

## Message of the Prefect of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development for the World Day of Fishing 2025

**“We have not caught anything, but at your word I will let down the nets” (Luke 5:5)**

Dear brothers and sisters,

in this Jubilee Year 2025 the central message of hope accompanies us. In his convocation of the same Jubilee, Pope Francis began by mentioning St. Paul: “hope does not disappoint” (Rom 5:5). Without a doubt, the Apostle to the Nations had traveled the seas many times, even been shipwrecked, although always fortified by hope in Christ. And how can we not recall the ancient ways that Christian pilgrims traveled not only on foot but also by sea?

Put out into the deep and let down the nets! Christ says to his disciples. This is a call to hope, to have faith! And St. Peter answers: ““We have not caught anything, but at your word I will let down the nets” (Luke 5:5). This is what fishermen do every day. They let down their nets with hope.

Each since 1998, is celebrated the World Day of Fishing is celebrated on 21 November. Its objective is to call attention to the way of life in the fishing sector. It also supports sustainable fishing, recognizing and rendering homage to the fishing communities of all the world and highlighting the importance of this activity for human life and the health of ecosystems. Besides the Jubilee, this year marks the tenth anniversary of the encyclical *Laudato si'* (LS) of Pope Francis, which dedicates significant attention to the care of the seas and oceans, considering them part of the “common home” and of the global ecological equilibrium. “Many of the poor live in areas particularly affected by phenomena related to warming, and their means of subsistence are largely dependent on natural reserves and ecosystemic services such as (...) fishing” (LS 25). Pope Francis also referred to destructive methods of fishing with their fateful consequences and also linked the crisis of the oceans with unjust working conditions in the fishing industry, the trafficking in persons and the impact on impoverished coastal communities. (cf. LS 33, 41, 142). The seas are not only a physical reality, but also a spiritual space of



interdependence between the human being and all Creation. In a special way, fishermen can be guardians of Creation. Lamentably, many fishermen face storms far beyond the seas: low income, job insecurity, poor working conditions, being far from their families. We must not forget that behind each catch there is a life, a family, a call to integral development!

Highly industrialized fishing is also a great threat for artisanal fleets as it decreases the catch that remains. In addition, the large ships leave contaminated residues that damage coastal ecosystems. On board the large industrial fishing tankers, the crews remain for months, living in reduced and uncomfortable spaces, away from their families, with work hours that often exceed legislated limits. Many of them are migrants, who in some cases are contracted under discriminatory conditions. So, the fishing sector in general has a sinister side: according to the International Labor Organization, fishing and the occupations related to it are some of the most dangerous professions (cf. *Safety and Health in the Fishing Industry: Report for discussion at the Tripartite Meeting on Safety and Health in the Fishing Industry*, Geneva, 1999). By contrast, St. Pope John Paul II reminds us: “human work is a key, probably the essential key, to the whole social question, if we try to see that question really from the point of view of man's good” (LE 3).

The recent apostolic exhortation *Dilexi te* (DT) of Pope Leo XIV has some illuminating paragraphs on the sinful structures that cause extreme poverty and inequalities in. These structures of injustice are “social sin” (DT, 90-93). This also applies to the world of fishing, considering that in the value chain of fishing the active assumption of responsibilities is lacking due to the nature and the immensity of the oceans, and it is extremely difficult to control human activities there (cf. *Orientations Aqua Fons vitae*, Vatican, 2020 § 87 and 89). Nonetheless, “we need to be increasingly committed to resolving the structural causes of poverty” (DT 94), also in the fishing sector. This commitment involves valuing and promoting human dignity. It is evident that the care of the seas and fishing is intimately tied to the care of persons. Besides the controls that are necessary to apply the laws and measures pertaining to working conditions of fishermen, in this World Day of Fishing, it is important to emphasize the need to watch over the defense of the dignity of the fishermen (including those engaging in aquaculture) and their families, seeking their integral development. Voice must be given to fishermen lest the policies and laws that affect them be discussed only by those who “live and reason from the comfortable position of a high level of development and a quality of life well beyond the reach of the majority of the world’s population” (LS 49). John Paul II always spoke to us of the corresponsibility of those who dedicated themselves to fishing on both



the small or large scale, as well as the different forms of solidarity in free associations. We should encourage the active participation of all who work in fishing in decisions that affect their life and work (Address of Pope John Paul II to Participants in the World Conference of the FAO on Fisheries Management and Development 1984).

The Church, through the Work of the Apostolate of the Sea, aims to be present where fishermen and sailors are suffering the most. In coastal parishes and in ports, the chaplains and voluntaries accompany those who endure long absences from their families, dangerous working conditions and hard days at sea, becoming also spokespersons for their dignity. Thank you for this service!

We commend all sailors, fishermen and their families to the maternal protection, of Mary, Stella Maris. Even when tired, in the midst of the storm, lacking decent conditions of life, far from families and friends, having caught nothing, nevertheless with the faith of St Peter, “at your command, I will lower the nets” (Luke 5:5). May Mary guide and protect those who plow the seas and, with her maternal intercession, sustain everyone in hope, in justice and in the commitment to the care of the seas.