

Message for Sea Sunday (July 13, 2025)

Dear brothers and sisters,

Once a year Catholic communities around the world remember seafarers in their Sunday liturgical assemblies. The second week of July, in fact, opens with Sea Sunday, dedicated to a reflection that brings to the heart of the Church the often invisible work of thousands of seafarers, people who spend much of their lives far from their families and communities, yet offer an immense service to the economy and the development of peoples. As memorably expressed in the Second Vatican Council's Constitution *Gaudium et spes*, of which this year is the 60th anniversary, 'The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ. Indeed, nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in their hearts' (GS 1). This is why we want all those who work at sea to know that they are in the heart of the Church: they are not alone in their demands for justice, dignity and joy. Integral human development, in fact, includes all human beings and all their physical, spiritual and community dimensions. Wherever the Gospel is proclaimed and the presence of the risen Jesus is welcomed, the world cannot remain as it is. For he who has conquered sin and death says: 'Behold, I make all things new!' (Rev 21:5).

In this Jubilee year, dear friends, the newness that Christians announce must even more radically question the existing order, because the Kingdom of God calls us to conversion: breaking chains, forgiving debts, redistributing resources, meeting in peace are courageous but achievable human gestures. They rekindle hope. For as we have learnt from the beginning, "those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen" (1 John 4:20). Thus, the whole Church is also called to consider how people work in ports and on ships today, with what rights, under what conditions of safety, with what material and spiritual assistance. In a wounded creation and in a world where conflicts and inequalities are increasing, loving the God of life engages with life. Life, in fact, is always concrete: someone's life, life spent within relationships that, if they do not liberate, imprison, and if they do not make one flourish, humiliate. Let us therefore shine some light on what lies behind our economies, on those

who make them work on a daily basis, often not benefiting from them at all and indeed exposing themselves to discrimination and danger.

We want to recognize seafarers - as the Jubilee 2025 motto calls us all - 'pilgrims of hope'. Whether consciously or not, they embody the desire of every human being, of whatever people or religious faith, to live a life of dignity, through work, exchange, encounters. They do not stand still: they have had the need and the audacity to set out, like so many men and women Sacred Scripture recounts. People who travel within the journey of life. 'Hope' is the word that must always remind us of our goal: we are not wanderers without a destiny, but daughters and sons whose dignity no one and nothing can ever erase. We are consequently brothers and sisters. We come from the same home, and we are returning to the same home: a homeland without borders or customs, where there are no privileges that divide and no injustices that wound. Because this awareness is firm, indestructible, we can hope. Already today, solidarity among ourselves and among all living beings can be stronger and more alive. 'Christian hope does not deceive or disappoint because it is grounded in the certainty that nothing and no one may ever separate us from God's love,' (*Spes non confundit* 3).

I thank Christian seafarers and all their colleagues of other religious and cultural affiliations: you are pilgrims of hope every time you work with care and love; every time you keep alive the bonds with your families and your communities; every time that in the face of social and environmental injustice you organize yourselves to react and respond courageously and constructively. We ask you to be bridges even between enemy countries, prophets of peace. The sea binds all lands, invites them to look at the infinite horizon, to feel that unity can always prevail over conflict. I ask the ecclesial communities, especially the dioceses encompassing seas, rivers or lakes, to promote attention to the Sea as a physical and spiritual environment that calls us to conversion.

May Mary, Star of the Sea, guide and enlighten our hope.

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