

The Calling and the Sea

by LCDR Michael Gore, CHC, USN



Early one morning, at the mid-point of my deployment, I sat down with a good book on the starboard quarterdeck of USS VICKSBURG (CG 69) to nourish my mind and spirit. I'd been at sea some three months in support of our nation's war on terror, and the long lonely hours of separation made me homesick for my family. Halfway through deployment, I needed to marshal my energies for the three remaining months of ministry before I would finally be reunited with my wife and my children.

As the ship swayed rhythmically beneath me and the breeze blew cool against my face, I came across a passage from Virgil's *Aeneid* that struck me with all the force of a word sent straight from heaven. As you may know, in the *Aeneid*, Virgil tells the tale of Aeneas' long journey from the ruins of Troy to Italy where he founded the city of Rome. For Aeneas, this voyage is more than just a journey. It is a calling sent from heaven itself. He proclaims: "I am the man whom heaven calls."

Along the way, Aeneas comes to Carthage on the northern coast of Africa where he meets Dido, the queen of Carthage, and falls passionately in love. For a time, it seems that he may forget his calling. But then Jupiter discovers Aeneas' love for Dido and perceives that he is in danger of abandoning the call. So Jupiter sends Mercury to remind Aeneas of the task to which he has been commissioned:

What has he in mind?

What hope, to make him stay

Amid a hostile race, and lose from view

Ausonian progeny, Lavinian lands?

The man should sail:

that is the whole point.

Let this be what you tell him, as from me.

Mercury carries the message. Aeneas heeds the call. The ships are readied for the dangerous voyage onward. Dido discovers this and begs Aeneas to abandon his mission and settle with her in Carthage.

Duty bound,

Aeneas, though he struggled with desire

To calm and comfort her in all her pain,

To speak to her and turn her mind from grief,

And though he sighed his heart out, shaken still

*With love of her, yet took the course
heaven gave him*

And went back to the fleet.

It was the call that kept him at the task, the call that kept him with the fleet, the call that carried him onward to fulfill the mission. "I am the man whom heaven calls."



I closed the book, looked at the sea, and thought about my calling. I remembered that day, so long before, in the fall of 1981, when I sat in a service listening to a sermon by Dr. R. B. Smith. Suddenly, in and through his voice, I heard another Voice calling me to ministry and mission—an

insistent Voice that would not be denied. I remembered that day in the spring of 1995 when, after 14 years of ministry, the Voice returned beckoning me to a new field of service in and through the Navy Chaplain Corps, and the joy I found in serving God upon the sea.

*Others went out on the sea in ships;
They were merchants on the mighty waters.
They saw the works of the Lord,
His wonderful deeds in the deep.*

Psalm 107:23-24 (NIV)

I had seen God's wonderful deeds in the deep. But it hadn't come without a price. As I sat there on the ship, wrapped in recollection, I also remembered every sad farewell I bid my family since accepting my commission and affirming my oath—the long days of deployment far from home, the haunting homesickness that comes with every missed birthday and every absent anniversary.

But through it all there's been the Call assuring me that I am in the center of God's will and assuaging the sorrow that sometimes comes with obedience.

*Fear not, for I have redeemed you;
I have summoned you by name; you are mine.
When you pass through the waters,
I will be with you;
And when you pass through the rivers;
They will not sweep over you.*

Isaiah 43:1-2 (NIV)

And so I put my book aside. The Voice had spoken again as it always, does soon or late. And the word I heard was just enough to send me back to the task at hand with fresh conviction and newly-won power. "The man should sail. That is the point." Yes it is. Like Aeneas, "I am the man whom heaven calls." And the calling is enough!

The *Aeneid* by Virgil can be read online at:

<http://classics.mit.edu/Virgil/aeneid.html>

ATTENTION chaplains who were on active duty any time
between **01 January 1992 and 31 December 2001:**

**Have you filled out your biography questionnaire?
If not, please go to:**

<http://www.chaplain.navy.mil/Vol11Survey/vol11.asp>

**or contact the Chaplain Resource Branch
to request a questionnaire.**