

Hymn: Eternal Father, Strong to Save

“Eternal Father, Strong to Save” is a cherished hymn that has offered comfort and courage to sailors, their families, and many others through the years who have faced the powerful forces of the sea. The hymn began as a poem, written in the nineteenth century by William Whiting.

William was a teacher who had lived near the English coast throughout his life, witnessing the beauty and power of the ocean. When he was 35, he sailed on board a ship that nearly capsized in a raging storm. But after surviving the ordeal, he came to trust God’s power over the ocean, and later wrote the poem for a worried student who was preparing to sail across the Atlantic. Whiting wanted to reassure him that God is present in every fearful moment, and wrote the verses, inspired by Psalm 107, to anchor this student’s faith. His words are simple and sincere, expressing a deep trust in God’s protection.

Shortly after the poem was written, a church musician named John Bacchus Dykes composed the tune that is now widely known as “Melita,” named after the site where Apostle Paul was saved from a shipwreck. The music has a calm and steady quality that feels similar to the rhythmic movement of waves on the shore. The pairing of Whiting’s heartfelt prayer with Dykes’ gentle melody made the hymn especially comforting.

Over time, the song became closely associated with naval traditions in both the British Royal Navy and the United States Navy, and additional verses were added to form their own versions of the song. For many sailors, this hymn was a source of strength during long journeys and dangerous storms. Churches also often sang it as a prayer for loved ones serving at sea. Today, “Eternal Father, Strong to Save” continues to be sung around the world. It reminds us that, no matter how big the waves of life may feel, we can call on God for strength and peace. Its history is simple but meaningful: born from compassion, shaped by faith, and carried by generations who found comfort in its steady, hopeful words.

Eternal Father, Strong to Save Lyrics (Navy Version)

Eternal Father, strong to save,
Whose arm hath bound the restless wave,
Who bidd'st the mighty ocean deep
Its own appointed limits keep,
O hear us when we cry to thee
For those in peril on the sea!

O Christ! Whose voice the waters heard
And hushed their raging at thy word,
Who walkedst on the foaming deep,
And calm amidst its rage didst sleep,
O hear us when we cry to thee,
For those in peril on the sea!

Most Holy Spirit! Who didst brood
Upon the chaos dark and rude,
And bid its angry tumult cease,
And give, for wild confusion, peace,
O hear us when we cry to thee
For those in peril on the sea!

Eternal Father, grant, we pray,
To all Marines, both night and day,
The courage, honor, strength, and skill
Their land to serve, thy law fulfill;
Be thou the shield forevermore
From every peril to the Corps.

Lord, guard and guide the ones who fly
Through the great spaces in the sky.
Be with them always in the air,
In darkening storms or sunlight fair.

Eternal Father, Strong To Save

William Whiting

John Bacchus Dykes

E - ter - nal Fa - ther, strong to save, whose arm hath bound the
O Christ, whose voice the wa - ters heard and hushed their ra - ging
O Ho - ly Spir - it, who didst brood up - on the wa - ters
O Trin - i - ty of love and power, our breth - ren shield in

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rest - less wave, who bidd'st the might - y o - cean deep its
at thy word, who walk - edst on the foam - ing deep, and
dark and rude, and bid their an - gry tu - mult cease, and
dan - ger's hour; from rock and tem - pest, fire and foe, pro -

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own ap - point - ed lim - its keep: O hear us when we
calm a - mid the storm didst sleep: O hear us when we
give, for wild con - fu - sion, peace: O hear us when we
tect them where - so - e'er they go; thus ev - er - more shall

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cry to thee for those in per - il on the sea.
cry to thee for those in per - il on the sea.
cry to thee for those in per - il on the sea.
rise to thee glad hymns of praise from land and sea.