



FEBRUARY
2021

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 around 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



ANTWERP, BELGIUM

The Port of Antwerp in Belgium is Europe's second largest seaport. It's potential as an inland port was spotted by Napoleon himself and it has grown steadily since then. Today it deals with upwards of 190 million tonnes of cargo each year.

Stella Maris has served seafarers in Antwerp since 1951 and continues to do so from a brand new Antwerp Seafarers Welfare centre run jointly by the umbrella organization covering all Christian-inspired missions. Since the outbreak of the corona pandemic, sailors' houses have been closed in most ports by order of the Belgian government. This is also the case in the ports of Antwerp and Ghent. The virus is still around and the shipping companies or agencies advised against shore leave for the crews out of fear for contamination. As no one wanted to take any chances the gangway was locked.

Most ships therefore became floating prisons for the sailors who could not be relieved at the end of the contract because many airports also went into lockdown. Repatriation not being possible, seamen were forced to stay on board for more than a year; having a serious impact on the morale.

Gangway as a meeting place

In addition, ship visits by the

harbour chaplains were also restricted. On most ships, they were soon forbidden to enter the accommodations any longer. At best, they were allowed to climb up the gangway to have a chat on deck with the sailors. But sometimes that was still too much. Sometimes the crew was allowed to descend the gangway to exchange a few words with the port chaplain on the quay.

Many people on board were short of the most basic toiletries due to the unexpected renewal of their contracts. In normal times this is not a big problem because they buy their necessities in a shop belonging to the seaman's house.

The Antwerp welfare officer Ann Van der Sypt found a solution however. She runs the shop in the Antwerp Harbour Hotel, which is now inaccessible to sailors. Knowing from experience the products that are in demand, she loads the most popular items in her van, and sells them to the crew on the gangway.

Guaranteed success!

Winter relief

This year, Christmas was different at home and on board. Usually Christmas is celebrated in the Antwerp Seafarers' Center with an ecumenical mass, followed by a snack buffet with accompanying drinks and distribution of Christmas gifts. However not in 2020. It was unlikely that the captains would allow shore leave. Therefore the missions prepared for a Christmas in a minor key with visits on Christmas Eve and distribution of gift packages on the gangway.

The distribution of woolen hats and scarves, during the year knitted by volunteers in the UK and Belgium was a welcome gift, especially with winter just around the corner. The chaplains and volunteer ship visitors have always a supply of clothes, sweaters, anoraks, shirt and trousers in their car to be distributed to the sailors. Many crewmembers come from warm, southern countries and are not always prepared for winter temperatures in the north.



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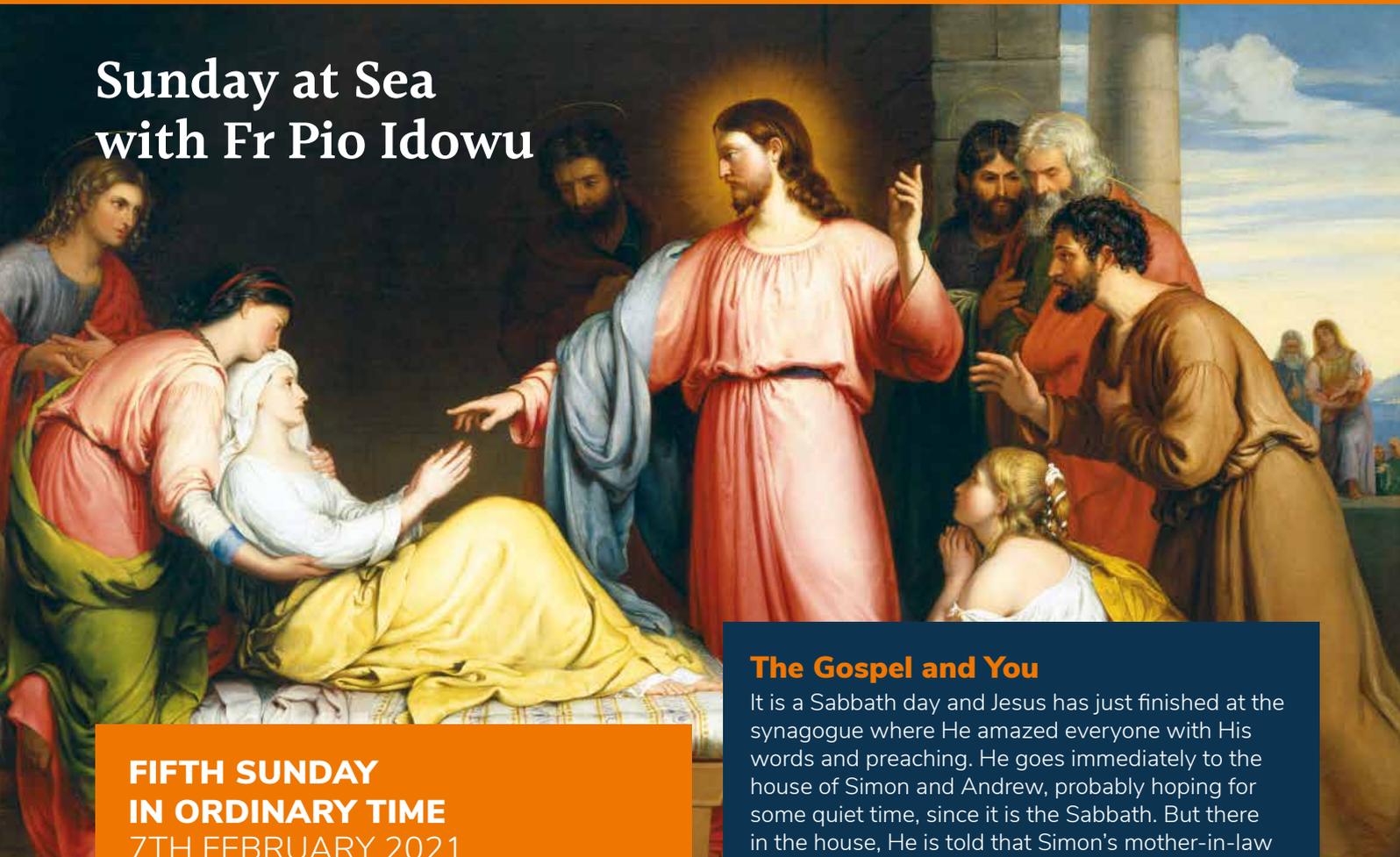
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Sunday at Sea with Fr Pio Idowu



**FIFTH SUNDAY
IN ORDINARY TIME**
7TH FEBRUARY 2021

GOSPEL MARK 1:29-39

At that time:

Leaving the synagogue,

Jesus entered the house of Simon and Andrew,
with James and John.

Now Simon's mother-in-law lay sick with a fever,
and immediately they told him of her.

And he came and took her by the hand and lifted her up,
and the fever left her; and she served them.

That evening, at sundown,
they brought to him all who were sick
or possessed with demons.

And the whole city was gathered together about the door.

And he healed many who were sick with various diseases,
and cast out many demons;

and he would not permit the demons to speak,
because they knew him.

And in the morning, a great while before day,
he rose and went out to a lonely place, and there he
prayed.

And Simon and those who were with him followed him,
and they found him and said to him,

"Every one is searching for you."

And he said to them,

"Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach
there also;

for that is why I came out."

And he went throughout all Galilee,
preaching in their synagogues and casting out demons.

The Gospel and You

It is a Sabbath day and Jesus has just finished at the synagogue where He amazed everyone with His words and preaching. He goes immediately to the house of Simon and Andrew, probably hoping for some quiet time, since it is the Sabbath. But there in the house, He is told that Simon's mother-in-law lay sick with a fever. Without hesitation, Jesus goes to her restores her to full health. In gratitude, the woman serves Jesus and the disciples who are with Him.

A fever is a little thing and yet it can prevent us from serving the Lord. We can all see how the coronavirus pandemic has disrupted our lives and shattered the dreams and hopes of many. Maybe even right now as you read this reflection, the virus is still with us and the world is yet to recover from its devastating effect. There were periods when we could not go to church and public Masses were suspended. Yet even in bleak and dark times such as these, Jesus loves us and comes to heal us, to restore us to full health so we can love and serve Him.

Venial sin is like a fever. Even though it does not separate us completely from God, still it prevents us from loving and serving God above all things. Frequent deliberate venial sin results in the loss of many graces and the fervour of charity and one's generosity in the service of God is greatly lessened. It can lead to lukewarmness and tepidity. A lukewarm soul may eventually avoid committing mortal sin, yet it suffers from a spiritual fever which prevents it from serving God with much generosity.

It may be that you suffer from a lack of generosity in the Lord's service. If this is so, then you need the healing touch of God's love. Just as Jesus healed Simon's mother-in-law, so may He heal us of our lukewarmness and restore us to a life of fervent love and generous service.

**SIXTH SUNDAY
IN ORDINARY TIME**
14TH FEBRUARY 2021

GOSPEL MARK 1:40-45

At that time:

A leper came to Jesus begging him,
and kneeling said to him,
"If you will, you can make me clean."

Moved with pity,
he stretched out his hand and touched him,
and said to him, "I will; be clean."

And immediately the leprosy left him,
and he was made clean.

And he sternly charged him,
and sent him away at once,
and said to him,

"See that you say nothing to any one;
but go, show yourself to the priest,
and offer for your cleansing what Moses
commanded,
for a proof to the people."

But he went out and began to talk freely
about it,
and to spread the news,
so that Jesus could no longer openly enter
a town,

but was out in the country;
and people came to him from every quarter.



THE GOSPEL AND YOU

At the time of Jesus, leprosy was an incurable condition. The disease would slowly disfigure the face, hands and feet of the victim and cause great suffering. Due to the contagiousness of the disease, lepers were banished from inhabited areas and had to avoid contact with people. The disease was regarded as a punishment from God for sins committed.

Because of the disfigurement it caused and the separation from others that it entailed, leprosy has always been regarded as an image of sin. St John Vianney says: "If we had faith and were to see a soul in the state of mortal sin, we would die of horror." St Joseph of Cupertino, a Franciscan friar who died in 1663, had the gift of being able to smell the stench of sin. Sometimes, he would tell sinners that they stank and that they had to go and wash themselves. By this, he meant that they should go to confession.

The leper of today's Gospel was well aware of his situation. He also knew that only Jesus could heal him. And so, he came to Jesus, "...begging him, and kneeling said to him, 'If you will, you can make me clean.'" We sinners must learn from the example of this leper. In confession, we humbly acknowledge our sinfulness, and we beseech the Lord to make us clean again. In confession, not only are we made clean, we once again become part of that community of brothers and sisters which is the Church. We are reunited with God and receive new grace.

When we go to confession, our attitude must be like that of the leper who humbly begged Our Lord: "If you will, you can make me clean." We need to go to confession with dispositions of faith and trust. And Christ, who sees into the depths of the heart, will be moved by a sincere desire for purity and will not withhold His mercy and forgiveness.

FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT

21ST FEBRUARY 2021

GOSPEL MARK 1:12-15

At that time:

The Spirit drove Jesus out into the wilderness.
And he was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan;
and he was with the wild beasts;
and the angels ministered to him.

Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee,
preaching the Gospel of God, and saying,
"The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand;
repent, and believe in the Gospel."

THE GOSPEL AND YOU

The Gospel for this First Sunday of Lent relates that "the Spirit drove Jesus out into the wilderness. And he was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan." In former times, the period of Lent was observed as a form of annual retreat, a period of Christian renewal. And even today, many Christians still try to maintain the spirit of Lent, detaching themselves for a bit from the pleasures of this world to join Christ in the desert in prayer and penance.

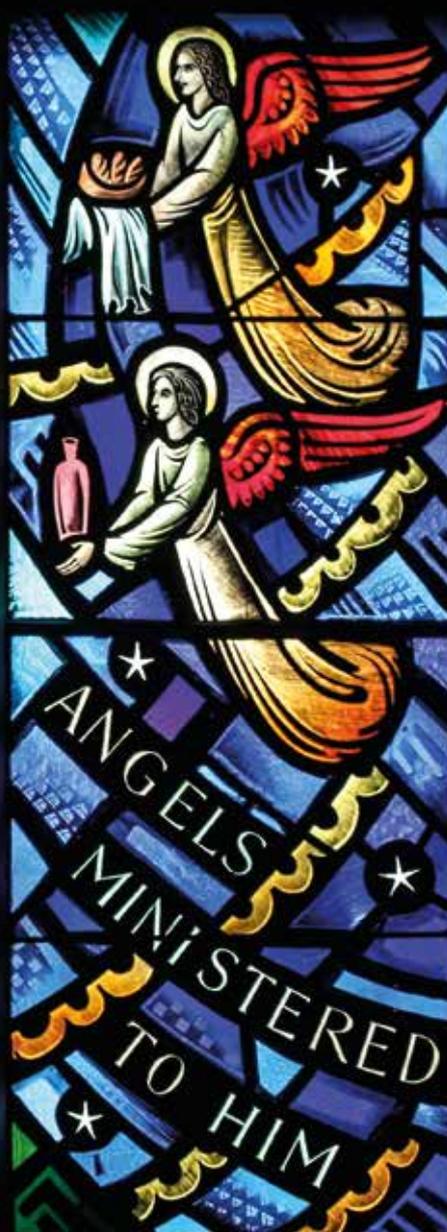
In order to observe well this period of Lent and obtain abundant spiritual fruit, our Lenten observance should be characterised by a few necessary conditions. The first is sorrow for sin. Our sorrow for sin must be sincere, interior and

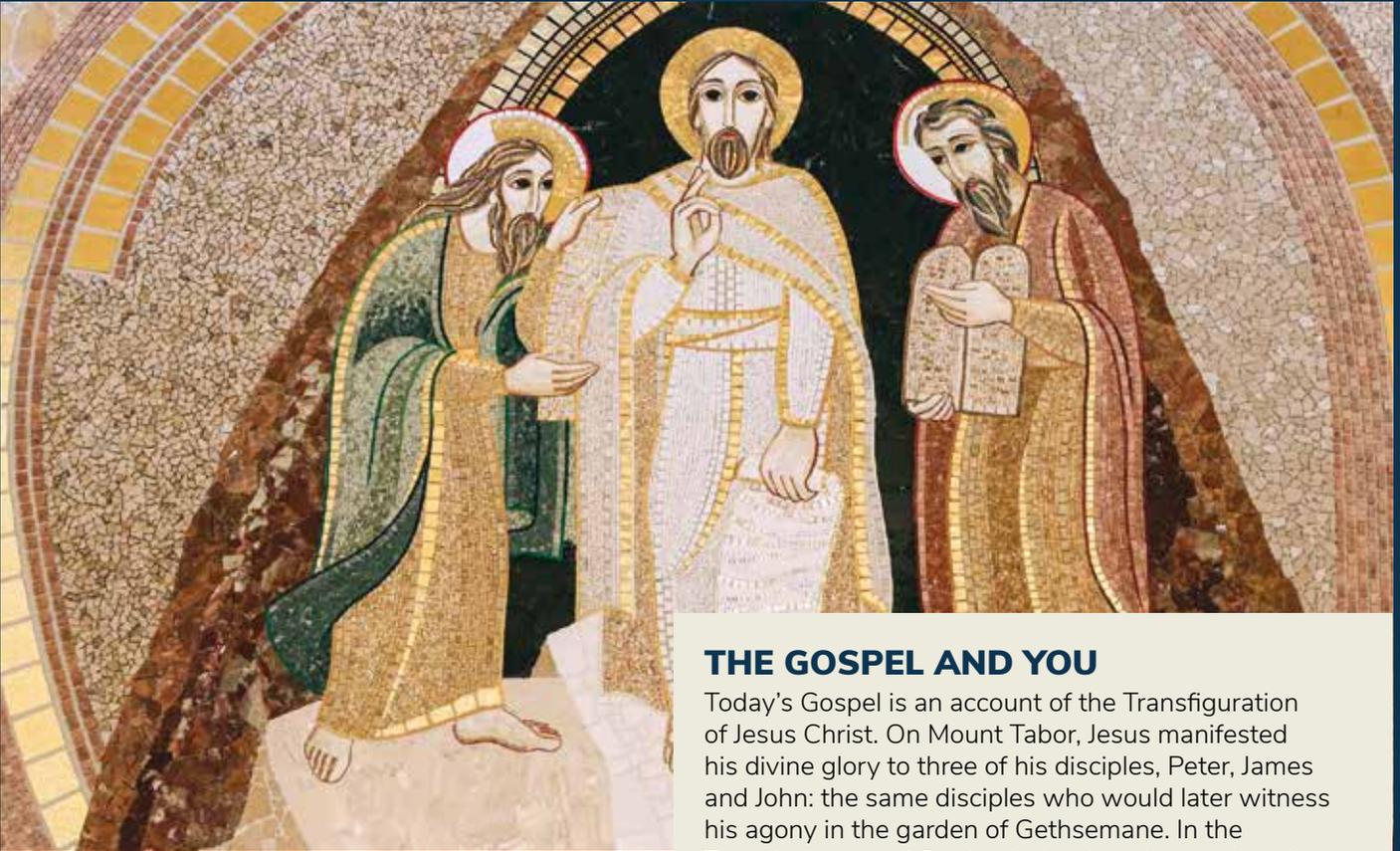
not just exterior. The Gospel admonishes us with these words: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the Gospel."

Another necessary condition for a fruitful Lenten observance is the austerity of our lives. Like Jesus Christ, led by the spirit into the desert, we too must live this period of Lent isolated from the world as far as possible, in prayer and mortification. A common way of living this austerity is by fasting from food. The fast can take other forms: it could be a fast from bad habits, a fast from social media, a fast from the comforts of everyday life.

A third necessary condition for a fruitful Lent is charity. Charity is the virtue by which we love God above all things and our neighbour as ourselves. When we fast from food, when we limit the spending of money during this period of Lent, let us remember those who are less privileged and give to them those things that we now have in abundance.

May this time of Lent be a time of spiritual renewal for each and everyone of us. Let's turn to the Blessed Virgin Mary and ask to journey with us during this Lent as we prepare for the coming solemnities of Easter.





SECOND SUNDAY IN LENT 28TH FEBRUARY 2021

GOSPEL MARK 9:2-10

At that time:

Jesus took with him Peter and James and John,
and led them up a high mountain apart by
themselves;

and he was transfigured before them,
and his garments became glistening, intensely white,
as no fuller on earth could bleach them.

And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses;
and they were talking to Jesus.

And Peter said to Jesus, "Master, it is well that we
are here;

let us make three booths,
one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah."

For he did not know what to say,
for they were exceedingly afraid.

And a cloud overshadowed them,
and a voice came out of the cloud,
"This is my beloved Son; listen to him."

And suddenly looking around
they no longer saw any one with them but Jesus only.

And as they were coming down the mountain,
he charged them to tell no one what they had seen,
until the Son of man should have risen from the dead.

So they kept the matter to themselves,
questioning what the rising from the dead meant.

THE GOSPEL AND YOU

Today's Gospel is an account of the Transfiguration of Jesus Christ. On Mount Tabor, Jesus manifested his divine glory to three of his disciples, Peter, James and John: the same disciples who would later witness his agony in the garden of Gethsemane. In the Transfiguration of Our Lord, the disciples catch a glimpse of the glory of Paradise. And Peter, ravished with joy and delight, exclaimed: "Master, it is well that we are here."

According to Saint Bede the Venerable, Christ, "by his merciful providence allowed them to enjoy, for a short time, the contemplation of that happiness which will last for ever, in order to make them capable of enduring adversity with fortitude." St Alphonsus de Liguori says that "The glory of heaven consists in seeing and loving God face to face."

The Transfiguration took place on a high mountain, away from the noise of the world. Just as Jesus took Peter, James and John up the mountain, so does he invite us to isolate ourselves from the noise of this world and climb the mountain of divine intimacy. How great shall our happiness be when, on reaching the heights of divine intimacy, we shall be permitted to behold God face to face! It is true that full vision of God will only be granted in heaven, but already here on earth, we can behold God's face.

But it must be observed that the road which leads to God's abiding presence is not easy. We have to climb a mountain before we can see and talk to God. And this mountain is the purification of one's heart for nothing impure can enter into the presence of God. To achieve purity of heart, two things are necessary and these things are prayer and penance. Through prayer, grace is obtained and through penance, the will is disciplined and trained to correspond to grace. A life of prayer and penance makes it easier for us to shut out the noise of this world, go into the desert with Christ, climb up the mountain with him, and there alone with him, dwell in His presence.

STRESS

Stress is the body's reaction to any change that requires an adjustment or response. The body reacts to these changes with physical, mental, and emotional responses. When external and internal demands are greater than the resources we have to meet those demands, we experience stress. Stress is a normal part of life but when stress is too much and for too long it can lead to physical and mental illness.



Key facts

- Stress is the body's reaction to feeling threatened or under pressure. It is very common and can be motivating to help us achieve things in our daily life.
- Too much accumulative stress, or chronic stress can increase the risk of developing depression if you are not coping with the stress well.
- Stress and anxiety may seem similar, but they are not the same. Stress is a response to daily pressures or threatening situation, while anxiety is a reaction to stress.
- While it may seem like there is nothing you can do about stress at work and home, there are steps you can easily take to relieve the stress and regain control.
- Effective stress management helps you break the hold stress has on your life, so you can be happier, healthier, and more productive.
- There are also effective psychological and pharmacological treatments for moderate and severe depression.

Why is managing stress important?

- If you are living with high levels of stress, you are putting your entire well-being at risk. Stress wreaks havoc on your emotional equilibrium, as well as your physical health. It narrows your ability to think clearly, function effectively, and enjoy life.
- Stress is linked to some of the leading causes of death: heart disease, cancer, lung ailments, accidents, and suicide.
- Chronic stress can lead to number of mental health conditions like depression and anxiety disorder.
- Research has found that stress can negatively affect the immune system.
- Stress also becomes harmful when people engage in the compulsive use of substances or behaviours to try to relieve their stress. These substances or behaviours include food, alcohol, tobacco, drugs, gambling, sex, shopping, and the internet.
- Stress spills into our personal lives in many ways, affecting the quality of our close relationships.
- Chronic stress can affect job performance in many ways, including: physical symptoms on workdays (like upset stomach, headaches), difficulty making decisions and accidents due to human error etc.

Recognising early signs of stress

It is very important that we recognise the signs and symptoms of stress at an early stage. The earlier we recognise and identify its signs, better we will be able to manage it. Following are some common signs and symptoms of stress:

- Difficulty in sleep and insomnia
- Abnormal appetite and weight changes
- Frequent headaches
- Stomach upsets and frequent urination
- Trembling, sweating and restricted breathing
- Tearful or crying spells
- Increased heart/respiratory rate
- Dehydration, dizziness and fainting
- Blurred eye sight/sore eyes
- Inability to get things done
- Isolation and increased relationship conflict
- Substance abuse
- Problems with memory, concentrating and difficulty making decisions
- Feeling nervous, anxious, angry, irritable or easily frustrated

Practical tips for managing stress

- Keep a positive attitude and accept that there are events that you cannot control.
- Be assertive instead of aggressive. Assert your feelings, opinions, or beliefs instead of becoming angry, defensive, or passive.
- A healthy body can help you manage stress. Get enough rest and sleep, eat healthy food, stay hydrated and exercise regularly. Go easy on the caffeine.
- Learn and practice relaxation techniques; try meditation, yoga, or controlled breathing
- Strike a better work-life balance. Learn to manage your time more effectively. Make time for hobbies and interests.
- Remember to take breaks when you feel worried or stuck. Do something relaxing every day. Sing, dance, and laugh – anything to burn off the energy.
- Set limits appropriately and say no to requests that would create excessive stress in your life.
- Do not rely on alcohol, drugs, or compulsive behaviours to reduce stress.
- Do not suffer in silence and build up your support network at home and at work.
- Build resilience. We all possess this, which helps us to adapt to adversity successfully and bounce back. A growth mindset rather than a fixed mindset helps build it.
- Planning your day ahead gives you the ability to accomplish more and gain better control of your life. Create a “to-do” list that highlights what is urgent and important.
- Identify what is contributing to stress. Many things can trigger stress: worries about home,



relationship problems, tension between colleagues, bullying & harassment, too much work and less rest. Make a list of things that are worrying you or talk it over with someone you trust to identify the main causes of stress.

Reaching out and where to get help and support

- Seek help if you are feeling low through most of the day continuously for more than 2 weeks.
- If you have lost interest in daily activities/pleasurable activities.
- If anxiety is interfering with your daily routine and feel like you cannot regulate your emotions.
- If you develop thoughts about suicide/self-harm.

If you are still not feeling well after talking to your friend or colleague about your emotions and feelings. Then you need to seek support from outside. Call the 24/7 psychological helpline services that are available in many countries; see a doctor/psychologist. (Courtesy of www.itfseafarers.org)



LENT

Lent is not just a liturgical season with a beginning date and (thankfully!) an end date. Above all, the first meaning of Lent is a journey, the *Christian journey*. This journey is led by the Spirit and it is fulfilled by the Spirit. At the beginning we read that “Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert” (Mt 4:1) and at the end we are told to “wait for the promise of the Father...you shall be baptised with the Holy Spirit.” (Ac 1:4) The Christian journey has a destination, Pentecost and the gift of the Holy Spirit; as the journey of Israel had its destination, the Promised Land and its sweet fruits.

Fasting, Praying, Almsgiving

There is no Lent without fasting:

In the book of Genesis, ‘original sin’, the source of all our sins, is presented to us as an act of eating. Hunger simply means that I have no life inside of me and that I need to depend on another for life. Satan came to Adam in paradise and came to Christ in the desert, two hungry men. We need to fast in Lent to fight against Satan and to discover the victory of Christ over temptations.

There is no Lent without praying:

The Lenten practice of prayer connects us with our spiritual life. We are body and spirit. The conversion of the body cannot be disconnected from our spiritual conversion. Prayer is the antidote to pride. In Lent we need to pray to discover the sin of pride in us and the victory of the humility of Christ.



There is no Lent without almsgiving:

Almsgiving connects us to other people, to those in need. It is another form of conversion, turning away from my needs and turning towards the needs of others. Almsgiving is not about being good and generous, no. It is about a ‘shift’, placing others before me!

Fasting, praying and almsgiving are conversion:

St Augustine has a beautiful expression to describe conversion, he calls it a ‘shift of love’. Love, our love, is a real force and carries ‘weight’, the *pondus amoris*. Conversion is a ‘shift of love’, from *cupiditas* to *caritas*; the heart moves from self-love to self-giving love.

Keep Lent and Lent Shall Keep You

- 1 Find out the date of your Baptism, and if possible, go and pray in front of the baptismal font where you have been baptised. Ask for a renewal of the grace of your baptism, and say: *I am baptised, not was baptised!* Go to confession during Lent: it is like celebrating the day of your Baptism and so keep clean the white garment of your Christian dignity.
- 2 During the Forty Days of Lent nicely decorate a large candle and on Easter Sunday light it from the Paschal Candle; pray around it over the Fifty Days of Easter.
- 3 Keep together Ash Wednesday and Ascension – forty days before Easter and forty days after Easter, respectively – the lowest point and the highest point of our journey.
- 4 Take seriously the Lenten fast. It is not about ‘dieting’ but a different ‘style of life’. Avoid, as far as you can, parties, entertainments, TV, radio, Internet, fancy food and drinks. Lent is about ‘external’ as well as ‘internal’ fasting.
- 5 Take prayer seriously. At the beginning of each week in Lent read the Gospel for the coming Sunday. Look out in the reading for the ‘old man’ and for the promise of a ‘new man’. During Lent make a point of kneeling down when you pray, but during Easter make a point of standing, to show that we are people of the Resurrection (cf. Tertullian, *On Prayer*).
- 6 Take almsgiving seriously. During Lent, go around with a purse and “give to everyone who asks” (Lk 6:30). When the purse is empty, fill it up! (courtesy of www.ctsbooks.org)



Prayer

Holy Family of Nazareth,
by your intercession, love, and holy example,
make our family and home
more and more like Yours,
until we are all one family,
happy and at peace
in our true home with You.

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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