



FAKE NEWS, FAKE PRODUCTS DETRIMENTAL TO SUSTIANABLE LIFE

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ABUJA, NIGERIA -

The negative and dangerous impact of fake news and fake products in the different facets of life cannot be controverted; and they have caused damages to life and relationships in communities, societies and countries in different parts of the world. Thus, fakeness or falsehood is not limited to the media alone, but in all facets of life; and has led to crisis in the society, families and communities; wars among nations; as well as avoidable deaths in other aspects of human existence.

This assertion was made by the Director of Social Communications, Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria (CSN), Rev. Fr. Chris Anyanwu, in his homily at the celebration of the 52nd World Communications Day, held at the St Gabriel Chaplaincy Church, Durumi, Abuja, last Sunday. Premising his homily on the 2018 World Communications Day message of the Holy Father, titled: "The truth will set you free; Fake news and Journalism for peace,"; the CSN director noted that the aftermath of fakeness or falsehood is inimical to the common good of humanity and cannot be limited to the dissemination of fake news by the media but also available in all other aspects of human endeavours.

According to the homilist: "Pope Francis wants us to focus on the phenomenon of 'fake news.' The questions that immediately come to my mind include: Why does fake news pre-occupy the attention of Pope Francis at this time? What is fake news? What makes news fake? More importantly what are the consequences of fake news in the lives of individuals and society?"

Using some biblical references and life stories to buttress his submission on the negative impact of fake news, Fr. Anayanwu noted that "Fake news" is real. He continued: "Just like we have fake people, we equally have fake products, fake medicine and fake drugs". If you ask a motor-mechanic in Nigeria to change your car break-pad, the first thing he will ask you is: "Do you want the original or the fake one." The fake one is cheap, but the original is more expensive.

The homilist, however regretted that: "The tragedy of the Nigeria state is that many Nigerian business men and women with the collaboration of high powered men in government, flood our markets with all types of substandard products in the name of making money at the expense of human lives. You can imagine how many millions of lives have been lost as a result of fake drugs and medicine that people have brought into this country? What about many lives that have been lost through car accidents as a result of fake motor-parts that was used to service cars? What about fake water bottles that have caused many diseases. Sometimes, I wonder how God will judge us especially those who have deliberately traded on blossoming businesses at the expense of human lives".

The CSN Director went further to analyze fake news, its destructive tendencies and consequences and the guidelines

provided by Pope Francis on how to counter the negative impacts of fake news in the society. His words: "Pope Francis on his own part gives us some guidelines on how to improve our communications praxis and interpersonal relationship". These include: Learning to read and evaluate information and Self-education ourselves to enable discernment, evaluation and reflection on what moves each of our hearts, in such a way that we can act with true freedom and not because of confused self-interest.

Others include: Supporting the Common Good; Drawing near to God and the need to focus on persons. Quoting the Holy Father, Fr. Anyanwu declared: "The best antidote to falsehoods is not some strategy, but persons: persons who, free of greed, are ready to listen and to permit the truth to emerge through the hard work of sincere dialogue; persons drawn to the good who make responsible use of language. If the way to avoid the spread of disinformation is responsibility, then the one who has a special obligation is the one who by profession has the duty to inform: that is the journalist, the guardian of the news. "

The Pope concluded: "The journalist not only carries out a job in our modern world, but also has what is a genuine mission in itself. In the frenzy of newsgathering and the whirlwind of breaking news, he or she has the task of remembering that the focus of the news is not how fast it can be reported and its impact on ratings, but persons. To inform is to educate, to involve oneself in the life of persons".