

PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR THE PASTORAL CARE OF MIGRANTS AND ITINERANT PEOPLE



Sea Sunday Message

(13th July 2014)

Throughout the history of mankind, the sea was the place where routes of explorers and adventurers intersected, and where battles determined the rise and fall of many nations. But it is, above all, a privileged place for exchange of goods and global trade. Actually, over 90% of merchandises worldwide are transported by nearly 100,000 ships, that unrelenting, are sailing from one end of the world to the other, run by a workforce of approximately 1.2 million seafarers of all races, nationalities and religions.

During this Sea Sunday, we are invited to become aware of the hardships and difficulties that seafarers face daily and of the valuable service provided by the Apostleship of the Sea in being Church who bears witness of the Lord's mercy and tenderness in order to preach the Gospel in the ports of the whole world.

Due to a number of factors related to their profession, seafarers are invisible to us and to our society. As we celebrate Sea Sunday, I wish to invite every Christian to look around and realize how many of the objects we use in our daily lives have come to us through the hard and laborious work of seafarers.

If we observe their lives carefully, we immediately realize that they are certainly not as romantic and adventurous as sometimes is shown in films and novels.

The life of seafarers is difficult and dangerous. In addition to having to face the rage and power of nature, that often prevails even upon the most modern and technologically advanced ships (according to the International Maritime Organization [IMO] in 2012, more than

1,000 seafarers have died as a result of shipwrecks, maritime collisions, etc.), we should not forget the risk of piracy, which is never defeated it but is transformed in new and different ways and is manifested in many maritime routes, and also the danger of criminalization and abandonment without wages, food and protection in foreign ports.

The sea, the ship and the port are the universe of life of seafarers. A ship is economically viable only when sailing and, therefore, must continually sail from one port to another. The mechanization of cargo-handling operations has reduced the time of berthing and the free time of crew members, while security measures have restricted the opportunities to go ashore.

Seafarers do not choose their companions of journey. Each crew is a microcosm of people from different nationalities, cultures and religions, forced to live together in the limited area of a ship for the duration of the contract, without any interest in common, communicating with an idiom that often is not theirs.

For seafarers loneliness and isolation are traveling companions. By its nature, the work of seafarers bring them to be away, even for long periods, from their family environment. For the crews is not always easy to have access to the numerous technologies (telephone, wi-fi, etc.) for contacting family and friends. In most cases, children are born and grow up without their presence, thus increasing the sense of loneliness and isolation that accompanies their life.

The Church, in her maternal concern, for over ninety years has been providing her pastoral care to the people of the sea throughout the *Work of the Apostleship of the Sea*.

Every year thousands of seafarers are welcomed in ports, at the *Stella Maris Centers*, distinctive places where seafarers are warmly received, can relax away from the ship and contact family members using different means of communication made available to them.

The volunteers daily visit seafarers on ships, in hospitals and those who are abandoned in foreign ports, ensuring a word of consolation but also concrete support when needed.

The chaplains are always available to offer spiritual assistance (celebration of the Eucharist, ecumenical prayers, etc.) to seafarers of all nationalities who are in need, especially in times of difficulty and crisis.

Finally, the Apostleship of the Sea gives voice to those who often have no voice, denouncing abuses and injustices, defending the rights of the people of the sea and asking to the maritime industry and to the individual governments to respect international Conventions.

While, during this Sea Sunday, we express our gratitude to all those who work in the maritime industry, with a trusting heart we ask Mary, *Star of the Sea* to guide, enlighten

and protect the sailing of the whole people of the sea and support the members of the Apostleship of the Sea in their pastoral ministry.

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