

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO PARTICIPANTS IN THE WORLD CONGRESS OF THE
APOSTLESHIP OF THE SEA**

*Clementine Hall
Friday, 23 November 2012*

*Venerable Brothers,
Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

I welcome you with joy, at the end of your work in the 23rd World Congress of the Apostleship of the Sea. I cordially greet Cardinal Antonio Maria Vegliò, President of the Pontifical Council for Migrants and Itinerant People, grateful for his courteous words, as well as the collaborators of that Dicastery and those working in this specific area. These have been intense days for you, delving into important themes, such as proclaiming the Gospel to a growing number of seafarers who belong to Eastern Churches, helping Christians and non-Christians alike, seeking to make ecumenical and interreligious collaboration ever more solid. Confronted with the hardships faced by workers in the maritime industries, such as fishermen — and their families — there is a growing need to face these problems with "an integral vision of man, reflecting the different aspects of the human person, contemplated through a lens purified by charity" (Encyclical *Caritas in Veritate*, n. 32).

These are only a few of the many points which the Apostleship of the Sea has at heart and which were discussed at your Congress and, especially, are well attested by the long history of this worthy initiative. In fact, already in 1922, Pope Pius XI approved its Constitutions and its Rule, encouraging the first chaplains and volunteers in their mission to "expand the maritime ministry"; and, 75 years later, Blessed Pope John Paul II confirmed this mission in his Motu Proprio *Stella Maris*. In continuity with this precious tradition, you find yourselves reflecting on the new evangelization in the maritime world, in the same hall as that in which the 13th Ordinary Assembly of the Synod of Bishops was held in October, to find "the new methods and means for transmitting the Good News to people in our world today with a renewed enthusiasm" (*Lineamenta*, Introduction). In this way you have answered the appeal, that I addressed to all in proclaiming the Year of Faith, to give a renewed impetus to the mission of the Church "so as to help all believers in Christ to acquire a more conscious and vigorous adherence to the Gospel" (Motu Proprio *Porta Fidei*, n. 8).

Since the dawn of Christianity, the maritime world has been an effective vehicle for evangelization. The Apostles and disciples of Jesus were able to go all over the world, preaching the Gospel to the whole creation (cf. Mk 16:15) thanks to sea voyages; we need think only of St Paul's journeys. This is how they began their journey to spread the Word of God "to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8). Today too the Church sails the seas to bring the Gospel to all the nations and the network of your presence in all the ports of call around the world, your daily visits to ships in port and your brotherly welcome to crews during their layovers — are a visible sign of your affectionate attention to those who cannot receive ordinary pastoral care.

This world of the sea, with the continuous migration of people today, must take into account the complex effects of globalization and, unfortunately, must come to grips with situations of injustice, especially when the freedom of a ship's crew to go ashore is restricted, when they are abandoned altogether along with the vessels on which they work, when they risk piracy at sea and the damage of illegal fishing (cf. *Angelus*, 18 January 2009). The vulnerability of seafarers, fishermen and sailors calls for an even more attentive solicitude on the Church's part and should stimulate the motherly care that, through you, she expresses to all those whom you meet in ports and on ships or whom you help on board during those long months at sea.

A special thought goes to those working in the vast fishing sector and to their families. Indeed, they more than others must face the difficulties of the present time and live the uncertainty of the future, marked by the negative effects of climate change and the excessive exploitation of resources. To you fishermen, who seek decent and safe working conditions, safeguarding the dignity of your families, the protection of the environment and the defence of every person's dignity, I would like to ensure the Church's closeness. In this context the lay apostolate is already particularly active and has many permanent deacons and volunteers in the "Stella Maris" Centres. Yet, among mariners themselves there is above all a growing concern to support other seafarers, encouraging them to rediscover and intensify their relationship with God during long ocean voyages, and helping them with the spirit of charity in times of danger.

To use a metaphor well known to you, I urge you to take up the treasure of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, which is like "a compass that permits the Barque of the Church to put out into the deep in the midst of storms or on calm and peaceful waves, to sail safely and to reach her destination" (*General Audience*, 10 October 2012). In particular, recalling

the decree *Ad Gentes* on the Church's Missionary Activity, I wish today to renew the ecclesial mandate that places you, in communion with your local Churches, in the front line in the evangelization of so many men and women from different nations who pass through your ports. Be apostles faithful to the mission of proclaiming the Gospel, show the loving face of the Church which also welcomes and makes herself close to this portion of the People of God; respond without hesitation to maritime people who wait for you on board to appease the deep longing of their soul and make them feel active members of the community. I hope that each one of you may rediscover every day the beauty of faith, in order always to bear a consistent witness to it. May the Blessed Virgin Mary, *Stella Maris* and *Stella Matutina*, never cease to illuminate your work so that seafarers may know the Gospel and encounter the Lord Jesus who is the Way, the Truth and the Light. I impart my heartfelt Apostolic Blessing to each one of you, to your colleagues and to your loved ones.

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