

PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR THE PASTORAL CARE OF MIGRANTS AND ITINERANT PEOPLE



Sea Sunday Message 2010

(11th July 2010)

Dear chaplains, volunteers, friends and supporters of the Apostleship of the Sea,

the International Maritime Organization (IMO) has declared the 2010 “Year of the Seafarer” to pay tribute to the 1.5 million seafarers for their unique contribution to the society, and increase awareness on the difficult situations created by nature, but often also by people, in which many of them found themselves, while sailing across the seas of the world.

As seafarers are usually defined as “invisible people”, passing quickly through the ports, the annual celebration of Sea Sunday invites the Christian communities to see and recognize them as “real people” who, with their hard work and sacrifices, make our life more comfortable.

The seafarers are workers different from the ones on land, also because we do not see them going to work every day. Their contract requires from them to leave wife, children, family and friends, for a long period of time. They sail from port to port often in isolated places with little time to go ashore before they sail out again. The perimeter of the vessel is the limit of their world, the confine space of the cabin is their home and they share their work with people of different nationalities and religions, often using a “Babel of languages” to communicate. For seafarers loneliness is a constant companion, injustices are frequent. Moreover in these times of economic crisis crews are easily abandoned in foreign ports, pirates attacks are becoming more frequent and when an accident occurs criminalization and detention are sometimes the price they pay on behalf of the vessel owner or the charter.

The technological progress has made many changes on the maritime world improving safety and reliability of the vessels and fast turnaround in port but little has changed on the human needs of seafarers and fishers. These needs are simple, a warm welcome in a foreign country, a van to transport them to the city, a telephone or a computer to connect with their family and loved ones, a priest to celebrate the Holy Mass – if they are Catholic – or bless them, a friend to listen to their stories and problems, a volunteer or a pastoral agent to visit them in hospital or in jail.

The Apostleship of the Sea was founded by a small group of committed people in Glasgow on the 4th October 1920, to provide spiritual and material assistance to “neglected” Catholic seafarers and to provide for their needs. Since then it has grown behind any expectation, and in

looking back at its humble beginning, we can see the providential hand of God in the way in which the Apostolate has spread throughout the world.

Providing pastoral care, especially through ship visiting, for seafarers and fishers remains our main concern as it was at the origin of this Apostolate. Therefore, we would like to encourage everyone to continue to support this “Work” hoping that the local Churches will be more and more involved in this pastoral care.

The Apostleship of the Sea, with its network of “Stella Maris” and Centers around the world, is always available to respond to the seafarers’ requests, welcoming them in ‘a home away from home’ and making their life a little easier.

The chaplains and volunteers in many ports of the world are visiting hundreds of vessels, welcoming thousands of seafarers of all religions and nationalities offering counseling, clothing, telephone cards, money and providing ‘a safe and secure port’ in time of crisis and also, last but not least, helping to maintain in their life the openness towards the transcendental values.

On the international and national level the Apostleship of the Sea also does advocacy work to promote seafarers rights and provide justice for seafarers.

In remembering its 90th Foundation Anniversary and celebrating the Year of the Seafarer, we would like to make an appeal to the States to speed up the ratification of the 2006 Maritime Labor Convention, a fundamental instrument to improve the working and living conditions of seafarers.

Finally everyone on this occasion is invited to pause for a moment and pray for them and their families and recommend to Mary, *Star of the Sea*, the chaplains and volunteers that every day generously walk along piers, climb gang ways and show love and concern for “*those who for various reasons live and work in the maritime world*” (Motu Proprio *Stella Maris*, Introduction).

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