Dear Bishop Erik, dear Abbot General Bernardus (Abbot General of the Order of Cistercians of the Strict Observance), dear Abbot of Citeaux Pierre André, dear Abbot of Rochefort Gilbert, dear sisters and brothers, dear ladies and gentlemen!

It is an extraordinary joy and honor for me to be here today to celebrate the dedication of the monastery expansion and church in Munkeby with you. I vividly remember standing here on a cow pasture about 15 years ago, discussing the idea of a new monastery with Brother Joel and an architect from Paris. Now, the project is finally completed—not as an oversized mega-project, but sensibly planned step by step. It is admirable what has been accomplished here. We can all be very grateful for that!

I still remember Brother Cyril Ampe very well, who, even at an advanced age, ventured to establish a new religious community in Munkeby on its old foundations. That deeply impressed me. I also remember countless discussions: in Munkeby, in Paderborn and even in Cîteaux when the project was standing on the edge. I then had also the privilege of advocating for it there.

Being here at a monastery consecration and offering congratulations is something special for me. Especially in these turbulent times of transformations and closures of spiritual places in many regions in our supported areas. I convey the congratulations of all the staff of the Bonifatiuswerk, as well as the Bonifatiusrat and the Diaspora Kommissariat of the German Bishops.

Our guiding principle, or rather, our mission, is: "No one should believe alone”. This applies to this place as well. Our faith needs community, places where we can live our faith together. Places where we can exchange our joy, questions, hopes and fears with each other, experiencing that we belong to a vast, worldwide Church. And precisely that—a place of faith and community—you have created here with this monastery extension—a space of faith. With endurance, energy, dedication and the trust in God, you have succeeded in acting against the trend and rebuild this monastery.

The power of monasteries in general and the power especially of this monastery on the increasingly secularized society of Norway is not to be rated highly enough. Your simple and secluded way of life arouses curiosity among many Norwegians. Everyone is welcome with you.

You have integrated very well into Norwegian culture from the beginning, praying in Norwegian and welcoming people with hospitality. In doing so, you present the Catholic Church with a friendly and inviting face, showing that prayer is alive here. This new place of faith is a sign of hope for me, reviving the old roots. Because strictly speaking, the monastery is merely a continuation of a tradition that existed about one and a half kilometers from this location a long time ago: In 1180, the Cistercian monastery of Munkeby was first mentioned in records. At that time, it was the northernmost Cistercian monastery in the world. Presumably, it was relocated to Tautra in 1207, the old Munkeby monastery from then on only served as an agricultural outpost. Historians believe that an attempt to revive the monastery around 1470 failed.

They were once gone, but they have been back for a few years now. And today, the monastic community no longer must live improvised on a small room. The monks can now use the monastery, and guests have the guesthouse available.

It is very pleasing that more and more people visit this place to spend the night on their pilgrimage from Stiklestad to Trondheim or to spend days of inner reflection. On weekends, numerous people also come to celebrate worship service together with the monks.

We, as an organization for faith, are delighted to have supported this project with extraordinary financial means and now are able to celebrate the consecration together. More than 9 million euros have been invested here. Around 2.4 million euros were made available for this project via the Bonifatiuswerk. Almost 800,000 euros of the 2.4 million come from the Bonifatiuswerk and 1.6 million euros from the Diaspora-Kommissariat of the German bishops. A heartfelt "Vergelt's Gott" to our donors who have contributed and included your blessed work in their prayers. I would like to take this opportunity to mention exemplary Mr. and Mrs. Alois and Renate Jaugstetter from Würzburg. Thanks to their donation, two stained glass windows have found their place here.

It is good to see that here in Munkeby, as well as in other places in the Prelature of Trondheim, where we have supported major projects in recent years, the projects have been realized — such as the Birgitta Monastery in Tiller, the Tautra Monastery, or the construction of the St. Olav Cathedral in Trondheim, as well as the parish hall and youth rooms there.

Today, at the dedication of this new chapter in the history of the monastery, we can consider ourselves fortunate to witness a place that is not only architecturally impressive but will also be a place of reflection, prayer and encounter between God and people, for all who come here. A heartfelt thank you to all who have contributed to this impressive project. May the monastery grow in depth and breadth.

And, of course, we must not forget about the cheese, following the recipe of Cîteaux, that you produce here, along with the newly completed dairy. Here's a little anecdote: Once, as a Christmas gift, I ordered cheese from the monks, which was sent by post. I received a call from the customs in Germany, asking me to come by to clarify some questions. Unfortunately, on that day, I was unavailable. After three days, I received another call from customs, someone should pick up the package, as the entire customs office now smelled like cheese. And just like that, there were suddenly no more questions.

With this image, I would like to conclude. Just as people enjoy the taste of Norwegian cheese, may they also savor the taste of the gospel and perceive the familiar scent of a welcoming church. God's blessings to you and let us pray for each other.



Yours

Monsignore Georg Austen,

General Secretary of the Bonifatiuswerk