

PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR THE PASTORAL CARE OF MIGRANTS AND ITINERANT PEOPLE

XXII WORLD CONGRESS OF THE APOSTLESHIP OF THE SEA

PRESENTATION OF THE CONGRESS

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Introduction

Since the dawn of humanity and of civilisation, men and women have been fascinated by the sea and the oceans and by the ships which sail on them. This fascination has pushed people to develop ever more performing ships and navigational skills to explore the oceans, rivers and lakes, pushing always further the unexplored frontiers. During centuries they have struggled to master the oceans, to find their way to new lands and continents and to harness them for the benefit of humanity. These explorations represent one of the greatest adventures and heroic achievements of mankind and it is not yet over. Today, even if deep-sea exploration has progressed dramatically, most of the oceans' depths remain a mystery to us.

Oceans, rivers and lakes are of vital importance also for the welfare and sustained development of humanity and for its global economy. Today, ninety per cent of world trade is carried out by ship and millions of seafarers visit our ports all over the world. Fishing has always been and remains a major source of food for mankind and one of the main providers of employment. The extraordinary growth of the cruise industry is providing a new dimension to tourism and to leisure activities. Yachting and recreational/competition sailing is gaining each year in popularity and already has millions of adepts.

AOS mission is towards all seafarers who come to our shores - regardless of their creed or nationality - to provide them with pastoral assistance. By seafarers we mean those who are onboard merchant ships or fishing vessels and also all those who have undertaken for whatever reason a sea voyage.

It is a specific pastoral care. Why? The Apostolic Constitution *Pastor Bonus*, of Pope John Paul II provides the answer: "The Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People brings the pastoral concern of the Church to bear on the special needs of those who have been forced to leave their native land or who do not have one ... It likewise fosters pastoral solicitude for sailors, at sea and in port, especially through the Apostleship of the Sea"¹.

Part I

The theme of our Congress

This Apostolate, of course, has some fundamental and traditional roots and expressions, but it must also constantly be adapted to the needs of our times to contemporary mankind. This, on the other hand, is what the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council has done, if correctly interpreted. Hence the importance for us to embark every five years in this undertaking of considerable significance for the good and faithful functioning of AOS. During this week, it will be our task to review together our pastoral outreach in the light of the Teaching of the Church which interprets the signs of times, to support and encourage the ongoing apostolate around the world and to formulate our vision and future plans for the years ahead. To guide us in this exercise, after a long reflection and after having consulted as widely as possible, we have chosen as our theme *In Solidarity with the People of the Sea as Witnesses of Hope*,

¹ JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Constitution on the Roman Curia *Pastor Bonus*, no. 149-150 § 2: AAS LXXX (1988) p. 899

through Proclamation of the Word, Liturgy and Diakonia. This theme is also inspired by 1 Peter 3:15-17: “Always be ready to give an answer when someone asks you about your hope. Give a kind and respectful answer and keep your conscience clear.”

We shall, during this week, endeavour to explicit and confirm our conviction that AOS expresses one of the Church’s essential aspect by being “Witness of Hope” and for us concretely in the maritime world, bearing in mind Pope Benedict XXVI’s teaching in his Encyclical “Deus Caritas Est”. That is: “The Church’s deepest nature is expressed in her three-fold responsibility: of proclaiming the word of God (*kerygma-martyria*), celebrating the sacraments (*leitourgia*), and exercising the ministry of charity (*diakonia*). These duties presuppose each other and are inseparable. For the Church, charity is not a kind of welfare activity which could equally well be left to others, but is a part of her nature, an indispensable expression of her very being”². In line with the Holy Father’s teaching and as members of the Church we shall interrogate ourselves on our ongoing commitment to the threefold responsibilities which constitutes the essence and specificity of all our pastoral work:

- The place of the proclamation of the Word of God in AOS;
- The celebration of the Sacraments as the source and “raison d’être” of our pastoral care;
- The service, “diakonia”, to all but especially to the poorest.

We want this World Congress to be a time of reflection, prayer and sharing that will lift our spirits and renew our apostolic zeal. As we have already said, it has been planned to be a pastoral Congress. Of course pastoral care is holistic, it ranges from material help and advocacy to more specific spiritual or religious aspects such as sacramental ministry and Christian formation and counseling. Ours will be an ecclesial exercise, which is expected to give AOS the occasion to better understand its spirituality and the necessary means to exercise the proper pastoral care to the people it is called to serve.

May I quote here Albert Camus for whom life is absurd because hopelessness is the common lot of every individual, and this absence of hope renders our very existence meaningless. Well, while of course agreeing with him that nobody can live a meaningful life without hope, we do not accept his pessimistic conclusions. On the contrary, the Christian outlook and attitude towards the world is resolutely optimistic in spite of being realistic. It is enough to recall that the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council’s Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the modern world starts with these wonderful words “Gaudium et Spes”-“Joy and Hope”. It is a clear signal given to all that followers of Christ are joyful witnesses of His Good News and Grace and must always be ready and able to assume the duty to give an answer to everyone who asks for the reason “of the hope that is in [them]” (1 Pt 3:15). To do this, as Christians, we believe and proclaim that Christ’s death and resurrection has changed the world radically, giving us the possibility to live the joy and hope also with sorrows and anguishes³, which are part of our life.

What is then Christian Hope?

For the Catechism of the Catholic Church: “Hope is the sure and steadfast anchor of the soul. The virtue of hope responds to the aspiration for happiness which God has placed in the heart of every man; it takes up the hopes that inspire men’s activities and purifies them so as to order them to the Kingdom of heaven; it keeps man from discouragement; it sustains him during times of abandonment; it opens up his heart in expectation of eternal beatitude”⁴. The anchor is the icon of hope and this is reflected in the logo of our Congress. Whenever in life, we are being tossed around like a ship by violent waves in dangerous waters, and we run the risk of going adrift, hope, like an anchor, is what allows us to hold fast, not giving way to despair but to persevere and to find again our direction and continue on our way.

Hope is at the heart of St Paul’s preaching. As Christian life is born of faith, it manifests itself through love and charity and it is lived in hope. These are the three theological virtues. For St. Paul, the

² BENEDICT XVI, Encyclical Letter *Deus Caritas Est*, 25 : AAS XCVIII (2006), p. 236

³ SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the modern world *Gaudium et Spes*, 1: AAS LVIII (1966) p. 1023

⁴ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1818

foundation and motive of all “hope” is God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who reveals his infinite love and faithfulness in the resurrection of Jesus and in the effusion of the Spirit. “Hope”, for St. Paul, is not the result of human reasoning and calculation, of speculation or natural optimism, but it is founded on a person, on an event, which is the very foundation of our faith, proclaimed especially during the Easter season: Jesus has risen from the dead and we are the witnesses of this resurrection. This event is so central that in his first letter to the Corinthians St. Paul did not hesitate to say that if Christ has not risen then our faith is worth nothing, we have no hope and we are the most pitiable people of all “*if Christ has not been raised, then empty too is our preaching; empty, too, your faith ... and you are still in your sins*” (1 Cor 15:14-17).

May be it is good here to reflect a while on the episode of the disciples of Emmaus. The reason the two disciples had lost all hope and were so sad and downcast was because they did not believe the women who had been at the tomb early in the morning and had come back announcing that it was empty and that Jesus was alive. They were terribly disappointed and despondent because Jesus had not risen from the dead as He had promised he would, “*we were hoping...but it is now already three days*” (Lk 24:21). However, as soon as they recognised Jesus, alive, in the breaking of the bread, their whole attitude and personalities changed completely and, filled with new ardour and apostolic zeal, “*they set out at once and returned to Jerusalem*” (Lk 24,33) where they reported enthusiastically to the Apostles that Jesus was alive and they had recognised him when he broke the bread. It is also to be noted that in the Gospels, no encounter with Jesus leaves anyone indifferent, on the contrary for many it brings about radical changes in the persons concerned.

As “People on the Move”, it is interesting to note that commenting this passage, St. Augustine writes that if we want to share “life” with Jesus, like the disciples of Emmaus, it is in the welcoming of the stranger that we shall recognise the Master and hence share His life⁵.

Like St Paul and the disciples of Emmaus, our hope, too, is rooted in our faith in the Paschal mystery, in the fact that Christ has risen from the dead and that through his passion and resurrection he has triumphed over evil and death and given meaning to life. The risen Lord is the foundation stone of our hope; his resurrection opens our hearts to the spirit of hope. Now the testimony that the world expects from us is that since Jesus has triumphed over evil, sins, hate, injustice, violence and death, these are not fatalities any more. Even though we are aware of our frailty and vulnerability, of our sins and death, we are comforted by the hope that following in Jesus footsteps, we shall ultimately have part in Jesus’ victory, even if we must first go through times of trial, sufferings and death. For us Christians, our hope has a name, Jesus Christ: “*Christ Jesus our hope*” (1 Tim 1:1). By suffering his passion and resurrecting from the dead, Jesus gives sense to our own sufferings and to our death.

The virtue of hope is a divine gift, like the two other theological virtues, faith and charity. These virtues are the concrete expression of the love and concern which God has for each one of us personally. As regards hope, it is when we are at our most weak and vulnerable, that God manifests Himself to us in hope. In fact, its object is the accomplishment of our salvation, promised and brought about by Christ our Saviour. To give witness to hope finally means to give witness to the person of Jesus Christ, who is Himself our hope and salvation and the Good News is that whatever the situation Jesus will always lead us to liberation and safety. In the person of Jesus is realised the prophesy of Isaiah “*and in his name the nations will hope*” (Mt 12:21).

Moreover, hope is a fragile and rare good and its fire is often weak, even in the hearts of the faithful. Charles Péguy wrote: “Little hope walks between her two bigger sisters [faith and charity] and is not even noticed. Since she is almost invisible, the ‘little’ sister seems to be led by her two bigger sisters’ hand, but with her childlike heart, she sees what the other sisters do not. And with her fresh, innocent joy, she brings along faith and love on Easter morning. It is she, the little one, who sets along everything”⁶. If hope is present in the heart of every Christian, the Risen Crucified Lord is the name of hope. “Hope, a

⁵ ST. AUGUSTINE, *Sermo* 103, 1-2. 6: *PL* 38, 613-615. See Instruction *Erga migrantes caritas Christi* (The Love of Christ Towards Migrants), 16: *People on the Move* XXXVI (2004), p. 123

⁶ Cf. Charles Péguy, *Portico of the Mystery of the Second virtue*

relation”, is what we read recently in an Italian review⁷. To see, encounter and communicate the Risen Lord is the task of the Christian witness, which is also echoed in poets and writers⁸.

Communion and our and the Church’s mission are the two names of the one same encounter that preserves God’s paternal face and man’s fraternal life with solidarity. Anyone who wishes to deepen this theme could do so by following the trail of reflection to the Verona Ecclesial Congress⁹, in Italy, where the source, root, account and exercise of witness is presented. Here I will only mention “the figures of hope: contemplation and commitment”.

As you understand, hope and giving witness are intrinsically linked. What we believe in and hope for, what we have experienced personally, it is our duty joyfully to proclaim and share. In practical terms for us to be “witnesses of hope” means to renew constantly our reading of the events of our time in the light of the paschal mystery and to testify by our whole life that evil, death, exploitation and injustice will not prevail, but on the contrary that goodness, life and righteousness will have the last word. It is to believe that God is for us and with us and never against us. St Paul is adamant that Christ lives in us and that we shall have part in Christ’s glory: “*God has raised Jesus to life! God’s spirit now lives in you, and he will raise you to life...*” (Rom 8:11).

As we have seen, Christian hope has its source in the testimony in the Risen Christ, so that “*the Resurrection both anticipates and guarantees our hope*”¹⁰. We are all called to announce and witness the Resurrection to the world, together as one family in which there are different functions (bishops, priests, deacons, men and women religious, laypeople). Each in his own mission must be the visible sign of Christ’s invisible presence in the world. Pope Benedict XVI, during the World Youth Day in Cologne, insisted that communion of the faithful among themselves and with their pastors is closely linked to the work of evangelisation: “*It is important to maintain communion with the Pope and the Bishops. They are the ones who guarantee that singular paths are not being sought, but that we are living in turn in that great family of God that the Lord has founded with the Twelve Apostles*”¹¹. Here we can find the organic, hierarchical nature of our Apostolate, the function of Bishops Promoters, the appointment by the Pontifical Council of the Regional Coordinators, whose functions go beyond the national boundaries. Here we can find the foundation of the role of the AOS International as a part of the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People, for matters which are “universal” in approach and in nature, going beyond the national boundaries of the local Churches.

Our witnessing, however, must always remain humble and altruistic inside and outside the AOS: “*Give a kind and respectful answer*” urges St. Peter. In this connection we are also reminded of the words of Pope Paul VI: “*Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses*”¹².

A credible and true witness must always be in solidarity with the people he is sent to, so that he can have the empathy that would allow him to understand correctly the situations and respond to their interrogations. Let us go back to the last Ecumenical Council when it says: as “*Church we have the responsibility of reading the signs of time and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel... we should be able to answer the ever recurring questions which men ask about the meaning of this present life and of the life to come ... We must be able to understand the aspirations, the yearnings and the often dramatic features of the world in which we live*” (G.S. 4).

The milieu in which we are called as AOS to bear witness (that is the practice of hope in the various aspects of our life), remains today one of the most difficult, demanding and dangerous. To paraphrase the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, in no other age have we seen such prosperity, wealth and technological advances in the maritime industry and yet countless workers of the sea are in extreme need, as so many of them are faced with new forms of slavery in their living and working conditions (cfr. *ibid.*).

⁷ *Il Regno*, n. 997 (2006) p. 575

⁸ cf. *Avvenire*, 18/10/06. See also M. AND S. RAVALICO “Come comunicare la speranza?": *Dialoghi* no. 4 (2006), p. 80-85

⁹ cf. “*Avvenire*”, 21/6/05

¹⁰ BENEDICT XVI, at Verona (Italy), 19 October 2006: *OR*, English edition, no. 43, 25 October 2006, p. 6

¹¹ IDEM, World Youth Day, Cologne, 20 August 2005: *OR*, English edition, no. 34, 24 August 2005, p. 10

¹² PAUL VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* to the Episcopate, to the Clergy and to all the Faithful of the entire world, 1975, 41: *AAS* LXVIII (1976) p. 31

Confronted to this situation, we cannot be indifferent, as “our heart cannot be at peace while we see our brothers and sisters suffering from lack of food, work, a home or other fundamental goods”¹³. It is our obligation by our testimony to open the way to new hopes. Hope for us includes, of course, all human legitimate aspirations and expectations but goes further, it links them all to the source of all hope, the love of God, who in Christ wishes to share it with us all. The object of Christian hope, then, is not only faith in life after death, or its eschatological content. Christian hope has also a great power for the transformation of today’s realities as it casts over our existence the light of the Risen Christ, which, far from being alienating, gives a whole new meaning to human life and man’s destiny. As it was said this year at “Notre Dame de Paris” in a Lent sermon: “Our deficiencies are not an obstacle to hope”¹⁴.

I realize that the time is almost gone and I have not yet spoken of what is fundamental in the theme chosen for this Congress, that is solidarity and hope through the Word of God, the Sacraments and the service of our brothers and sisters. I will cover such an aspect presenting the program of this Congress in this second part of my intervention.

Part II

Presentation of the programme

The next keynote address of this Congress will be given by Mr David Cockroft, who will illustrate to us the current situation and today’s challenges in the maritime world. It is a kind of reading in the line of the sign of times. We must know the world in which we are called to exercise our ministry through proclamation of the Word, administration of the Sacraments and Diakonya. We are fortunate today to have here someone of Mr Cockroft’s experience. We shall then be invited to a theological reflection on the nature of our Apostolate. Fr. John Chalmers, starting from the Holy Father’s Encyclical Letter “Deus Caritas Est”, will help us better understand the role of AOS and our vocation to be witnesses of love, hope and solidarity among the people of the sea... We shall conclude this first day with a power point presentation by AOS-International, on the state of AOS around the world. It will be based on the Regional Coordinators’ reports and on the questionnaire that was sent to you and which has yielded interesting information which will now be shared.

The place of the proclamation of the Word of God in AOS

It has never been easy to proclaim and witness the Gospel, it is nevertheless also today the special and joyful responsibility of AOS to preach the Good News of Jesus Christ in the maritime world. In this respect, I recall especially these words inspired by the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council which urge all those who are legitimately and officially engaged in the ministry of the Word to read and study carefully the Sacred Scriptures, this must be done so that *«none of them will become [as says St Augustine] ‘an empty preacher of the word of God outwardly, who is not a listener to it inwardly’»* (D.V. 25)¹⁵. The ministry of the Word, which includes pastoral preaching, catechetics and all form of Christian instruction, nourishes itself on the Word of God (ibid., 24).

On Tuesday after morning prayer, we shall have a reflection by H.E. Bishop Pierre Molères, who was for many years the “Mission de la Mer” Bishop Promoter in France. He will give a talk on the theme “Hope motivates and inspires the Apostleship of the Sea commitment”. Then, because of the importance of the Internet and Information Technology, Msgr Jacques Harel and Commodore Chris York will present the AOS International website, one of the projects recommended and implemented after the Rio Congress. From the two interventions, you will realize the difficult dialogue we have had in this respect from the point of view of AOS International and AOS-GB, which offered itself to realise it, as a website of AOS International.

¹³ BENEDICT XVI, Address at the presentation of the Letters accrediting new Ambassadors to the Holy See, 16th June 2005: OR, English edition, no. 25, 22 June 2005, p. 3

¹⁴ *La Croix*, 1-2/4/06, p. I

¹⁵ SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Verbum*: AAS LVIII (1966), p. 829

Then Msgr. Felix Machado, Under-Secretary of the Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue, will speak about our pastoral ministry engaged in dialogue with other religions. Moreover, in AOS we have a great tradition of ecumenical cooperation and of collaboration with kindred societies, organisations and unions, which are for us valued and trusted partners in our pastoral outreach. Our ministry to maritime people is today increasingly carried out in an ecumenical setting and we rejoice of this greater openness between the Churches and Ecclesial Communities worldwide. In the afternoon we shall have therefore a round table, in which will participate the Rev. Dr Jürgen Kanz, Mr. Tom Holmer and Mr Andrew Elliot respectively of ICMA, ITF-St and ICSW.

The rest of the afternoon will be devoted to workshops, of which there will be a wide range in order to allow the different opinions and approaches to express themselves. We have selected 13 topics which we think are particularly relevant to the maritime community and which will cover our main present concerns. You are kindly requested to attend a different workshop on each of the three days when they are scheduled. Workshops have a dual purpose, first to impart information and secondly, as already mentioned, to consult and gather feedbacks and information; they are an important instrument to foster the participation of a maximum of persons.

The celebration of the Sacraments as the source and “raison d’être” of our pastoral care

The Holy Eucharist, Vatican II tells us, is *“the source and summit of the Christian life”*¹⁶. The other Sacraments, and indeed all ecclesial ministries and apostolate, are bound up with the Eucharist and are oriented towards it¹⁷. Frequentation and reception of the Sacraments are central to the spiritual life of all Catholics. In both our spiritual and apostolic journey, the Sacraments are our starting point and also the point of arrival, they are instruments of grace and we need them to grow closer to Christ and to develop our Christian life. Hence the necessity for us all to receive frequently the Sacraments and the obligation to make them widely accessible to all those, who are the subjects of our spiritual and pastoral care.

The Sacraments are also prayers and the Congress is a time to pray, give thanks, welcome the love of Jesus and *“to learn to spread it around with every one of our words and deeds”*¹⁸. Every morning we shall have together our community prayer and every day as well we shall gather together *“as God’s family round the table of the Word and Bread of life”*¹⁹, even if it cannot still arrive at the sacramental communion with our Christian brethren. These Eucharistic celebrations will be at the heart of our Congress and not just a sideline. In his Lenten Message 2007 the Holy Father says that the contemplation of the pierced side of Christ on the Cross will impel us to open our hearts to others *“recognising the wounds inflicted upon the dignity of the human person; it will move us, in particular, to fight every form of contempt for life and human exploitation of the person and to alleviate the tragedies of loneliness and abandonment of so many people”*²⁰.

Bishop René Marie Ehouzou, who has been an AOS chaplain, will develop this theme in the context of the AOS and will propose new insights for our reflection.

The service, “Diakonia”, to all but especially to the poorest

The Apostolic Exhortation “*Sacramentum Caritatis*” insists on the social dimension of the Sacraments especially that of the Eucharist: *“ ‘The bread I will give is my flesh, for the life of the world’ (Jo 6:51)... In these words Jesus reveals his deep compassion for every man and woman... And in the Eucharist He also makes us witnesses of God’s compassion towards all our brothers and sisters”*²¹. The

¹⁶ SECOND ECUMENICAL VATICAN COUNCIL, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 11: AAS LVII (1965) p. 15

¹⁷ cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1324

¹⁸ BENEDICT XVI, Lenten Message 2007: *OR*, English edition, no. 8, 21 February 2007, p. 6

¹⁹ JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 36: AAS XCIII (2001) p. 302

²⁰ BENEDICT XVI, Lenten Message 2007: *OR*, English edition, no. 8, 21 February 2007, p. 6

²¹ IDEM, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Sacramentum Caritatis*, 88, 13 March 2007: *OR*, English edition, Insert, 21 March 2007, XVI

reception of the Sacraments can be a source of justice and of a greater charity and respect for God's creation.

Our apostolate in AOS is one of presence and service. Our vocation is to incarnate Christ's love for those who suffer, the sick, the marginalized and the poor. We are also often called to stand alongside seafarers in defence of their rights and in doing so we are exercising the prophetic mission of the Church, because for us at the heart of social justice lies love of God and love of neighbours. We rejoice that there are more and more permanent Deacons engaged in this ministry, and we believe that their presence is a blessing for AOS. In order to better understand and appreciate their contribution, we shall have a Round Table which will be animated by Deacons Ricardo Rodriguez, Albert Dacanay and Jean Philippe Rigaud and his wife Marie-Agnes. As a background of this Round Table we could read "La vocation diaconale de l'Eglise" published by the General Secretariat of the French Episcopal Conference²².

On Thursday, the morning session will be devoted to the Fishing sector, which has traditionally been a sector of the apostolate for which AOS has always felt particularly concerned and which is characterized by great hardships and poverty. We are witnessing every day the pressure that international fish trade is putting on fishermen and on the sea resources. In this context we welcome the approval on the 14th June 2007 of the new ILO Convention on Fishing, which will promote opportunities for women and men to obtain decent and productive work in conditions of freedom, equity, security and human dignity.

We believe that to establish sustainable fishing, it is essential to listen also to the voices of men and women of the small scale or artisan fishing sector. In it, we shall have a presentation by Fr. Bruno Ciceri and another by Mrs. Cristina de Castro. While Fr. Ciceri will concentrate on the international legal framework, the "AOS International Fishing Committee" – formed by the Regional Coordinators, as decided by the Pontifical Council – has and the problems of the fishing industry in emerging economies, Mrs. De Castro will give us a fisher's wife perspective of the sustainability of fishing communities in developed countries. In line with the teaching of Pope Benedict XVI, it is a priority for the AOS to take into account the real needs of Fishers' wives and women's associations and to support every pastoral initiatives "to defend, help, safeguard and value the family in its unrepeatable uniqueness"²³.

In the afternoon Msgr Harel will present the AOS Manual, which has been completely revised and which will hopefully be a useful help to chaplains, pastoral agents and volunteers. Then Mr. Douglas Stevenson, will take us through the "Maritime Labour Convention 2006", whose adoption has been hailed as an historical landmark, and which will make such a difference to the lives of the 1,2 million seafarers when it is ratified and implemented. Mr. Stevenson's work as a champion of seafarers' rights is well known, but I would like to take this opportunity today to thank him and the ICMA delegation to the ILO for their positive contribution during the maritime sessions, which have led to this new convention, and for their fruitful collaboration with the delegation of the Holy See at the ILO. As you know, we decided that ICMA will represent AOS in the international meetings of this kind, to give in them a testimony of Christian unity.

We are all aware of the phenomenal growth of the cruise industry and of the new pastoral challenges which are emerging. Therefore here is another point of our program. Many national AOS are already committing part of their resources to the cruise ship sector. In October 2005 a meeting was organised by the Pontifical Council, in Dunkerque, to discuss among other things "a new model of cruise ships ministry" and the necessary training this would entail. We shall hear of the new developments in Cruise Ships Chaplaincy. To discuss and introduce these issues we have three experienced cruise chaplains, Msgr. John Armitage, Fr. Luca Centurioni and Fr. Sinclair Oubre.

After dinner, on Thursday, you will be invited to meet by region. This will be an important exercise as you will be asked to nominate candidates for the important responsibility of AOS Regional Coordinators. Their role is more and more necessary and much depends on their commitment and generosity. As you know, the Pontifical Council will realize the appointment, but you are asked to recommend three names per region. The nomination procedures have been revised and will be explained to you, so that each country will have the possibility to have its say. This supranational role is linked with

²² Cf. Documents Episcopaux, n. 1, 2006

²³ *Angelus*, 4 February 2007: *OR*, English edition, 7 February 2007, p. 1

the solicitude for all the Churches that the Holy Father delegated to our Pontifical Council. In this, the Coordinators are sharing the responsibility of AOS International, above the boundaries of States and local Churches.

On Friday, the last day of the Congress, which is the feast of St Peter and Paul, before joining our Polish brothers and sisters for the Pilgrimage of the Sea and the Eucharist, we shall have in the morning, our session to present the final document and the message to the maritime world which, this year, will substitute our Message for Sea Sunday.

Conclusion

The choice of the theme and of the programme reflects our conviction that the role of AOS, to be faithful to its tradition and identity, is also to be found in the historical context in which the people of the sea lives and works today. It is in this world that we are called to engage ourselves, to live fully the Gospel by being faithful witnesses of the Risen Christ, by introducing the seed of love, faith and hope in a society facing constant challenges and which is often looking for directions and guidance, in spite of everything. The Church as a community is dedicated to the spreading of this Gospel of hope in a world which has lost many of its landmarks and references. Many people who do not know Christ and his teachings are nevertheless sensitive to the witness of those who communicate his message especially through the concrete witness of charity, because *“love is a language that directly reaches the heart and opens it to trust”*²⁴.

It is my sincere hope that we shall come out of this Congress better equipped for our ministry. But it is equally important for us to better know ourselves and to deeper identify with our spirituality in order to maintain our specificity and not to become just another form of social assistance²⁵.

If I could, I would show you in this moment an enigmatic painting, done in 1881 by Pierre Puvis de Chavannes, which in its time perplexed the public. It was soon realized, however, that this was an extraordinary work, the beginning of a new period in painting. It is found in the Museum d’Orsay and depicts “The Poor Fisherman”. How beautiful it would be if this Congress could also open up a new era for the AOS!

My prayer and fervent wish is that this Congress we are embarking on, be above all a “formation of the heart” for us, so that it leads us *“to that encounter with God in Christ which awakens [our] love and opens [our] spirits to others”* (DCE 31). As I conclude, I invoke on us the maternal intercession of Most Holy Mary, the “Stella Maris”, in whose hands we place our assembly, remembering also, because we are in Poland, her title of Our Lady of Czestochowa.

Our Lady of Hope, pray for us! Bright Star of the Sea, guide us!

²⁴ BENEDICT XVI, Address to the Members of the Italian Voluntary Service Organisations, 10th February 2007: *OR*, English edition, no. 8, 21 February 2007, p. 5

²⁵ Cf. *Deus Caritas Est*, 31