



FEBRUARY
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Stella Maris

SUPPORTING SEAFARERS AND FISHERS AROUND THE WORLD

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Stella Maris is a Catholic charity supporting seafarers worldwide.

We provide practical and pastoral care to all seafarers, regardless of nationality, belief or race. Our port chaplains and volunteer ship visitors welcome seafarers, offer welfare services and advice, practical help, care and friendship.

Stella Maris is the largest ship visiting network in the world, working in 332 ports with 227 port chaplains around the world. We also run 53 seafarers' centres all over the world.

We are only able to continue our work through the generous donations of our supporters and volunteers.

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Stella Maris
provides seafarers
with practical
support, information
and a listening ear

HOLY SEE CALLS FOR SEAFARERS' RIGHTS TO BE UPHELD

➤ **The Holy See is calling for seafarers' dignity and welfare to be protected and upheld, as concerns continue over unjust treatment and violence at sea.**

Addressing the International Maritime Organization's 32nd Session of the General Assembly in London on 7th December 2021, Archbishop Paul R. Gallagher, the Holy See's Secretary for Relations with States, said that many seafarers are still being denied shore leave and access to welfare services.

He pointed out that seafarers are also vulnerable to violence and abuse at sea, including pirate attacks and modern slavery.

"There are thousands of seafarers who are currently stranded on ships well beyond the term of their original contracts and who are unable to be repatriated due to COVID-related travel restrictions. Furthermore, there are seafarers who, because of lockdowns or other similar constraints, are unable to join their

sea crews and secure their salary," Archbishop Gallagher said.

"This is deplorable and severely affects their families as well," he said, adding that the pandemic has only served to bring such despicable violations into greater focus.

Archbishop Gallagher expressed the Holy See's support for the International Maritime Organization (IMO) and its Member States in upholding the fundamental human rights and integral development of all seafarers, as well as a fairer future for them.

"We join this Organization in considering as a priority the protection of seafarers and their fundamental human rights, as well as the importance of avoiding the pollution of the environment as parts of an integral ecology.

"Moreover, the IMO has an essential role to play in urging the international community to take into consideration more safe and regular migration pathways, for the large numbers of people migrating by sea in overcrowded and unseaworthy vessels."

The Catholic Church's support to seafarers and fishers worldwide is conducted through global maritime charity Stella Maris – which is the largest ship-visiting network in the world.

The charity improves the lives of seafarers and fishers through its local chaplains and seafarer centres, expert information, advocacy, and spiritual support. It operates out of more than three-hundred ports in more than fifty countries.



Sunday at Sea with Fr Pio Idowu

FIFTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME
SUNDAY 6TH FEBRUARY

GOSPEL LUKE 5:1-11

At that time:

While the people pressed upon Jesus to hear the word of God,

he was standing by the lake of Gennesaret.

And he saw two boats by the lake;

but the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets.

Getting into one of the boats, which was Simon's, he asked him to put out a little from the land.

And he sat down and taught the people from the boat.

And when he had ceased speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch."

And Simon answered,

"Master, we toiled all night and took nothing!

But at your word I will let down the nets."

And when they had done this,

they enclosed a great shoal of fish;

and as their nets were breaking,

they beckoned to their partners in the other boat to come and help them.

And they came and filled both the boats,

so that they began to sink.

But when Simon Peter saw it,

he fell down at Jesus's knees, saying,

"Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord."

For he was astonished,

and all that were with him,

at the catch of fish which they had taken;

and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon.

And Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid; henceforth you will be catching men."

And when they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed him.

THE GOSPEL AND YOU

The miraculous catch of fish witnessed by the first disciples teaches us the important lesson of absolute surrender to the will of God. Peter, an experienced fisherman, had fished all night, which was the proper time for fishing, but without any success. Instead, Jesus comes in the daytime, the wrong time for fishing, and tells them to "Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch." Peter tried to reason with the Lord: "Master, we toiled all night and took nothing!" Being an experienced fisherman, he knew the appropriate time for fishing, but he decides to follow the Lord's suggestion: "But at your word I will let down the nets." Peter's companions followed his lead and because of their surrender to the will of Christ, they made such a large catch of fish that their boats were filled to sinking point.

The miraculous catch of fish coincided with the call of the first disciples. Pope Benedict XVI, in his first homily as Pope, reflecting on this Gospel passage, said: "Peter's call to be a shepherd...comes after the account of a miraculous catch of fish... Jesus had invited Simon once more to put out into the deep. And Simon, who was not yet called Peter, gave the wonderful reply: "Master, at your word I will let down the nets." And then came the conferral of his mission: "Do not be afraid. Henceforth you will be catching men" (Lk 5:1-11). Today too the Church and the successors of the Apostles are told to put out into the deep sea of history and to let down the nets, so as to win men and women over to the Gospel – to God, to Christ, to true life."

But in the apostolate, absolute surrender to the will of God is indispensable. Just as in the miraculous catch of fish Jesus had given a command that was at variance with human reasoning, so also in the work of catching men for God's kingdom, we must learn to abandon our ideas and submit ourselves completely to the will of God. As St John Chrysostom once said: "God does not need our work, but He does need our obedience."

SIXTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

SUNDAY 13TH FEBRUARY

GOSPEL: LUKE 6:17,20-26

At that time:

Jesus came down with the Twelve and stood on a level place, with a great crowd of his disciples and a great multitude of people from all Judea and Jerusalem

and the seacoast of Tyre and Sidon, who came to hear him and to be healed of their diseases.

And he lifted up his eyes on his disciples and said: "Blessed are you poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.

"Blessed are you that hunger now, for you shall be satisfied.

"Blessed are you that weep now, for you shall laugh.

"Blessed are you when men hate you, and when they exclude you and revile you, and cast out your name as evil, on account of the Son of man!

"Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven; for so their fathers did to the prophets.

"But woe to you that are rich, for you have received your consolation.

"Woe to you that are full now, for you shall hunger.

"Woe to you that laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep.

"Woe to you, when all men speak well of you, for so their fathers did to the false prophets."



THE GOSPEL AND YOU

The Gospel tells us that Jesus "stood on a level place, with a great crowd of his disciples and a great multitude of people from all Judea and Jerusalem and the seacoast of Tyre and Sidon". He was with the people, healing their infirmities and delivering them from the evil spirit. But when He began to teach, we are told that "he lifted up his eyes on his disciples." Even though there was a great multitude of people around Jesus, when He began to speak, He addressed His words directly to His disciples.

As Christians, we are disciples of Christ and we learn to live His life, we imitate His example and we already begin to live in intimate union with Him, even in this world. And in the beatitudes, Christ promises to reward our fidelity with eternal happiness: blessed are the poor in spirit, blessed are the hungry, blessed are those who weep, blessed are those who are persecuted and hated for the sake of Christ. These

are values we see in Christ and which every Christian is called to imitate. And if we have in us these same values and attitudes, we shall truly be happy.

The Blessed Virgin Mary is the model of the Church. She is the inspiring example of how to hear God's Word calling us to conversion and of how to put it into practice. At the Annunciation, Mary teaches us how to listen to God's Word and accept it in faith. And motivated by faith in God, she gave her consent: "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word". Like Mary, may we learn to listen to God's voice calling us to a life of intimate union with Him. May we imitate Mary's example by listening to God's Word, by pondering it in our heart in order to understand the gift of grace contained therein, and thus dispose ourselves to become instruments of grace, means by which others will come to know Christ.

SEVENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME SUNDAY 20TH FEBRUARY

GOSPEL LUKE 6:27-38

At that time:

Jesus said to his disciples,

“I say to you that hear,

Love your enemies,

do good to those who hate you,

bless those who curse you,

pray for those who abuse you.

To him who strikes you on the cheek,

offer the other also;

and from him who takes away your cloak

do not withhold your coat as well.

Give to every one who begs from you;

and of him who takes away your goods

do not ask them again.

And as you wish that men would do to you,

do so to them.

“If you love those who love you,

what credit is that to you?

For even sinners love those who love them.

And if you do good to those who do good to you,

what credit is that to you?

For even sinners do the same.

And if you lend to those from whom you hope

to receive,

what credit is that to you?

Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive as

much again.

But love your enemies, and do good,

and lend, expecting nothing in return;

and your reward will be great,

and you will be sons of the Most High;

for he is kind to the ungrateful and the selfish.

Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.

“Judge not, and you will not be judged;

condemn not, and you will not be condemned;

forgive, and you will be forgiven;

give, and it will be given to you;

good measure, pressed down,

shaken together, running over,

will be put into your lap.

For the measure you give will be the measure

you get back.”

“Jesus tells his disciples to ‘love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you’”



THE GOSPEL AND YOU

In the Gospel for this Sunday, Jesus continues to teach His disciples and proposes for their consideration some truly noble ideals. He invites them to imitate the Father’s mercy and goodness of heart if they wish to be truly regarded as His children. “Love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High”. Our goodness and generosity must not be measured according to worldly standards. Instead, just as the Father is “kind to the ungrateful and the selfish”, in like manner, Jesus tells His disciples to “love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you”.

Through baptism, we have become children of God. In baptism we receive a new identity as adopted children of God the Father. We become members of the Church, the Body of Christ, and temples of the Holy Spirit. Through this saving sacrament, God fills us with sanctifying grace. To understand the meaning and implications of our baptism is fundamentally to grasp our identity, vocation and mission as disciples of the Lord Jesus and members of the household of God.

And Christ reveals to us that we have a duty to be like our Father, to imitate his goodness and to treat others the way God treats us. We must learn to forgive those who hurt us and to be kind and generous to those in need. For if we limit ourselves to doing good only to those who are good to us, then we would be no different from those who have not received the grace of baptism. Instead, we have received the gift of sanctifying grace, and therefore, we must be “be merciful, even as your Father is merciful”.

**EIGHTH SUNDAY IN
ORDINARY TIME**
SUNDAY 27TH FEBRUARY

GOSPEL LUKE 6:39-45

At that time:

Jesus told his disciples a parable:

“Can a blind man lead a blind man?

Will they not both fall into a pit?

A disciple is not above his teacher
but every one when he is fully taught
will be like his teacher.

Why do you see the speck that is in your
brother’s eye,
but do not notice the log that is in your own eye?

Or how can you say to your brother,
‘Brother, let me take out the speck that is in
your eye,’

when you yourself do not see the log that is in your
own eye?

You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye,
and then you will see clearly
to take out the speck that is in your brother’s eye.

“For no good tree bears bad fruit,
nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit;
for each tree is known by its own fruit.

For figs are not gathered from thorns,
nor are grapes picked from a bramble bush.

The good man
out of the good treasure of his heart produces good,
and the evil man

out of his evil treasure produces evil;
for out of the abundance of the heart his
mouth speaks.”

THE GOSPEL AND YOU

Many of you are perhaps familiar with the song ‘Day by Day’: Day by day, Dear Lord, of thee three things I pray: To see thee more clearly, Love thee more dearly, Follow thee more nearly, Day by Day. This song draws its inspiration from a prayer ascribed to St Richard, bishop of Chichester, who died in the year 1253 and was canonised about nine years after. To see Christ more clearly, to love Him more dearly and to follow Him more nearly are three things necessary for a disciple of Christ. In today’s Gospel, Christ addresses himself to his disciples. These disciples would later be given the mission to preach, to evangelise, to lead other souls to Christ. In order to perfectly fulfil this mission, they needed to learn from Master.

But if the disciple does not learn from Christ, if the disciple does not absorb his teaching, if the disciple does not imitate the sentiments of His Sacred Heart, then he is guilty of spiritual blindness and is incapable of leading others to Christ. Which is why Christ asks the rhetorical question: “Can a blind man lead a blind man? Will they not both fall into a pit?” We all know the answer to that question. Those who are leaders must be perfect, or at least, they are expected to be better than those they lead. And generally, that is how the world views the leaders of the Church. They are expected to be of a high moral conduct.

A person who lives a good life, by virtue of that good life he lives, acquires a certain spiritual authority over souls. While one who makes no effort to overcome his weaknesses and defects will never be able to confidently say to another, correct your evil ways. Let us make an examination of conscience and see which aspects of our lives need correcting and healing, and ask the Lord, through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, to come and heal us with his grace.





The Messages of Our Lady of Lourdes

By David Baldwin

➤ There were not many words spoken for “public consumption” by Our Lady when she appeared to Bernadette; of her secrets to Bernadette, we of course will never know length and content. But the messages that Our Lady imparted for us, whether by word, symbol or implication, are many and multi-layered, giving a wealth to ponder over. They are gentle, reassuring, encouraging, albeit at times woven through with sorrow.

- First, it is significant that Mary, the most elevated of humanity, was sent by God as His messenger to one of the poorest, most obscure and disregarded of humanity. The simple message is that God is accessible to all, welcomes all, and speaks to all, and, conversely, it is often the poorest and most obscure who hear the message and unashamedly transmit it. "How blessed are you who are poor: the kingdom of God is yours" (Lk 6:20). One only has to look at St Teresa of Calcutta to see this aspect.
- Next, Our Lady's first words to Bernadette, "What I have to say to you does not have to be written down", is an eloquent statement on faith – in an age of increasing rationalism and cynicism over the supernatural – tangible and visible "proof" is not always going to be on hand, "Only faith can guarantee the blessings that we hope for, or prove the existence of realities that are unseen" (Heb 11:1).
- In that same third Apparition, the next statement Our Lady made was, "Would you be kind enough to come here every day for fifteen days?". This is God's invitation to us all in its broadest sense, always graciously put, for us to engage with Him, with the same commitment and determination, against the opposition, no matter how subtle, that Bernadette had to face and successfully overcame. "The promise that was made is for you and your children, and for all those who are far away, for all those whom the Lord our God is calling to himself" (Ac 2:39). It could also be taken as an explicit invitation for any one to make the pilgrimage to Lourdes either for healing or to assist.
- The last remark during that Apparition, that would not only resonate with Bernadette for the rest of her life, but should with us too, "I do not promise to make you happy in this world, but in the other", is God's sure promise to us, His broken and struggling people in this "vale of tears", that, through our honest endeavour to follow His will, and despite the hardships of this world, we will find eternal peace and happiness with Him in the other. "In my estimation, all that we suffer in the present time is nothing in comparison with the glory which is destined to be disclosed for us, for the whole creation is waiting with eagerness for the children of God to be revealed" (Rm 8:18, 19).
- From the eighth to the twelfth Apparitions the theme is repentance, where Bernadette's actions – crawling on her knees, kissing the ground, drinking and washing from the muddy residue from the nascent spring, eating the saxifrage herb, all signify deep acts of penitence, a common theme from many of Our Lady's messages, a theme usually spelt out with a dramatic urgency, coupled with a strong call for conversion. "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is close at hand. Repent and believe the gospel" (Mk 1:15).
- There is, though, a sign of hope in amongst this theme of repentance: the uncovering of the spring indicated by Our Lady. This is the "living water", "the water that I shall give will well up in them and will become a source of eternal life" (Jn 4:14), and in the particular context of Lourdes, the healing water.
- The calls, in the thirteenth and fourteenth Apparitions, to bring people in procession and build a chapel has even more poignancy and relevance today: processions are rarely seen, chapels and churches are closing down in many parts of the world, but Lourdes remains a faithful rallying point to this call. "So, since God has chosen you to build a house for his sanctuary, go resolutely to work!" (1 Ch 28:10). The reference to "build a chapel" does not only refer to bricks and mortar, but also to people, "Now Christ's body is yourselves, each of you with a part to play in the whole" (1 Co 12:27). That of the sixteenth Apparition, "I am the Immaculate Conception" was the one that astounded the Catholic world. Not, "I was immaculately conceived", but, "I AM the Immaculate Conception", signifying a resounding confirmation by God, through Our Lady, to the declaration of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception four years earlier by Pope Pius IX, and an unequivocal endorsement of papal infallibility.

Poverty, Penance, Prayer

When René Laurentin, a distinguished Marian scholar, collated and analysed the chance words of Bernadette, he, "was greatly surprised that they almost grouped themselves under the key words of the message of Lourdes: poverty, penance, prayer". And these are the overarching components of Our Lady's message from Lourdes, and indeed the Christian message. Bernadette most certainly reflected these attributes throughout her life; Our Lady entreats us all to do the same. Poverty is that attitude that God seeks most from us, as preached by Jesus in the Beatitudes; penance is the continual actions we take in acknowledging our weaknesses, repairing them and thereby returning as soon as we can back to God's love; prayer is seeking that intimate dialogue with God, not necessarily only through words or song, but also through our intentions and our actions. All three should be bound in that inestimable element of the Almighty: love.



St Josephine Bakhita: A Survivor of Human Trafficking

➤ **The tragic story of St Josephine Bakhita, of her abduction into slavery but her eventual discovery of Jesus, is an important story for us to know in times when human trafficking is still a very real problem.**

They treated her as a thing. That was what she was to them: an object, a possession to be made use of as they saw fit. They ignored her gasps of pain as they carved patterns into her skin.

It was fashionable to have the bodies of your slaves decorated like that. We don't know for sure how old she was then – maybe twelve or thirteen? Afterwards, they rubbed salt into the wounds to ensure permanent scarring.

That kind of treatment doesn't just leave scars on your body: it leaves even more painful wounds deep inside you, in your spirit. And although time can sometimes heal those wounds, all too often it does not.

Searching for healing

After Bakhita had been sold to a master who behaved decently to her, and eventually took her to Italy – where he casually gave her away as a present to someone he hardly knew – she thought she'd found happiness at last. In a way, she had, at least on the surface.

No more beatings! No more cruel punishments just for happening to be there when a slave-owner was in a temper about something! Nevertheless, she carried around a sadness inside her, a sadness that never really lifted. She seems naturally to have been a kind, co-

operative and helpful person, someone who was very good with children because they trusted and were attracted to her.

They didn't understand what was the matter: she never talked – not in those days – about what had happened to her. But they could see the sadness inside.



When it came about, at last, that Bakhita found healing for the wound in her spirit, it wasn't thanks to the passage of time, or to her own natural resilience. Even the awakening of faith, through the religious instruction and loving care she received from the Canossian Sisters in Venice, did not in itself bring about that healing.

It happened as a kind of miracle at the moment of her baptism, a miracle performed by Jesus Christ through the power of the sacrament. From that moment on she radiated joy – a joy not of this world.

The healing she received was so complete that she was able to forgive the slave-owners who'd tortured her, excusing them – even feeling sorry for them – because they didn't know God. She prayed for them always, asking God to be good to them as he'd been to her, and bring them to salvation.

What can Bakhita's story say to us today?

It tells us that nothing is beyond Christ's power to heal. When we have inner wounds, even wounds that seem to separate us from his love, he doesn't always choose to heal them straightaway. But he does ask us to trust in his power to keep us safe and watch over us, heal us in his own time, and bring something good and beautiful out of the pain we suffer, as he did with Bakhita.

And Bakhita, too, can help us if we ask her.

Her story also reminds us of something else which we must take very seriously indeed. No child should ever have to go through what she went through. No child, and no woman or man either. So if there's ever anything we can do to stamp out all forms of human trafficking, and to help care for its victims, let's do it.





A PRAYER TO OUR LADY OF LOURDES

The Feast of Our Lady of Lourdes is celebrated on the 11th February

Ever Immaculate Virgin Mother of Mercy, health of the sick, refuge of sinners, comforter of the afflicted, you know my wants, my troubles, my sufferings; look with mercy on me. By appearing in the Grotto of Lourdes, you were pleased to make it a privileged sanctuary, whence you dispense your favours; and already many sufferers have obtained the cure for their infirmities, both spiritual and corporal.

I come, therefore, with complete confidence to implore your maternal intercession.

Obtain, O loving Mother, the grant of my requests. Through gratitude for your favours, I will endeavour to imitate your virtues, that I may one day share your glory. Amen.



STELLA MARIS

Stella Maris is the largest ship-visiting network in the world. We improve the lives of seafarers and fishers through our network of local chaplains and seafarer centres, expert information, advocacy, and spiritual support.



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