

Sea Sunday Message 2008

Sea Sunday is annually a day set aside for the remembrance and prayer for all those who are mariners, fishers, port workers together with their families and dependents. This is therefore an opportunity for us to remember the issues that seafarers daily confront in undertaking their professional and seafaring life in the context of the pastoral care of the Apostleship of the Sea throughout the world, which is characterized also by our support for human rights, fair trade and the defence of the environment.

Coming one year after the XXII AOS World Congress, which was held in Gdynia (Poland) in 2007, this celebration will certainly give new impetus to our pledge to remain in solidarity – as stated by the theme of the Congress – with the People of the Sea as witnesses of Hope, through the Proclamation of the Word, Liturgy and Diakonia, and to promote in the maritime world a humanism inspired by Christian hope. Its introduction in the maritime environment means first and foremost the creation of a climate of respect and fairness for all seafarers.

Towards this end, the AOS has welcomed the adoption by the ILO of the *Maritime Labour Convention 2006* and the *Work in Fishing Convention 2007*. Now that these two Conventions have been adopted, the work of all national AOS continue in order to ensure that they are ratified and implemented as quickly as possible so that they may make a genuine improvement to the lives of millions of seafarers and fishers.

However, there is one area of maritime activity which is of particular concern all over the world, that of the fishing profession. The fishing communities in fact are battling against the more negative aspects of globalisation and are confronted with economic, social and ecological problems of international proportion. Everywhere AOS has to manifest solidarity with them and intensify its pastoral mission in this area, as these next years will be decisive if we want the oceans to live, the fishing communities to survive and to continue harvesting fish, on which more than one billion people rely, till now, as their main source of protein.

In this perspective Pope Benedict XVI has spoken about “the great challenge of today [that] is to 'globalise,' not just economic and commercial interests, but also the call for solidarity.” This will be possible only if “the person, created in the image of God and loved by him, [is] at the centre of every economic plan to protect and administer the immense resources of creation” (Speech to ‘*Centesimus Annus-Pro Pontifice*’ Foundation, May 31, 2008).

Another sad and emerging phenomenon, which must be mentioned, is piracy. In some parts of the world, this is prevalent and presents a real threat to the security of vessels and their crews. AOS therefore must support every move by the International Community and local Authorities to address this problem.

Our world celebration also gives us this year the opportunity to thank again all chaplains, pastoral agents and volunteers who are active in the AOS and who extend pastoral and practical assistance together with hospitality to all seafarers regardless of race, creed or political opinion. One of our great strengths is the number of laity who work in a voluntary capacity for the AOS in chaplaincies, together with the ongoing formation and training in so many places that continue to bear fruit.

In this respect we would like to recommend that our new *‘Manual for Chaplains and Pastoral Agents of the Apostleship of the Sea’* be translated if possible in local languages under the authority of the respective national AOS. In this way this pastoral instrument, which has already proved to be an excellent guide, will benefit to an ever greater number of people.

We rejoice too – as it was stressed in Gdynia – for the ecumenical collaboration and interreligious dialogue taking place aboard ships, in the ports and in seafarers’ centres. Our presence and witness express the solicitude and proximity of the Church to all those who are involved in the maritime environment, especially to the poorest and those most in need.

We pray that this celebration of Sea Sunday will enable us to renew our commitment to human promotion and evangelisation. May Mary, *Stella Maris*, intercede for us in asking for God’s grace, so that AOS may ever more remain committed to the building up of God’s Kingdom in the maritime world.

Cardinal Renato Raffaele Martino

President

+ Archbishop Agostino Marchetto

Secretary