WORLD COMMUNICATIONS SUNDAY
(2ND June 2019)

(This is not a homily as such but the following are some of the ideas in the <u>Pope Francis's exhortation</u> for Communications Sunday 2019)

Ever since the internet first became available, the Church sees it as a vehicle for forging closer links between peoples.

Today's social media environment is so pervasive as to be part and parcel of everyday life. It is a vital accessary for most. The Net is a source of knowledge and relationships that were once unthinkable. If the Internet represents an extraordinary possibility of access to knowledge, it is also true that it can be a vehicle for disinformation where facts can be distorted and used to discredit those on the receiving end which may lead to the straining of relationships.

Statistics show for instance that among young people one in four has been at the receiving end of cyber bullying.

The metaphor of the 'net' was the basis of the Internet to begin with. We become networked together on an equal footing as it were. The internet is not a top-down structure.

When used properly the internet should promote genuine community. Often it has the opposite effect. Through the web, for instance, we can vent every kind of prejudice fuelling hatred and division rather than genuine bonds.

The Net is an opportunity to promote encounter with others, but it can also increase our self-isolation, like a web that can entrap us. Young people can easily succumb to the illusion that the web can satisfy all their social requirements. There is the dangerous phenomenon of young people becoming "social hermits" and alienating themselves from society at large. This is something we cannot ignore.

As Christians, we all recognize ourselves as members of the one body whose head is Christ. "Nothing, in fact, is as specific to our nature as entering into communion one with another. We need each other if our potential as human being is ever going to flower.

The Trinity itself is a 'community of persons, Father Son and Holy Spirit' united in the bonds of love. So our communication with each other through the 'net' must be based on mutual respect as members of the Body of Church formed as we are in God's image and likeness.

The image of the body reminds us that the use of the social web is complementary to our encounter with others in the flesh. If a family uses the Net to be more connected, but then meet at table and look into each other's eyes, then it is a resource for the good. If a Church community coordinates its activity through the network, and then celebrates the Eucharist together, it is fulfilling its mission. If the Net becomes an opportunity to share stories and experiences of suffering members of our human family both at home and abroad resulting in prayer and positive action, then it's a genuine asset.

This is the network we want, a network created not to entrap, but to liberate, to protect and built up community and not divide. The Church herself is a network woven together by Eucharistic communion, where unity is based not on tenuous social media links but flesh and blood communities. Only then be a source of genuine good in our divided world.