

## CROSSING THE BAR

*I've crossed the bar at last, mates.  
My longest voyage is done*

Over the last few months, I have had to bid my last farewell to a number of family members and dear friends including members of this parish family. It has saddened me to say goodbye but I have been consoled knowing that they were all good people, people I loved, respected and admired. In just the last five years, I have lost two brothers, a sister, four cousins, three dear friends to whom I have been close to for half a century as well as a number of dear members of this parish, all of whom I feel privileged to have known. One of those life-long friends served many years in the Merchant Navy and never lost his love of the sea. The above quotation is from a poem which was read at his remembrance service. The poem is called "The old sailor" by Margaret E. Sangster, and I was very moved by it. I have reread it over and over many times and it has caused me to reflect on my own life.

I think that my whole life has been one long voyage in numerous stages and the vessel I have served on is the Holy Church; my captain, Jesus Christ. I have tried to be a good and loyal crew member but I know that many times I have been a disappointment to my captain but He has never disowned me nor cast me aside, His patience and understanding is ineffable. I remember little of my early childhood but my mother obviously played a major part in it for I remember much of the things she taught me. When the war ended and the family returned from evacuation in Ireland, I was only six. I became very close to Dad in those following few years. We lived in Rock Ferry and I attended school at St Anne's primary school. I remember some of my primary school days. My first teacher was Sister Marie de Lourdes. She was lovely. She taught me to read and prepared me for my first Holy Communion. I became an altar boy and learned all the Latin responses, although I did not understand what they meant. At that time, I thought I wanted to be a priest when I grew up. I only really got to know my dad during those few precious years after the war. I lost him when he was killed in a fatal road accident. I was only thirteen. I was devastated and it affected the rest of my teenage years but one thing kept me going, I had a parent in heaven who would look after me.

The next stage in my voyage was when we married and had children. I took my commitment to my wife and children very seriously. I worked hard to provide for them, both physically and spiritually. The children were still small when we came to live in Neston and all attended St. Winefride's primary school. We were very happy although there were some difficult times when we did not know where to turn but I always remembered what my mother taught us, that God would always provide and He did. In order to give a little back to the community, I joined the Knights of St. Columba for a while and became involved in Parish activities. I began to take on several ministries such as Catechist helping parents of first communicants, minister of the word, extraordinary minister of Holy Communion and Sacristan. I truly believe that I received far, far more from these ministries and the people I served than I could ever have given. I am now unable to safely carry out and do justice to these ministries and have sadly resigned, I have crossed the bar. but I can still sing God's praises and pray for those I know and love as well as those I do not know personally but know they are in need; the poor, the sick, the hungry, the homeless and the vulnerable.

I have respectfully composed my own ending to Margaret Stangster's poem.

My body's old and weary,  
My senses failing fast,  
But I'll not complain, mates,  
For soon I'll see the face of God at last.  
It may not be this year,  
Perhaps, not even next,  
For time it does not matter,  
For I will ever trust  
That, He, My God, will safely guide me  
to my final place of rest.