What did you have for breakfast this morning? A banana? A cup of tea or coffee?

I ask this because it highlights one of the remarkable aspects of the crisis that has gripped us this year. The global trade of goods has continued virtually unaffected. Food continues to arrive in our kitchens from all around the world. Not to mention medicine, medical equipment and any number of other items.

**In fact, 90% of the products in our shops and homes have arrived here by sea and have been brought to us by seafarers.**

These hardworking men and women who crew container ships, oil tankers, fishing vessels and transporters are among the true frontline heroes of 2020. Today, on Sea Sunday, we thank God for them, just as we clapped for carers back in the Spring.

But this week, many seafarers face a miserable, lonely Christmas, thousands of miles away from their families.

**Right now, around 400,000 seafarers are stranded around the world because of the pandemic**.

National quarantine rules, airline cancellations and ongoing disruption mean they cannot return home. Many have had their contracts extended again and again, and some have not seen their families for up to a year. Seafarers are exhausted and anxious. This is a humanitarian crisis, but few outside the maritime sector know about it. As we reflect upon the Nativity scene in the crib, let us remember that some seafarers will miss the birth of their child while stranded at sea this Christmas time. Like all of us, they just want to be with their loved ones for Christmas.

**T**h**is Sea Sunday, I hope you will join with us at Stella Maris (Apostleship of the Sea) to make Christmas special for stranded seafarers.**

Here’s how you can help please.

At Stella Maris, we have chaplains and volunteers working in ports up and down the country and across the world. This week – even on Christmas Day – they will be out, as usual, visiting seafarers on the gangway or dockside. They will (safely) hand out small gifts and provide vital pastoral care. They will provide welfare packages of food and toiletries and faith resources: rosaries, Bibles and prayer books. And they will make videos of Gospel readings and email them out to crews stuck onboard ships.

But all this can only happen with your support. Today, please, will you do two things?

Firstly, please remember seafarers in your prayers. Thank God for them and the vital role they play in all our lives, often working in difficult and hazardous conditions and harsh weather.

Secondly, please could you give a donation? Your gift will help seafarers who are stranded and who won’t see their families this Christmas. It will show your appreciation for these often-forgotten key workers. And your support will be a generous expression of God’s love. You can donate in one of three ways:

• use the giving envelope provided

• text SEA to 70460 to donate £5

• give via the website: www.stellamaris.org.uk/donate

Thank you so much for playing a part this Sea Sunday. We are very grateful for all your support.

***Bishop Paul Mason,*** *Bishop Promoter for Stella Maris in England & Wales.*