

PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR THE PASTORAL CARE OF MIGRANTS AND ITINERANT PEOPLE

XXII WORLD CONGRESS OF THE APOSTLESHIP OF THE SEA

**GREETINGS BY ARCHBISHOP AGOSTINO MARCHETTO**

Secretary of the Pontifical Council

*(Gdynia, Poland, 24 June 2007)*

Every five years the World Congress of the Apostleship of the Sea is held. We remember very well the last Congress in Rio de Janeiro in September 2002, For this XXII World Congress we have chosen as venue Poland, the native land of our late and great Pope, the Servant of God John-Paul II, a land of fidelity to the Catholic Faith and the land of “Solidarnoc”, which was born in Gdansk, 20 km from here.

In the absence today of Cardinal Renato Raffaele Martino, President of the Pontifical Council, it behoves to me to bring to you the greetings and prayerful good wishes of the Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI. Cardinal Martino is prevented from being with us tonight, as today is the official celebration of his 50 years of priesthood in his native Salerno. Cardinal Martino after long and devoted years in the Church diplomatic service was named President of the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerants in 2006 in replacement of Cardinal Hamao. He is also the President of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace. On our behalf I would like to assure him of our heartfelt congratulations on the occasion of his jubilee and to give thanks to the Lord for his 50 years of devotion and service to Christ and to the Church. We wish him “ad multos annos”.

As we are gathered here in Gdynia, AOS wishes to pay homage and recognises the special debt of gratitude it owes to Pope John Paul II for the publication of the Apostolic Letter *Motu Proprio Stella Maris*, whose 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary we celebrate this year. We have also included the term “Solidarity” in the theme of the Congress, in order to render a tribute to the Polish labour movement Solidarity, which was instrumental in bringing such great historical changes in the Port of Gdansk and in Poland with the worldwide implications that we know and which have culminated in Poland’s freedom.

We are grateful to all our Polish friends for their generous hospitality, which has made this conference possible and permitted 290 delegates from 66 countries to gather in this beautiful venue. I would like to mention His Honour the Mayor of the City of Gdynia, Mr. Wojciech Szczurek, the Apostolic Nuncio Archbishop Josef Kowalczyk, the Archbishop of Gdansk and AOS Bishop Promoter of Poland, Msgr. Tadeusz Gocłowski, the President of the Port authorities Mr. Przeuyslaw Marchlewicz, the President of the Local Organising Committee, Fr. Edward Pracz and the innumerable volunteers, sponsors and well wishers. You have all accepted to host this Congress with enthusiasm and generosity and without you this event would not have been possible.

It is my privilege today to welcome the participants of this Congress and that include Bishops, Priests and Religious, lay Pastoral Agents engaged in this important organisation: the Apostleship of the Sea. You come from all the continents and each one of you brings to this meeting, a unique experience and flavour. This diversity is a source of mutual enrichment and an image of the catholicity of the Church. We rejoice and welcome the participation of fraternal delegates as well as the experts and colleagues, with whose organisations we work in partnership daily and who have generously accepted our invitation to address the Congress. I am sure that each one of us will also receive something from the other.

I wish to greet in particular the Rev. Canon Bill Christianson and the Rev. Juergen Kanz, respectively Chairman and General Secretary of ICMA. Dr. Kanz will be regretted as he will soon retire and this is probably his last participation to an official function as ICMA Secretary General; the General Secretary of the ITF Mr. David Cockroft, the Administrator of the ITF–Seafarers’ Trust Mr. Tom Holmer, the manager of ICSW Mr. Andrew Elliot and the Director of the Centre for Seamen’s Rights, Mr. Douglas Stevenson. We are very fortunate to have them with us and we thank them for their presence and their support, financial and otherwise, which have been so important to us along the years, linked to AOS International.

The theme of our present Congress is *“In Solidarity with the People of the Sea as Witnesses of Hope, through Proclamation of the Word, Liturgy and Diakonia”*. As we embark on this undertaking, we have above all at heart the interests of those we have been called to serve, the people of the sea, and we are firmly decided that our reflection during this Congress should be rooted in the conviction expressed by the Second Vatican Council that: *“The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ. Indeed, nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in their hearts”* (Gaudium et Spes, Preface).

Moreover the accent, this year, is put on what is specifically ours: the Proclamation of the Word, the Liturgy and the Diakonia. As you see, evangelisation is deeply linked with human promotion. To conclude, I would like to invoke on us the protection and intercession of our Patron, Mary the “Stella Maris”, quoting a few lines from this beautiful prayer, borrowed from maritime terminology, which you will find in the new AOS Manual, and in which St. Bernard compares Mary to the Star that navigators seek so as not to lose their course and to reach safely their port of destination.

*“Whoever you are...Look at the star, call upon Mary.... With her for a guide, you will never go astray; ...under her protection, you have nothing to fear; if she walks before you, you will not grow weary; if she shows you favour you will reach the goal”*

I wish you all a fruitful meeting as I now declare open this XXII Congress of the Apostleship of the Sea.