

Sermon of Monsignore Georg Austen, secretary general and CEO of the Bonifatiuswerk

50 years Northern Europe aid, unveiling of the altar painting in Corvey

Gospel: Luke 9:1-6

For whom are you walking? – A journey into the NOW!

The Jewish religious philosopher Martin Buber tells the following story: In Robschnitz, Rabbi Naftali's town, the wealthy people, whose houses were isolated or located on the outskirts, used to hire guards to watch over their property at night. One evening, as Rabbi Naftali was walking late at the edge of the forest that bordered the town, he encountered one such guard pacing back and forth. "For whom do you walk?" he asked the man. The guard responded but then added the counter-question: "And for whom do you walk, Rabbi?" The words struck the Zaddik like an arrow. "I walk for no one yet," he managed to say with difficulty. Then he walked alongside the man in silence for a long time. "Do you want to be my servant?" he finally asked. "I would gladly do that," the man replied, "but what must I do?" "Remind me," said Rabbi Naftali.

For whom are you walking? The guard's question strikes the Rabbi like an arrow. For whom do you work? Who has assigned you? Why are you doing this? What do you want to accomplish? And what is your passion?

I understand this more deeply—as a synonym for questions of faith and life: For whom do you actually live? What gives your life meaning? For whom do you advocate, and whom do you follow? What do you want to achieve with your gifts and abilities—in the Church, in politics, or in the world? And of course, this question applies to each of us personally.

We are here today in Corvey, a special spiritual place. It reminds us that we might ask ourselves, and be asked, about the testimonies of people who help us find direction for our life's journey, or at least help us to be certain of the path we are on.

For me, it's clear: Only those who are aware of their origins, of their roots, also have a future. And so, today, in this imposing site of sacred architecture and art, here in the World Heritage Site and former monastery church, the figures of Saint Ansgar from the 9th century—known as the Apostle of the North—and Saint Boniface, who lived in the 8th century and is revered as the Apostle of the

Germans, come together. Both went forth for the Gospel. With trust in God, with their strengths and weaknesses, they set out to reach people. They journeyed into foreign lands, courageously living out the Good News and proclaiming the faith through their lives. This continues to resonate to this day, reminding us of the question: "For whom are you walking in your time?"

Looking back is, of course, important. However, as a Church, we are not a dusty museum. Our faith is not a canned good with an expiration date long past. We live in a changing world, both in society and in the Church. In a world beset and threatened by wars and crises. What is important is: With what mission and goal are we personally and as a Church on our way today? The beauty of looking back is that we don't have to reinvent everything. We figuratively stand on the shoulders of our ancestors in faith, who lived and died by that faith and who found support and direction for their lives through Christian belief. We, too, live out and in valuable traditions that give and create meaning.

The theologian Henri de Lubac once said: "It is not important to predict the future, but to see what the present demands. It is not necessary to calculate one's chances, but to reflect on one's mission."

We are celebrating 50 years of North European Aid in the Boniface Work. For 50 years, we have been in solidarity as a global Church. Today, we do not wish to celebrate with fanfare, but rather with gratitude for the many people over the decades who, with trust in God, dedication, and passion, have worked in and for the diaspora. We are deeply grateful to the countless donors who, through their support and prayers, have made possible innumerable projects that have benefited people—even beyond the Catholic Church.

And we have long known that this help was not a one-way street: from the Nordic and Baltic diaspora regions, we in Germany can learn how valuable the testimony of faith from each individual is. We can learn from this Church, with its international and youthful face, despite some challenges and financial difficulties, that different languages and cultures are not only alienating but also enriching. We experience something of hospitality because these societies welcome refugees and migrants, offering them a new home. These people, from diverse nations, often carrying only their faith, find new opportunities and life perspectives.

We also see that we are interconnected and that our Church cannot be confined to one nation. We live and work as a global Church in the European context and beyond. Yet we also experience that our Church, with its various forms, mentalities, languages, and rites, expresses the faith in different ways, sometimes with varying images of the Church. This can lead to misunderstandings, polarization, or tensions. The call of the hour is to meet each other with respect and on equal terms, engaging in dialogue about the contents of our faith and the challenges faced by our local churches.

Pope Francis has initiated the synodal process. We are to struggle together and seek to understand the questions and hopes of the people. What are their joys, their sorrows, and their fears? How can we today, even in the face of the loss of trust we experience here in our country and beyond in the Church, credibly transform the Gospel into the different contexts of the world through necessary reforms?

The global synod is just around the corner. The questions are on the table: What unites us, what constitutes our Christian unity? And also, how do we live as a global Church, and how can we shape the world in the spirit of Jesus in ecumenical solidarity? I catch myself asking: What does this unity concretely look like? And what does diversity require in unity? How much diversity can the unity of the Catholic Church bear?

Catholic diaspora today no longer just means "living as a minority among a majority of non-believers." On the contrary, the situation of diaspora, even in predominantly Catholic regions like around Brakel and Höxter, and in many other regions of Germany, now presents itself as being rooted in a secular majority and a non-believing environment. Diaspora is no longer just about numbers. We have long been living in a faith diaspora.

I believe, dear sisters and brothers, that one of the greatest challenges for all of us is to translate the reality and relevance of the Christian faith into our time, and to gain or regain the trust of people through dialogue—also with those who think or believe differently, as well as with non-believers.

"I am convinced," said Annette Schavan once, "that the vitality and persuasive power of the Church will fade if it fears the new and the future, if it only finds security in looking back and appears uncertain when looking ahead." For Christians, the future is where the true challenge lies, said Karl Rahner.

In the future, I believe, we are called not just to see downfall and destruction, but to trust that we are on a pilgrimage toward eternity and toward God.

Today's Gospel, which fits well with our celebration, illustrates this for us. Jesus equips his followers for their ministry of discipleship. They are to proclaim and be credible through their way of life. They are to free the sick from their mental and physical suffering. Jesus' commission to heal and proclaim applies for all time—including to us.

We as a Church are called to heal, not to wound. God works through us when we do not focus solely on ourselves, but open ourselves to HIM. What is needed is not reserve bags or material security, but courage and the willingness to approach people and meet them in their world.

That is why it is good that we are connecting this anniversary of North European Aid with the international youth networking

meeting. They work in youth ministry, often under difficult financial and staffing conditions on the ground, but in touch with the times. Thank you for your commitment and your witness to faith. As Boniface Work, we are very grateful for all exchange, the deepening of relationships, and the development of shared perspectives and pastoral projects for the present and future.

Without youth, our Church truly looks old. It is about showing young people that they have an inviolable dignity and potential. It is about conveying to both young and old that, based on the Christian understanding of humanity, every person must be recognized and protected in their dignity—from the beginning of life until the last breath in death. It is about accompanying people who are attentive to the preservation of creation, to freedom, and to justice in this world. Our task is to make the value of the Christian faith authentically tangible to young people and to equip them with the knowledge and understanding of the contents of our faith, as well as the value of a community of faith.

This is why it is also good that we will soon unveil the new Easter painting at the high altar. The previous painting was destroyed at the end of World War II, a time when the inhuman and destructive face of despots, shown by the Nazis, brought immense suffering. We know and see in the history of humanity, and even today, that whenever people promise salvation from other people alone—when they even call out “salvation” to them—it often leads to life-destroying calamity.

Faith in the resurrection of Jesus is the pivotal point for us as a Church and for our personal faith journey. Death and injustice do not have the final word. Jesus went to the cross and through death into life for this promise.

For us, it is already about daring to embark on the journey into the NOW with this confidence. To be connected through the bond of hope and faith into eternity. To stand up today, raise our voices, and act in solidarity where life is being destroyed, threatened, or suffocated.

For whom are you walking? For whom are you walking? Let us remind each other. Let us remind one another, and remind me!

Amen.