication is intended to bring about communion—the gathering of all men and women into the life of God, a sharing in his body and blood.

The Ears of All Are Turned Upon You

Yours is no ordinary job! As God once spoke to the world through his prophets and apostles, today he calls *you* to use this medium of radio to carry his Word to the ends of the earth. What an awesome privilege and responsibility.

St. Jerome once said: "The eyes of all are turned upon you. Your house is set on a watchtower. . . .Whatever you do, all [will] think that they may do the same" (*Letter 60*, 15).

These words apply to your vocation. The *ears* of all are turned upon *you*. You are the voice of the gospel in this culture. The Catholic faithful, and non-Catholics, too, turn to your broadcasts as they would to a watchtower. Think of your radio towers, as a watchtower, a beacon, a light for the lost. The news you broadcast, the stories you tell, the inspirational programs you offer, will form their consciences and guide their actions, and it may effect their eternal salvation.

The new evangelization is a big responsibility. And it can only be carried out if it flows from a life of prayer, from a life committed to growing in holiness. To those whom much has been given, much will be required. The Lord has given you this grand responsibility. And what he requires of you is an ever-deeper commitment to being his disciple.

My brothers and sisters, keep growing closer to Jesus; keep trying every day to live more the way he did; keep meeting him in the Eucharist, in the Bible, and in prayer. Keep growing, too, in your love for his Church and in your knowledge of her teachings, especially her social doctrine.

Turn always to the Scriptures for guidance in your vocation. The Scriptures will teach you to speak on your channels only truth, only what is good to edify and sanctify your brothers and sisters (Eph. 4:25,29). The Scriptures will teach you to give voice above all else to what is true, honorable, just, and worthy of praise (Phil. 4:8).

Remember that you are entrusted with communicating a wisdom that leads to communion with God who is love. And the human ear will never truly be able to hear all that God has prepared for those who love him (1 Cor 2:9).

I thank you for the honor of being able to address you.

And I pray that our Blessed Mother Mary—in whose womb the Word took flesh; who heard the Word and kept it, pondering it in her heart—I pray that Mary will help all of us to communicate that Word, in all its beauty and truth, to the ends of the earth (*The Rapid Development*, 14).