

A new beginning

HAPPY New Year. How did you celebrate? Did you stay up to see the New Year in, or were you on watch? Perhaps you were lucky enough to be in port and to share the event with the community ashore or with other crews, although traditionally it would seem that seafarers like to celebrate with their fellow crew members on board, even if their vessel is in port.

Some of you might have been lucky enough to be at home with families and friends singing *Auld Lang Syne*, perhaps with some laughter, perhaps some tears. For others it may have been just another evening and not really worth the trouble of staying awake for the midnight change-over, especially as many of you would have previously celebrated your own religions' new year festival. Each of us has a different way of recognising a new

beginning because we are all at different stages on life's journey. Some things are more important to us than they are to other people. We all have different priorities.

I am writing this article in Hong Kong where we are yet to celebrate the Lunar New Year, and the many thousands of you who are Chinese will know that it is the Year of the Rabbit, a time of reunion with families, a time when old bank notes are exchanged for new to place in red envelopes as gifts, and when everyone's home gets a thorough cleaning.

New Year here truly means New Year. Everything is new and it reminds me of a message to the Israelites recorded in the Book of the Prophet Isaiah that, after years of feeling abandoned by God, they will have a new name: they shall be called

"My delight is in her" instead of "Forsaken".

In the Bible, a new name is given to signify a new beginning in somebody's life. Abram became Abraham, Simon became Peter, and Saul became Paul. Obviously we don't get new names each New Year, but now we are at the beginning of 2011 it might be a good time to look at the way we could change our lives. It may indeed be the right time to get rid of much of the emotional and spiritual baggage that holds us back from fully experiencing life.

Saying goodbye to the family when you are rejoining your ship is not easy, but our day-to-day lives are a progression of hellos and goodbyes. In TS Eliot's *Little Gidding* we read: "What we call the beginning is often the end" and "to make an end is to make a beginning". And in one of the well-

known Beatles songs recently made available to download from the internet we hear the words: "Hello, hello! I don't know why you say goodbye, I say hello".

New Year could be the right time to say goodbye to old resentments or grudges. Perhaps you're dealing with old grief, the aftermath of a divorce, or the loss of someone close who has passed away. And I am fairly sure you could come up with many other things in your life that are holding you back from experiencing life to the fullest. It is not easy to move on and it does not happen overnight, but praying about it can help a lot – offering up whatever it may be to God, trusting that he will take care of you and that it is okay to move on, to say hello to a new beginning. So may the light of hope, the light of peace, guide you on your voyages in 2011.