

Reverend Father Abbot, dear brothers of Montecassino, distinguished guests of honor, dear brothers and sisters,

As the Abbot Primate of the Benedictine Confederation, it has been my deep wish to be here today for this festive celebration. On this day, in memory of October 24, 1964, many themes and meanings intertwine in a complex tapestry: we remember the consecration of the Abbey Church of Montecassino, which, thanks to the support of countless people, rose here again after senseless destruction, restored, in the immortal words of Abbot Diamare, “as it was and where it was.” We recall the devastation that the war brought to this place and so many others—a global catastrophe. The world had never seen anything comparable. We remember the presence of the great and holy Pope Paul VI, who, with his prayer and his own hands, performed the consecration and anointing of this church before—significantly—also blessing a parish in the valley and visiting the war cemetery. With his words and actions, he made this day a celebration of peace. In his homily, he himself said: “Thus we celebrate peace. Here we wish, almost symbolically, to mark the end of war; may it be God’s will: the end of all wars!” This devout hope remained such, but Montecassino thus became a reminder for peace, a place from which many peace initiatives have emerged over the decades. And as if all this were not enough: on this day, the Pope proclaimed Saint Benedict the Patron of Europe, an event that fills us Benedictines, and you as well, people connected to this cenobium, with pride and joy.

This tapestry thus offers much for remembrance and meditation, for gratitude and joy. But it seems important to me that today—and indeed always, when we celebrate history—we also look to the future. Saint Benedict founded this monastery in a world undergoing dramatic transformation. It was an era of barbarian invasions, where all customary order was upended, where old certainties were crumbling, and new forms of social coexistence were being arduously born—in a time full of violence, pain, and suffering, here arose a protected place. A place for seeking God in solitude, but also the cradle of a new form of civilization, which, based on Christian faith, could build what would become Christian Europe. It is paradoxical that from the withdrawal of people who wished to leave behind much of the world, there arose a movement that profoundly transformed and shaped this world.

Today we are again facing an epochal change. We are experiencing transformations that seem difficult to control. We have only recently begun to adapt to a life altered by the impact of climate change, threatened by the unraveling of old alliances, where war again becomes part of daily life, and where technological advancement at once offers beautiful promises and existential threats.

Benedict looked to the past. He urges his monks to become familiar with the teachings of the earlier Fathers. But above all, he gave his monks the tools with which they could shape the future. Pope Paul VI summarized it aptly in his writing: with the cross, the book, and the plow.

Fifteen hundred years ago, the monks became a force that changed the world. Today, we Benedictines are a relatively small part of the Catholic Church. It would be presumptuous to expect something similar from us once more. But we can and must, from this place and the

thousands of others around the world where life follows the Rule of the Master of Montecassino, recall the virtues that can enable people to find a home in this new and perhaps very inhospitable time:

Humanity, the right measure, order. Above all, humility: the awareness that we are on a journey and do not have all the answers, and that we must seek the answers for the future together, as monks have tried to do for 1,500 years.

Today is an important day on this journey. In 2029, we will celebrate the 1,500th anniversary of the foundation of this house. Fifteen hundred years of a wisdom of life born in this place. We will take the coming years as an opportunity to address these issues with great seriousness. And I invite all of you to participate in this reflection, in this work for the future.