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Audience with a Delegation of the “Biagio Agnes” International Journalism Award

At 12.30 today, in the Clementine Hall of the Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis will receive in audience a delegation of the “Biagio Agnes” International Journalism Award.

The following is the Pope’s address to those present at the meeting:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear friends,

Welcome! I greet and thank Dr. Simona Agnes, the members of the Jury and all of you present, who in various capacities cover important roles in communication. The Foundation that promotes the Award bears the name of Biagio Agnes, one of the best known Italian journalists, defender of public service, who repeatedly spoke regarding the role of the journalist as the guarantor of correct, reliable, authentic and timely information.

By taking to heart his teaching, you all commit yourselves, first of all personally, to a communication able to place the truth before personal or corporate interests. In addition, by observing what is produced by the cultural industry, with this award you indicate to society those journalists who are distinguished by responsibility in the exercise of their profession. Indeed, being a journalist relates to the formation of people, their vision of the world and their attitudes when faced with events. It is a demanding job, which at the moment is experiencing a season characterized, on the one hand, by digital convergence and, on the other, by the transformation of the very same *media*.

Often I happen to see, on the occasion of apostolic trips or other meetings, a difference in production methods: from the classic TV crews to the boys and girls who, using a mobile phone, know how to package news for a portal. Or even from traditional radios to full interviews carried out using a cell phone. All this shows that we are indeed experiencing a urgent transformation in the forms and languages of information. It is difficult to enter into this process of transformation, but it is increasingly necessary if we wish to continue to be educators of the new

generations. I said it was difficult, and I would add that wise vigilance is needed. Indeed, “when media and the digital world become omnipresent, their influence can stop people from learning how to live wisely, to think deeply and to love generously. In this context, the great sages of the past run the risk of going unheard amid the noise and distractions of an information overload” (Encyclical Letter *Laudato si'*, 47).

There are no recipes, but I would like to underline three words: peripheries, truth and hope.

Peripheries. Very often, the nerve centres of news production are found in large centres. But this should never make us forget the stories of people living far away in the peripheries. They are at times stories of suffering and degradation; other times they are stories of great solidarity that can help everyone to look at reality in a renewed way.

Truth. We all know that a journalist is required to write what he thinks, what corresponds to his informed and responsible understanding of an event. It is necessary to be very demanding with oneself so as not to fall into the trap of logics of opposing interests or ideologies. Today, in a world where everything is fast, it is increasingly urgent to appeal to the troubled and arduous law of in-depth research, comparison and, if necessary, also of remaining silent rather than harming a person or a group of people or delegitimizing an event. I know it is difficult, but the story of a life is understood at its end, and this should help us to become courageous and prophetic.

Hope. It is not about telling of a world without problems: it would be an illusion. It is a matter of opening spaces of hope while denouncing situations of degradation and despair. A journalist should not feel satisfied with the mere fact of having reported on an event, according to his own free and conscious responsibility. He or she is called upon to keep open an space for exit, meaning, hope.

I conclude by recalling one of the initiatives that the Biagio Agnes Foundation, thanks to the tenacity of its president, is carrying forth: the Forum for scientific education, “Check-Up for Italy”, a project that arose from an idea of Biagio Agnes, with the aim of advancing medical and scientific issue through accurate information to counter the proliferation of “DIY” information and vague news that one increasingly finds on the web and which attract public attention far more than science. The Pontifical Council for Culture concluded an international congress on these very issues just a few weeks ago. In this regard, I would like to reiterate that “a broad, responsible scientific and social debate needs to take place, one capable of considering all the available information and of calling things by their name. It sometimes happens that complete information is not put on the table; a selection is made on the basis of particular interests, be they politico-economic or ideological” (Encyclical Letter *Laudati si'*, 135).

I thank you again and offer my congratulations to the award winners. And, please, remember to pray for me.
