

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the holy Spirit Amen.

Today is Sea Sunday when we think of the work of the Mission to Seafarers and their many chaplains scattered across the world.

This last week had seen a focus on the NHS with the Queen bestowing the George Cross on the organization and all the staff, and with the service running for 73 years it is right we should thank them for their dedication. However we should also think about others who have given their time to help; the carers- in the community and in homes, police and the many organization set up to help people struggling through the pandemic. They have been mentioned from time to time. But there has been little said of the work of the chaplains who have been supporting the many thousands of seafarers who spend months sometimes years at sea to moving goods around the world, and very often working for unscrupulous shipping owners who have very little regards for the welfare of their staff.

It seems to be only on this Sunday do we remember the work of the Mission to Sea Farers and the many chaplains deployed across the world. We forget that almost 90% of our imported goods come by sea and all year round there are fishermen, risking their live, to bring fresh fish to our shops. The sea is a perilous place to earn a living. Very often it is only when there is a tragedy at sea, do we ever think of the seafarers and fishermen and the risk to their lives, many faces. Living on the coast, as we are we are very aware of just how unpredictable and treacherous the sea can be, but I wonder how often you spare a thought or prayer for the seafarers earning a living from the sea?

This evening I would like us to think of the Mission which is an international Christian organisation providing help and support to over 1.5 million seafarers across the world. They work in over 200 ports in 50 countries caring for seafarers of all ranks, nationalities, and beliefs. Through the global family of chaplains, staff, and volunteers they offer practical, emotional, and spiritual support to seafarers through ship visits, drop-in centres and a range of support services. The centres provide Wi-Fi for email and Skype calls. They print and publish six editions of the international newspaper for seafarers, 'The Sea,' each year. This newspaper features articles translated, into many languages. Many ports are in industrial, areas miles away from towns, shops and amenities, so transport is provided so that seafarers can make the most of their brief time ashore.

In cases of pirate attack, shipwreck, abandonment, serious injury or bereavement, the Mission is on hand to offer whatever assistance a seafarer needs and also for their families.. The chaplains provide services, spiritual support and opportunities for prayer and quiet reflection. They are trained to recognise and respond to signs of post-traumatic stress disorder and offer a caring response when needed, and provide rest and recreation when ashore. They help anyone in need regardless of nationality or religious belief, there is no discrimination.

We forget the human cost of shipping all our goods around the world, -the exotic foods we expect to see in the supermarkets, the cheap clothes and furnishings from the far east.

Most shipping companies and ship owners are honest and responsible employers. But when shipping companies run into trouble seafarers may be left to fend for themselves. They might not be paid for months they might not have enough money to return home. In these situations, they find themselves abandoned and alone in foreign ports far away from their homes. The Mission staff are available to assist seafarers when things go wrong and providing an advocacy service to assist in legal matters that may arise. Not all seamen get to crew luxurious container ships we may see in the channel. Many sail in old rust buckets. Some shipping companies treat Seafarers as expendable commodities abandoned. The work the Mission to Seafarers carried out in the name of Jesus is amazing and inspiring. They are ministering angels and definitely Good Samaritans, which brings us neatly to our reading.

We heard the very familiar Parable of the Good Samaritan. It tells the story of a man traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho, and while on the way he is robbed of everything he had, including his clothing, and is beaten to within an inch of his life. That road was treacherously winding and was a favourite hideout of robbers and thieves. As the man lies at the side of the path a priest comes along. Now you would expect a priest to stop and help the man, but he showed no love or compassion and passes by on the other side of the road so as not to get involved. If there was anyone who would have known God's law of love, it would have been the priest. By nature of his position, he was to be a person of compassion, desiring to help others. Unfortunately, "love" was not a word for him that required action on the behalf of someone else! The next person to pass by is a Levite, and he does exactly what the priest did, passes by without showing any compassion. Again, he would have known the law, but he also failed to show the injured man compassion.

Lastly a Samaritan, the one least likely to have shown compassion for the man. Samaritans were considered a low class of people by the Jews since they had intermarried with non-Jews and did not keep all the law. Therefore, Jews would have nothing to do with them. We do not know if the injured man was a Jew or Gentile, but it made no difference to the Samaritan; he did not consider the man's race or religion. The "Good Samaritan" saw only a person in dire need of assistance, and assist him he did, above and beyond the minimum required. He dresses the man's wounds with wine to disinfect and applied oil to sooth the pain. He puts the man on his animal and takes him to an inn to recover and pays the innkeeper with his own money. He then goes beyond common decency and tells the innkeeper to take good care of the man, and he would pay for any extra expenses on his return trip. The Samaritan saw his neighbour as anyone who was in need.

This parable was told by Jesus in response to a question from a lawyer who asked him- 'teacher what must I do to inherit eternal life. "What is written in the Law?"

Jesus replied. "How do you read it?"

The lawyer replied, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind and love your neighbour as yourself.

"You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live." But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbour?"

Jesus chooses a Samaritan as the rescuer of the injured man and in so doing, he is drawing a strong contrast between those who knew the law but applied it only to their own kind and those who applied the law to whoever was in need. They show no prejudice. Jesus now asks the lawyer if he can apply the lesson to his own life with the question "So which of these three do you think was neighbour to him who fell among the thieves?"

Once again, the lawyer's answer is telling of his personal hardness of heart. He cannot bring himself to say the word "Samaritan"; he refers to him as "he who showed mercy." His hatred for the Samaritans, his neighbours was so strong that he couldn't even refer to them by name. Jesus then tells the lawyer to "go and do likewise," meaning that he should start living what the law tells him to do. However, The Mission staff are available to assist seafarers when things go wrong and providing an advocacy service to assist in legal matters that may arise, and provide rest and recreation when I don't suppose the lawyer change his ways and probably still carried on with his bigoted attitude towards anyone who was not an orthodox Jew.

We may ask the question, 'Who is our neighbour? Over the past eighteen months many have become dependent on their neighbour for help and discovered who were their neighbour. But I think we should ask: Is there anyone Who is NOT MY NEIGHBOUR' since everyone is our neighbour, especially anyone in need in any way.

The Chaplains and staff who run the missions across the world do not ask the question 'Who is my neighbour' they help anyone in need. Television and social media have opened us up to the world. Suddenly people in other countries and remote areas have become our neighbours. We have all shared one terrible pandemic, some countries worse than other, we have been a united world whether we like it or not, united by suffering.

THE Mission to Seafarers has been subjected to the same restrictions as everyone else whilst already working in some terrible situation, but they have kept going with incredible ingenuity.

Today on Sea Sunday, we are asked to recognise seafarers as our neighbours and, indeed, our Global Family and to find ways of responding. However you choose, and details are on the website for Mission to Seafarers, please remember them in your prayers and also remember everyone is our neighbour and not to turn away from helping someone who might be in need. **It is up to us as Christians to be the Good Samaritans now. Amen**

