

Maritime Mass gives special recognition to those affected by oil spill

WASHINGTON - A Mass for mariners and people of the sea celebrated in Washington May 22 took on special significance in light of the massive oil spill endangering people's livelihoods and sea life in the Gulf of Mexico.

Archbishop Donald W. Wuerl of Washington, the main celebrant and homilist, dedicated part of his homily to the situation.

"Perhaps it takes a tragedy such as the events in the Gulf of Mexico to remind us of how life-giving the water is and how it touches all of us in one way or another" said the archbishop.

Hosted by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Apostleship of the Sea national office and the USCCB Secretariat of Cultural Diversity in the Church, the Mass was celebrated in the Crypt Church at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Basilica of the Immaculate Conception.

Concelebrants were Scalabrinian Father Anthony Dall Balcon, Monsignor William Cuddy Jr. and Father Joseph Opalda.

Since November 2005, the U.S. bishops have declared May 22 as the National Day of Prayer and Remembrance for Mariners and People of the Sea. The Mass was celebrated to commemorate merchant mariners, seafarers, fish and water workers, port personnel and others in the maritime community.

The Mass opened with the prelude "Whispers of the Sea," composed especially for the service by Philip Mornchilovich. In addition, soloist Susan Clark sang "Ave Maria" during the Mass, accompanied by organist Daniel B. Sanz. Aided by the church's acoustics, the rich music created an atmosphere of reverence for the attendees. A bouquet of red flowers graced the front of the altar.

The liturgy included recognition of the mariners and people of the sea, gratitude for mariners' valuable service, and a prayer for those who have gone down in ships and those who have been claimed by the water.

"Our prayer for our brothers and sisters, mariners and people of the sea, is that with them we are united not only in the solidarity of support and prayer, but a solidarity of faith and new life made real in the waters of baptism and the Pentecostal outpouring of the Holy Spirit," Archbishop Wuerl said.

The archbishop connected the readings of the Mass to his homily with references to both the books of Genesis and Revelation. He briefly explained in his homily how and where water was represented in the Bible, beginning with creation and continuing throughout Scripture as a rich source of life and part of baptism.

The text for the Mass, titled "The Blessed Virgin Mary, Star of the Sea," was approved by the Vatican for permanent use in the U.S. on March 21, 2006.

Among those invited to attend were officials from the federal Maritime Administration, the Philippines Consulate General, Virginia's secretary of transportation, representatives from the shipping and fishing communities, the Coast Guard, the National Transportation Safety Board, and mariners and their family members.

Monsignor Cuddy, chaplain of the Coast Guard, later described to Catholic News Service the importance of the Apostleship of the Sea.

"This organization, like many from other denominations, provides invaluable service for which the Coast Guard and the Navy are very grateful especially as our chaplains are so involved in the lives of active and reserve personnel and their families, due the demands of deployment and their personal needs," the priest said.

The International Maritime Organization has declared 2010 as "Year of the Seafarer." On the last Thursday of September, World Maritime Day is celebrated to pray for the approximately 1.2 million seafarers and merchant mariners worldwide in commercial ships and maritime vessels.

Also at the Mass was Scalabrinian Sister Myrna Tordillo, the apostleship's national

director, who in a recent letter appealed to chaplains and pastoral teams to encourage and help those in the Gulf Coast area coping with the effects of the oil spill. Sister Tordillo urged those in the affected areas to volunteer by registering with online with their respective states.

Bishop J. Kevin Boland of Savannah, Ga., episcopal promoter of the apostleship in the U.S., in a separate letter also encouraged bishops and others ministering in the Gulf region to especially pray for those who perished in the oil rig explosion in the Gulf Coast that led to the spill and for those involved in creating a solution for halting the disaster and cleaning up the resulting marine pollution.

“This tragic accident will impact thousands of people and could potentially destroy their livelihood,” Bishop Boland wrote.

The Apostleship of the Sea is a worldwide Catholic ministry. In the U.S. the apostleship’s chaplains, associates and volunteers carry out their ministry in 61 maritime ports in 49 dioceses to carry out their essential ministry.