

PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR THE PASTORAL CARE OF MIGRANTS AND ITINERANT PEOPLE

XXII WORLD CONGRESS OF THE APOSTLESHIP OF THE SEA

AOS: A SPECIFIC PASTORAL CARE

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President of the Pontifical Council

(Gdynia, Poland, 25th June 2007)

It gives me great pleasure to be with you for the XXII Congress of the Apostleship of the Sea, organized by the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant Peoples, on the theme: *In Solidarity with the People of the Sea as Witnesses of Hope, through Proclamation of the Word, Liturgy and Diakonia.*

As you know, last year I was appointed by the Holy Father to succeed to H.E. Cardinal Stephen Fumio Hamao as President of this Dicastery. On this occasion, and on your behalf, I would like to express heartfelt gratitude to my predecessor for his dedicated leadership in the past and his commitment to the AOS.

Transforming social realities with the power of the Gospel has always been a challenge for men and women faithful to Jesus Christ, and it remains so today at the beginning of the Third Millennium of the Christian era. The proclamation of Jesus Christ, the “Good News” of salvation, love, justice and peace, is not readily received in today’s world. Devastated as it is by war, poverty, and injustices, the human family is confronted with a host of new problems and challenges which require new responses and new initiatives in the light of faith.

One such problem is the growing phenomenon of the new “boat people”, who often find themselves threatened by mafias and unscrupulous smugglers. The migration of boat people poses grave humanitarian challenges. Death tolls have been estimated in the thousands; and the untold suffering of so many is devastating. This phenomenon has also disrupted the coastal communities and has put considerable pressure on ships’ crews, chaplaincies, government services, and NGOs. In the face of such new problems we cannot remain indifferent or helpless, but we must endeavor to find new ways to express our solidarity and concern.

During these days together, let us renew our commitment to the Apostleship of the Sea; to be witnesses of the truth and life of Jesus, and to bring to every man and woman whose life is linked to the sea, the faith that saves, the charity that loves, and the hope that enlightens. In so doing, let us remember that we are all created in the “image and likeness” of God, and that the

human person is at the centre of our concerns¹. In a recent speech to members of the Secular Institutes, the Holy Father Benedict XVI insisted once again that the Church is committed to building a society where the dignity of the human person is central: “*Every pain, every injustice, every search for the truth of beauty and goodness must challenge you, not because you have the solution to all problems, but because every circumstance in which the human being lives and dies is for us an opportunity to witness to the salvific work of God*”,². The vocation of the Apostleship of the Sea is to stand in solidarity alongside seafaring and fishing communities, in their daily struggles against new challenges and pressures, and to embrace “the work of the faithful who are called to witness to their Christian life in this sphere”³.

On this happy occasion, I would like to acknowledge the valuable network of AOS centres and chaplaincies around the world. I warmly thank all men and women, priests, religious and laypeople, for their daily efforts on behalf of seafarers in providing places where they can feel welcomed and valued. Your personal witness to the hope of the Gospel enriches the lives of your brothers and sisters.

I am especially pleased to recognize the positive contribution of the great number of laity who serve in the AOS, many of whom are active in its ranks and who are represented here today. Without your willingness to accept positions of responsibility, such as Regional Coordinators, National Directors, Ship Visitors, and the multitude of volunteers, AOS would not be as effective in its mission. You are respected and valued collaborators in the Lord’s vineyard. I would also like to point out that, since his election in 2005, Pope Benedict XVI has frequently insisted on the crucial place of the laity in the Church, on their role and responsibilities, and the great debt of gratitude the Church has to them. To paraphrase the Holy Father we could ask, “*How could we imagine the AOS without the contribution of the laity?*” Therefore it is our duty “*to help them to follow the Lord faithfully, appreciating their spiritual potential and each one's charisms*”⁴.

Together with bishops, priests, and deacons, who share in the ordained ministry in unique and essential ways, the laity participate fully in the mission of the Church by virtue of their baptism in Christ. As the Second Vatican Council affirms: “*these faithful are by baptism made one body with Christ and are constituted among the People of God; they are in their own way made sharers in the priestly, prophetic, and kingly functions of Christ; and they carry out for their own part the*

¹ Cf. BENEDICT XVI, Pontifical Message for World Day of Peace 2007: OR, English edition, no. 51/52, 20-27 December 2006, 6

² BENEDICT XVI, Address to the World Conference of Secular Institutes, 3rd February 2007: OR, English edition, no. 7, 14 February 2007, 5
cfr. BENEDICT XVI, Pontifical Message for World Day of Peace 2007: OR, English edition, no. 51/52, 20-27 December 2006, 6

³ JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Letter *Motu Proprio Stella Maris* on the Maritime Apostolate, Art. I: AAS LXXXIX (1997) 209.

⁴ BENEDICT XVI, General Audience, 7 March 2007: OR, English edition, no. 11, 14 March 2007, 3

mission of the whole Christian people in the Church and in the world" (Lumen Gentium, 31). Of course, this does not diminish the indispensable role of ordained ministers as pastors of the flock.

All previous 21 World Congresses have contributed to the development of AOS and have enabled it to respond to the challenges of the times. In particular I recall the Rio de Janeiro Congress in 2002, which focused on three important aspects of the Apostolate:

1. We must globalize solidarity;
2. We must give a human face to globalization;
3. We must work for a new world order that will take into account the values of the Gospel and the Social Teaching of the Church.

In this context, the approval of the "Maritime Labour Convention 2006" by the ILO was a major victory for the maritime industry. As a result of that Convention, more than one million seafarers working on 50,000 vessels will realize improved benefits, and there is general agreement that the Convention is a key step towards the establishment of this global solidarity which we have been calling for. In this connection, we were gratified when Mr. Juan Somavia, Director General of the ILO, paid tribute to Christian and other religious welfare organizations that serve the maritime industry, and even made a special mention of the Delegation of the Holy See to the ILO, during that historical session when the Convention was adopted.

Also we hail the approval on the 14th of June 2007 of the new ILO Convention on Fishing as a great sign of hope, as the new Convention will extend the coverage of ILO standards to more than 90 per cent of the world's fishers by including also the self-employed and those paid on the basis of a share of the catch.

The post-Rio period for AOS has been a time of progress and of fertile initiatives, such as the creation of the "AOS International Fishing Committee", the "AOS Tsunami relief fund", the "AOS International Website," and the Consultation on Cruise Ship Ministry in 2005. A survey was also conducted in 2006 to ascertain the needs of seafarers and the services offered by AOS, and a new revised "AOS Manual" is ready for publication. There have also been efforts to include the yachting and sail competition sector in our pastoral vision and outreach. Regular national and regional Conferences and training sessions have been held throughout the world, which are proofs of the vitality of AOS. There have been numerous publications, articles and reports in "People on the Move," and in our quarterly Bulletin "Apostolatus Maris", which is published regularly. The Regional Coordinators have held annual meetings in Rome, at the headquarters of the Pontifical Council. I take this opportunity to thank all those who have been a part of these initiatives, and I commend them for their work and contribution to the AOS worldwide network. In spite of the obstacles of distances and lack of means, some regions have seen very positive developments in recent years. In addition, AOS has assumed its ecumenical commitments, and has cooperated to the

best of its ability with ICMA and their kindred societies, including in their various projects, meetings and training programs, and often with extra financial contributions.

Maritime Day is being given due recognition in the Church, and since the year 2003, both Pope John Paul II and Benedict XVI have prayed for and blessed the people of the sea during the *Angelus* on the Sunday preceding this celebration. The celebration of Sea Sunday has become a regular and popular feature in most countries and each year on that occasion our Pontifical Council has published a Message drawing attention to specific problems and challenges facing the maritime community. Such themes have included: the criminalization of seafarers and equal justice for all; the seriousness and dangers of HIV/AIDS, especially to the maritime community; and the urgency for the ratification and implementation of the “Maritime Labour Convention 2006”. The Sea Sunday message of 2004, for example, raised the question of “fair trade” in the maritime industries, stating that: “Sea transport being an essential part of international trade, has the time not come to extend this notion of “fair trade” to maritime transport, fishing and other categories alike? Has the time not come to provide to maritime workers social security and protection?”.

As we gather for the XXII World Congress of the AOS, let us sharpen our vision and enhance our commitment to be servants of peace and solidarity, of evangelization and hope, and to put flesh on the theme that has been chosen for our meeting this week. Let us truly be *In Solidarity with the People of the Sea as Witnesses of Hope, through Proclamation of the Word, Liturgy and Diakonia*.

I wish you a successful Congress, and I invoke the protection and intercession of our Blessed Mother and Patron, Mary the “Stella Maris.” May she always be our model and our “compass”, guiding us gently to the safe harbour of her Son’s all-embracing love.