

Greetings from the Holy Father

*From the Vatican
John Paul II
1 November 1987*

To my Venerable Brother

Cardinal Bernardin Gantin
President of the Pontifical Commission for
The Pastoral Care of Migrant & Itinerant People

18th Apostleship Of The Sea Congress
Mombasa, Kenya

"Seas and rivers bless the Lord, let the earth bless the Lord" (Dan 3: 73).

With this prayerful invocation I send cordial greetings to you and to the other Cardinals and Bishops present at the Eighteenth World Congress of the Apostleship of the Sea. I especially greet the seafarers, pastoral workers and chaplains of the Maritime Apostolate gathered in Mombasa, Kenya, for this international assembly.

Your program of prayer, reflection and deliberation is an event of prime importance for giving further impetus to your specific pastoral service of the men and women whose lives and work are connected with the sea. The concern of the Church for the spiritual well-being of seafaring people and their families is expressed to a great extent in your commitment and wise stewardship.

The theme of your Congress, "The Apostleship of the Sea and the dignity of maritime work in the light of *Laborem Exercens*", offers a rich source for your study and discussion. The dedication, self-sacrifice and round-the-clock availability involved in the ministry to seafarers is a work of love which reflects the closeness and compassion of Jesus himself, whom the Gospels often depict in contact with the people, and especially the fishermen, who lived and worked by the Sea of Galilee.

Earlier this year I had the privilege of addressing the seafaring people of the Baltic Sea assembled at Gdynia. There I remarked that the sea speaks to peoples "concerning the need to meet each other and to work with one another. It speaks of the need for solidarity, both between human beings and among nations" (Address at Gdynia, 11 June 1987, No. 2). Solidarity is a concept which seafaring people understand very well, and it is an important aspect of the *Apostolatus Maris*, which offers innumerable opportunities of encounter with so many people of varying faiths, cultures and backgrounds.

Through you, assembled in Mombasa, I greet the seafarers of the world and their families. I have in mind fishermen and merchant sailors on the high seas as well as those who navigate the lakes and rivers. The seas and waterways have a decisive influence on the realisation of their human and Christian vocation, on the formation of their personalities and outlook.

For many, the power and vastness of the sea helps them to make contact with God.

I pray that those who on the sea will always be solicitous for their families, separated as they are from them for months on end. I pray that the peace and love of Christ will reign in their homes in an atmosphere of mutual trust. My ardent hope is that seafarers will more and more respond to the Christian welcome and pastoral service offered to them in so many ports through the Stella Maris Centres and through the Apostleship of the Sea, which today is often carried out in collaboration with the ministry of other Christian Churches and Communions.

May Mary, Star of the Sea, under whose kindly patronage you have chosen to place your Apostolate, continue to intercede for you and make that Apostolate fruitful. I ask God to bless all those engaged in the maritime Apostolate, together with the seafarers and their families who are their special care.