

Homily of H. E. Archbishop Józef Kowalczyk, Apostolic Nuncio in Poland, delivered during the Mass celebrated on the occasion of the XXII World Congress of the Apostleship of the Sea

Gdynia, June 25, 2007

*Go forth from the land of your kinsfolk
and from your father's house
to a land that I will show you (Gen 12:1)*

1. I cordially greet the Superiors of the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People, the Metropolitan Archbishop of Gdansk, Most Rev. Gocłowski, the organizers, and all the participants in this Congress. During this Eucharistic Celebration in which representatives of the various areas of the Apostleship of the Sea from around the world are taking part, we are invited to meditate on the passage from the Book of Genesis whose content expresses the essence of the human condition. The scriptural passage means to point out the direct relationship that exists between God and man; this is the privileged condition to which human nature is called: to be in relation with God. God, in the logic of the Mystery of the Incarnation, always speaks to man with great respect while considering his freedom and not distorting his cognitive abilities. But God is essentially the Father: he directs man's life and embraces it in His Mystery of love. "Go forth from the land of your kinsfolk...to a land that I will show you": these words addressed to Abram are the word that God often says to us too, *men of the sea*. You, more than any other category on this earth, are called to leave your lands and go forth, to sail and to hope. You are carried away by the power of the sea: "*navigare necesse est*", as the people of the sea say!

2. "Abram took up his tent to go and camp in the Negeb". This getting up-going-resettling represents the condition necessary for Abram to carry out the divine plan. We, Christians, men and women, are also called to this paradigm of Christian life whenever we rise to listen to the Word in order

to determine divine Will for us. Precisely here, in Gdynia, we cannot fail to re- evoke the historic event that took place exactly twenty years ago on June 11, 1987 when the Servant of God John Paul II visited this port city, and on June 12, in Gdansk, where hundreds of thousands of the faithful gathered for the Pope's Holy Mass, a historic moment that restored life to *Solidarnosc*. The inhabitants of this beautiful little city consider the sea a natural force that is part of their lives and environment and they live well together. From the sea comes work and wealth; from these depths comes amber, the precious stone of these Baltic regions! To the inhabitants of this city a Fisherman came: John Paul II. On the occasion of his visit he said: "The sea speaks without words. It speaks with the language of boundless distance. It also speaks the language of the abysses". But with his fine poetic soul, John Paul II always had a way to achieve the precise pastoral goal of speaking to the hearts and lives of concrete men incarnated in a history. On that occasion he said: "Man in present-day civilization is threatened by the sickness of shallowness and the danger of trivialization. Efforts must be made to regain profundity, that profundity which is proper to the human being" (June 11, 1987). Then the Pope spoke about the specificity of the sea that has so much to do with man's life. He spoke about the profundity of truth, freedom, justice and peace. And who are the men of the sea? Fishers, seafarers, workers in shipyards, maritime workers, port workers, workers on tourist and merchant ships and people in the navy. The Church wants to be close to all of them as well as to the people who travel and work in particular circumstances. It was precisely the great son of this land, the Servant of God John Paul II, who wanted to promulgate a social document, "Stella Maris" (Cf. *Osservatore Romano*, Nos. 4-5/1997), which outlines the pastoral care of the people of the sea.

3. I would like to express my joy and gratitude for the fact that the World Congress of the Apostleship of the Sea is taking place in Gdynia, a city-symbol. It is only 81 years old and so it is young compared to other Polish cities, but it has become an eloquent symbol of the struggle for man and his rights. I have noted the theme of this World Congress with attention and satisfaction: "In solidarity with the people of the sea, as witnesses of hope, through the proclamation of the Word, the liturgy and diakonia". This theme contains in substance the missionary problem par excellence because precisely the men of the sea are called to bring the

people hope through the Word, sacramental life and the witness to love. This is concrete fulfillment of the fundamental Christian mission handed down to us by the Lord himself. Being witnesses to the Risen Christ through the Word, witness, an exemplary religious life and sensitivity to man's needs is the immediate response of Christians to the anxieties of our contemporaries. You have particular influence on two contexts: on your work companions and on those whom you meet in the ports around the world. Both of these contexts call for an authentic and visible Christian witness.

4. Dear *men of the sea*, I think of you with very special esteem when I realize the sometimes precarious conditions of your life and work, which are inevitably projected on your families, your wives and your children too. The participants in the Congress, who come from all over the world, work and live in conditions that differ very much from place to place. But you always live for your families who surely feel nostalgia because of your physical separation. And, on your part, this calls for a renewed and ongoing determination to safeguard family ties and fidelity, the human and Christian strength that makes your love authentic and mature.

5. Lastly, with esteem and gratitude I address the Chaplains and lay workers from the "Stella Maris" Centers. *A home far away from home*: this is your motto, dear friends. It expresses very well your solidarity with the people who live far away from their home and affections and it is an example of Christian charity for all of us. Every man is close to you because you see Christ in everyone. And you give proof of this by receiving the men of the sea in the Centers regardless of their nationality, language and religion. This concern is not limited exclusively to spiritual needs, but it also for social, human and cultural questions. I hope that in the work of the Congress you will be able to tackle the enormity of these problems, certain that the exchange of experiences will contribute to a renewed impetus and a re-launching of the activity of these meritorious pastoral Centers.

Dear *men of the sea* in a broad sense! In today's Gospel Christ puts great demands and renewed hopes on our relations with others. And truth, respect for man and solidarity with him are always fundamental pillars.

These are the values that are cherished and shared by all men. These natural virtues take on particular value when they are nourished by evangelical love. And contemporary man is particularly sensitive to this. May every ship, every port become an occasion for you to bring hope through the Word, religious behavior and practical generosity to man for love of God.

Finally, in renewing my gratitude for today's invitation, I express my fraternal best wishes that this Congress will encourage and sustain with Christian hope the mission of the chaplains and volunteers in their pastoral commitment. Amen.