



Seafarers and Sojourners A Reflection for Sea Sunday

Scripture

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let all men know your forbearance. The Lord is at hand. Have no anxiety about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be known to God. And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.¹

Meditation

There is a great deal of stress in our lives today. The world economic crisis touches nearly all of us — those nearing retirement, those supporting young families and those just graduating from college. Our Country is still mired in two wars, and we're not sure how the Arab Spring will affect the stability of the Middle East. Earthquakes, tsunamis, hurricanes and oil spills have combined to cause concern about the very earth in which we live.

After awhile, the stress can become exhausting.

Exhaustion is a huge problem for seafarers. They too live and work in a stressful environment. Their quarters are cramped and uncomfortable. They're isolated from home and family for ten months or more at a time. They're alarmed by storms and pirates at sea, and in port they're awakened by noisy cargo handling operations and demands from port security officers. The ships are often old and under-manned, and seafarers often work more than the allowable 98 hours per week to keep the ships on schedule. Then they are told to falsely record fewer work hours.

After awhile, the stress can become exhausting.

With all this stress in our lives ashore and at sea, how persuasive are Paul's words to the Philippians: Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.

Those of us stressed ashore, feel a little helpless and with some frequency, will lash out at our political representatives. They, in turn, have taken to lashing out against each other. It's neither productive nor satisfying.



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Those of us stressed ashore, feel a little helpless and with some frequency, will lash out at our political representatives. They, in turn, have taken to lashing out against each other. It's neither productive nor satisfying.

Seafarers also feel a little helpless, but in the middle of the ocean or in a strange port, there are no politicians against whom to rail. In fact, there's hardly anyone around against whom to lash out. So, instead, the seafarers pray, and when in port, they will seek out the port chaplain for pastoral care. It seems to work for them.

Of course, prayers notwithstanding, the seafarers still live and work in cramped and uncomfortable quarters. They're still isolated from home and family. The storms, pirates, cargo handling and port inspectors still intrude in their lives. Their ships are still undermanned, and the seafarers still work excessive hours. But the prayer and pastoral care are comforting.

Seafarers tend to be humble folk. The vast expanse of the ocean probably contributes to their humility and forbearance. It is immediately clear to the seafarer that the Lord is present. Nobody else is around. So seafarers will let their requests be known to God, and the Lord gives them peace and keeps their hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

Prayer

Lord, on this Sea Sunday, we turn our thoughts to the seafarers, who bring us so much of the food we eat, clothes we wear, automobiles we drive and household goods we use, but who also bring us a model for faithful living. Help us, our communities and our world through these times of trouble, but as importantly, guard and protect the seafarers through perilous seas, abusive employment practices and the despair of being removed from their families and communities. Help us too, Lord, to bring to you in thanksgiving and not to each other in anger, our concerns and our fears. Keep the hearts and minds of all of us, ashore and at sea, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

Sharing the Story

Our port mission to seafarers from all corners of the world is truly a unique ministry of the wider church of the ELCA. We welcome the opportunity to preach, offer a temple talk or lead an adult forum at your congregation on the lives of seafarers and the ministry that nurtures their spirits and fosters their dignity.

1. Philipians 4:4-7

Seafarers & International House is an ELCA mission to seafarers and sojourners in maritime ports from Philadelphia to Providence and in an 84-room guesthouse at 123 East 15th Street, New York, NY 10003.

Telephone 212-677-4800

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