**RMG - "Educating and Evangelizing Today in the Digital Habitat. Together with young people, toward the future": Part Four**

**(ANS - Rome) -** The publication of the series of articles by Fr. Gildasio Mendes, General Councilor for Social Communication - on the theme "Educating and Evangelizing Today in the Digital Habitat. Together with young people, toward the future" - continues. Today the fourth article is being presented, which aims to open a window on our view of the digital in the context of vast technological transformations.

How to educate and evangelize today in the digital habitat? Many of us ask ourselves this question. The Church and the Salesian Congregation invite us to learn more about this habitat and how to evangelize it.

Today, practically, the Internet and social networks form a new map in the world of relationships, politics, economics, and culture. To inhabit this environment as a Christian and, above all, to evangelize people is not a simple task. We need to deepen, know and broaden our vision of what this digital universe is all about.

In Part IV of this series, I would like to present a broader vision of the digital, where the Internet, for example, is not just a digital technological space, and where a human relationship in social networks touches something more profound in the human person.

The purpose of this Part IV is to open a window that allows us to broaden our view of the digital in the context of major technological transformations, keeping the human person as the protagonist. A turn in the digital beginning with the cultural and ritual dimensions of media.

I would like to start with a few simple affirmations that can help us enter this topic.

Illness is associated with human reality. Love is an expression of a profound human sentiment. Food. music, football, the way we dress, the way we celebrate a birthday or a religious holiday are human and cultural expressions. Death is an expression of anthropological reality.

This premise is fundamental to understanding that communication in all its dimensions - at the interpersonal, social, communal, and virtual levels - has as its central root the human person embedded in their culture and rituals, which reveal the strength and richness of the human. Moreover, this view of the virtual, starting from a broader notion of the human, helps us avoid some dualism between the person and the digital, physical reality and virtual reality, the off-line and the online.

This broader look at virtualization from an anthropological point of view gives us a broader way of interpreting our virtual real time and space, thus changing how we sometimes evaluate, for example, internet addiction, the dichotomy between working remotely or in-presence, education by new or traditional methods.

This issue deserves a separate, more in-depth study. Here, I would just like to introduce a few points that help us expand our view of the virtual from human rituals, symbols, art, culinary, and myth.

Personally, I define the Internet as a vast network of human and cultural rituals. On the internet, we find art, cuisine, politics, fashion, sports, music, movies, shopping, the relationships between people, information about daily life, religious content, life and death rituals. The human person communicates because he or she is always looking for meaning, a way to express his or her freedom and dreams.

They propose an interpretation of the digital starting from anthropological and cultural phenomena, such as language and its codes, as fundamental elements for digital communication, symbols as a metaphor for digital language, and the social rituals of daily life (dialogue, meetings, gatherings) as a way of establishing interactivity. In the huge mosaic of the online world, we find a real network of sociocultural elements that are people's own characteristics.

When we talk about fashion, food, music, games, we are talking about anthropological aspects, that is, how to understand people within their culture. One of the research segments that is growing a lot in this area is *digital ethnography* and *netnography*.

It is interesting in this regard, and deserving of further research and study, how people used social media during the Covid-19 crisis, whether to find information, to help others, to express grief and sympathy to the relatives of the victims, or to express concern regarding the virus. Moreover, a human phenomenon (the disease) became a reason for fostering interest to communicate, to be online, to participate in the virtual community.

This is why we have to look at the Internet as part of our lives, as an expression and extension of human rituals. I think that from these rituals, from these anthropological and cultural elements, we can better understand what is happening in the universe of communication and in the changing world. In addition, we are urged to accompany the evolution of technology. For example, 5G will bring another big change in the way we communicate, especially by enabling faster access with greater capacity to handle data and information.

The mobile Internet is growing everywhere in the world. The world of communication is, in itself, simple. However, considering the speed of digital transformation, it is always important to accompany and give an educational response to the new that there is and will be in this field.

I think the dialogue between education and digital is fundamental for the new generation and the generations of the future. Because the anthropological view of the digital is important for education today. An anthropological view of the digital environment allows us an openness to a systemic, human, and cultural dialogue with the dynamics of technology and the digital environment.

I believe, as I have said before, that people seek out social networks to share elements of their lives that are typically cultural expressions such as cuisine, music, fashion, painting, literature, games, creating groups for socializing, friendship relationships, affection, sexuality, experiencing life and death rituals. In other words, the Internet is the immense habitat where people experience the rituals that are part of their ordinary lives.

Social media is like an extension of life made up of rituals. Without these rituals, the internet would be empty, it would have no appeal for establishing relationships or even for browsing. The rituals of life and culture and society fuel the virtual universe.

What has Amazon done? It organized online the products and things we generally find in stores. What is one of the great successes of Tik Tok? Communication through action skits, which gives freedom in expressing in the virtual the rituals of daily life, such as dancing. What moves Spotify? Music, artistic expression, cultural expression, ritual. What has Spotify done? Make music available online.

Evidently, once music was digitized, and with the new virtual dynamic (such as hyperlink), technology favored speed, the ability to organize files, data, interactivity, instantaneity, and made it all available to whoever is connected online.

At the level of pedagogy's dialogue with the digital, I emphasize the importance of games and art. Art (music, theater, dance, painting) and play offer elements of psychodynamics, aspects of multiple intelligence and neuroscience, as well as aesthetic and technical aspects. For example, the technical structure of art offers numerical and geometric, aesthetic data, as well as all its psychological and educational richness; it offers technical elements such as design, interfaces, systems, geometric elements contained in virtual tools and spaces, and psychological, cognitive, affective and neurological structures.

I also believe that the presence of the educator, through human relationships, gives the capacity to create bonds of friendship, be associated with the visions of human psychology, with emotional intelligence in the expressions of human sensitivity and intuition. Human relationship is, indeed, fundamental to education.

The commitment to an integrated dialogue between the human person and the digital shall always require a wide-ranging, open, and interdisciplinary gaze or outlook. This attitude will enable an interdisciplinary dialogue, which is indispensable in our times.

In Part V of this series, I would like to introduce the methodology of communication in the digital habitat from two biblical texts: the disciples of Emmaus and the Good Shepherd. Our aim is to find paths that foster a broad look at the digital, seeking an integration between the message and the methodology of the Gospel, in order to dialogue with persons in the digital habitat.