

Keeping calm in rough seas

MY FIRST first sea voyage was from Southampton to the port of Leningrad as it was named at that time, now Saint Petersburg. I remember well the fierce storm that hit the ship. The pitching and rolling was considerable, and most on the ship suffered terrible seasickness. I had no difficulty, however, with the extreme motion.

Twenty years later, on another ship from the UK to Japan, we encountered nothing but calm seas aside from an electrical storm in the Indian Ocean. Although the ship was only gently swaying, on one occasion I felt really ill with nausea. I had thought that having not been affected by the battering received in the North Sea those years earlier, I would be really comfortable with the gentle motion, but innumerable short sea trips

across the bar at the Mersey estuary confirmed my dislike of the gentle movement.

There is no one reaction to disturbing events. Each of us responds differently to changes in our environment. Sometimes we remain calm when the expectation would be to panic. Other less stressful conditions may trigger a seemingly disproportionate response.

Mitigating the effects of stressful conditions depends on many things. Training and experience go a long way toward helping us cope when we are outside of our comfort zone. It is essential that all seafarers pay due attention to their continuing training. I find however that the bedrock of comfort comes from an understanding that faith provides stability when everything around

us is in turmoil, gives certainty among all of the ceaseless changes in the world and calm in a storm. We may look for support from a variety of sources and there are some constants within loving relationships and family bonds. These are strengthened and enhanced by knowing that God loves us and cares for us.

Whether we are within our comfort zone or far outside what we normally experience, there is a sense of wellbeing when we are in relationship with God. This enables us to confront the difficult and dangerous with a reasonable confidence that we can cope and are able to meet the challenge. When we feel overpowered by all that is happening around us, when we think we are being swamped, we can call on God to help. The Bible records

the events of Jesus in a boat with his disciples. A Storm arose and the disciples were in fear. They woke Jesus who was sleeping and said, "Master, Master, we're going to drown!" They were in panic and afraid. Jesus got up and rebuked the wind and the raging waters; the storm subsided, and all was calm. He asks his disciples "Where is your faith?" Even in the company of Jesus they were unsettled and scared. The most important element that was missing, diminishing their ability to cope, was faith.

We are all called to acknowledge God and to place our faith in him. To cope with the gently swaying of life or with the dramatic storm that may beset us we can cope, if we have faith and believe that God loves us.