

MESSAGE TO THE MARITIME WORLD

WITNESSES OF HOPE FOR A CHRISTIAN HUMANISM IN THE MARITIME WORLD

Today, 29 June 2007, the feast of the Apostles St Peter and St Paul, who was the navigator of the Gospel, we the members of the Apostleship of the Sea are gathered in the Polish port of Gdynia on the Baltic Sea for our 22nd world congress organised by the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People. We turn to you, the people of the sea, of coastal communities and exercising maritime professions, to address our message of solidarity to you.

The theme of our Congress has been: *In solidarity with the People of the Sea, witnesses of Hope through the Word of God, Liturgy and Service.*

Naturally we are aware of the many inhuman situations which persist in the maritime world and, alongside of you, we speak out against them: the fact human beings still endure great injustices with indescribable suffering and inhumane death.

But we also know that many of you live by genuine values of solidarity and courage and that even onboard ship people of different character, different cultures and religions, can co-exist in friendship.

We also know that new technologies help you to communicate better with your families and among yourselves and to make your voices heard in the public arena. We acknowledge those institutions which make these technologies available to you and teach you how to use them. Not having access to these technologies, or not knowing how to use them, only serves to widen the gulf which separates those who know from those who do not, those who are habitually poor. In reality, certain businesses use technology to subject you to working patterns more appropriate to robots, to the detriment of the human, spiritual and familial facets of your lives.

For these and other reasons, we pledge to remain in solidarity with you as witnesses of hope. The Church is conscious of being that fragile boat on which the hope of the world set sail, the hope that is more than a mere word, or idea or dream. As Christians we believe that that hope is The One who bears a human name and face, our Saviour Jesus, the Hope of the world.

- As the human face of the love of God, He makes us the messengers of his joy;
- Son of God, He turns us towards his Father whom He teaches us to love as our Father and to worship as our only God;
- Sharing in our grief and our suffering, He urges us especially towards those who have least, so that we can serve them as witnesses of His love.

And so, in these three ways, inspired by His Spirit, He moves us to advocate a maritime humanism brought to life by Christian hope. The fulfillment of this hope is not a question of achieving or of doing but rather of being, of living a life of true humanity such as God wanted for us whom He created in His image.

It is through this hope that He asks us to speak not with words which are actions as Pope Benedict XVI tells us, recalling the words of St John, in his encyclical *Deus caritas est*. Specifically, that means that the Lord is not only asking us to be the voice of the voiceless, for which of course your professional organizations serve. But in addition, He asks us to be His Word, the Word that we live and share throughout the maritime world, which is both our world and yours. The Word of God is bearer of His comforting presence and witness to the world which is to come, the world we will build together and which is also the gift of God, the heavenly Jerusalem.

It is through Christian hope that Christ asks us to turn towards God, as you do so often when faced with the vastness of the sea, its violence and its splendour. He asks us to adore the Creator, to respect His creation, to turn our hearts away from false gods and idols. He asks us to celebrate this God who has made us as His own and placed the seal of His infinity in our hearts; this God who gives us His real presence in the Eucharist and strong times of hope, joy and abundance in the liturgy.

Finally it is through Christian hope that Christ, Priest and Deacon, asks us to serve the people of the sea wherever we are, in the public arena and among the leaders of Christian communities. He asks us to ensure that these people do not continue to turn their backs to the sea but attend to the needs of those who put out into the deep and live from the sea within their culture.

Since the Rio Congress of 2002, we have rejoiced in the creation of the International Fishing Committee of AOS and the passing of the new ILO Convention on Fishing, which favours marine fishers, on 14 June 2007.

On this occasion, we wish to draw your attention to two publications of the Church: *The Compendium of Social Doctrine* and the *Manual for the Apostleship of the Sea*. These publications are very useful for the formation of all.

To finish, we would like to thank all the pastoral agents, ordained ministers, religious, lay men and women, employees and volunteers who, in whatever way, share in the life of the Apostleship of the Sea. We know of excellent results in many places of the sincere ecumenical collaboration and interreligious dialogue taking place on land, at sea and in seafarers' centres.

Despite the obstacles, the difficulties and the problems which we all experience, we continue to work for our Apostleship of the Sea giving thanks with Mary *Stella Maris*. Those who contend with winds and tides in the promotion of this maritime humanism and who, by the Word of God, Liturgy and Service, especially for the poor, make us witnesses of hope, in solidarity with the people of the sea.