



# The Holy See

---

**ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER PAUL VI  
TO THE PARTICIPANTS IN THE XVI WORLD CONGRESS  
OF THE APOSTLESHIP OF THE SEA**

*Thursday, 1 December 1977*

*To the participants in the XVI World Congress  
of the Apostleship of the Sea*

We address to you, venerable and dear Brothers and beloved sons and daughters in Christ, this message of esteem and encouragement from across the world in response to the filial request of those whom we ourselves, in our Apostolic Letter "Apostolicae Caritatis", of 19 March 1970, charged with responsibility for the Pontifical Commission for the Spiritual Care of Migrants and Itinerant Peoples, which, among its other duties, reflects our own paternal concern for those who leave home and hearth to serve their fellow men and women on the seas and oceans of the world (Cfr. AAS 62 (1970) 193-197).

This coming together in prayer and study of Bishops, priests, religious and laity from every continent, in a World Congress of the Apostleship of the Sea, the sixteenth of a series and the first to be held outside Europe, is a concrete expression of that concern.

On the occasion of your last World Congress, we welcomed "with interest your quest to come to grips with the new era into which the maritime world is entering consequent upon the technical upheaval which it is experiencing and which is producing a new type of seafarer" (AAS 64 (1972) 602)

As a result of that Congress, the study of this "new era" has revealed a situation so different from that which existed when the Apostleship of the Sea was born fifty-five years ago that it was unanimously agreed that the theme of the present Congress should be "Evangelization in the Maritime World".

Whereas in 1922 the primary concern was for the spiritual care of the vast majority of Christian seafarers who made up the seafaring world of that time, now without diminishing in any way that specialized spiritual care called for by the Second Vatican Council for those of the faithful “who, on account of their way of life, are not adequately provided for by the ordinary pastoral care of the parochial clergy or are entirely deprived of it” (*Christus Dominus*, 18), the Apostleship of the Sea is faced with a *new situation* in which the merchant navies and fishing fleets of the world, greatly expanded since those early days of its mission, now include large and ever increasing numbers of seafarers who have yet to hear and understand the Gospel message. “To reveal Jesus Christ and his Gospel to those who do not know them has been, ever since the morning of Pentecost, the fundamental programme which the Church has taken on as received from her Founder” (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 51).

In studying how to make this first proclamation of the Word to those who are “far off”, you are faced with a complex problem: in a worldwide and constantly itinerant international community, the Apostleship of the Sea not only has to bring the Good News of Jesus to the now immense number of seafarers of non-Christian religions, “which the Church respects and esteems because they are the living expression of the soul of vast groups of people . . . carry within them the echo of thousands of years of searching for God . . . (and) passes an impressive patrimony of deeply religious texts” (*Ibid.* 53), but also to many more who, as the result of secularizing influences of modern life, profess themselves to be atheists or nonbelievers, as well as those who, though baptized, live, for the same reason, quite outside the Christian life (Cfr. *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 55). Then, too, amongst simple sailors and fishermen, there are those who, though possessing a certain faith, have received but an imperfect knowledge of the foundations of that faith (*Ibid.* 52).

To approach this task, to achieve this new orientation, your preparatory regional meetings have analyzed the problem into four main questions which the present Congress will now examine: Who are to be evangelized? Who are the evangelizers? What is the message to be announced? and, How is that message to be conveyed? In answer to the first, you will consider the various categories of seafarers already mentioned as well as the very structures of the seafaring world itself, so that all things may be restored in Christ. With regard to the second, you will look closely at the respective roles of the Bishops as principal pastors, of the priests as sharing their ministry, of deacons as their intimate collaborators, of religious with their specific charisms, and of the laity, especially the seafarers themselves, with their proper vocation of evangelizing their world. Prudent use can be made in this sector of the ministries which may be conferred on the laity.

The message to be announced is that of salvation itself, the Word of God humanly and spiritually liberating through Christ and his Church.

Finally, in studying how that message is to be conveyed, you will stress the irreplaceable position of authentic Christian witness.

This it is which will open the way to a fruitful evangelizing dialogue, to be carried out with regard for personal convictions and paying great respect to all that is good in those other religions and ideas which are the motivating force of many seafarers. Since the time these latter spend at sea is constantly increasing, it is important that your apostolic ingenuity be applied to an ever better use of the means of social communication. Nevertheless, the interest which Christian communities ashore may have for the wellbeing of seafarers is to be sustained and even developed: it is difficult to exaggerate the evangelizing value of true Christian hospitality.

Finally, you are aware that the division among Christian Churches is an obstacle in the evangelization of an itinerant people such as those of the seafaring world: indeed Christian unity remains the test of credibility of faith in Christ. We therefore warmly encourage whatever may be done without confusion or impatience to further this unity.

In extending to all of you our prayerful good wishes for the success of the task you have set yourselves in the great international seaport of Hong Kong, and assuring you of our sustained interest in the results of your work, we gladly impart to you, dear Brothers and devoted sons and daughters in Christ, and to the seafarers and their families throughout the world, our heartfelt Apostolic Blessing.

From the Vatican, 1-XII-1977.

**PAULUS PP. VI**