BENET 2026 in Melk - 10 Oct 2026

Homily by Abbot Primate Jeremias Schröder OSB

We are living in interesting times. And as many of you know, that is not really a good thing. In France the schools are burning. We are confronted with dramatic change of the world as we know it. War and peace, climate crisis, a changing international world orer, the disruption of economies and career paths through the advent of artificial intelligence. I am not normally given to over-dramatization, but it is hard to think of a period that has been equally threatened by turmoil and disruption as ours.

And while the older among us can probably live with the expectation that some of these changes will show their full consequences only towards the end of our lifetime, the young generation entrusted to our schools is facing uncertainty that is mind-boggling.

Many of our societies are losing the core. Centrist parties that used to govern for decades are thinning out. Extreme fringes seem to be strengthening. Many political institutions are barely holding on. Very simplified promises, the search for bogeymen or scapegoats such as foreigners, the rich or the communists, seem to convince vast multitudes.

Yesterday I attended a small think tank meeting in Munich, where a professor from the Army University gave a very lucid commentary on this situation. She said that the greatest fundamental problem of our time is that we no longer have a good narrative for the future. And we do not even have a good narrative for our present. This struck me deeply, because I sense that it is true.

Here in the West, the generation of my parents and my own generation—I was born in 1964—grew up with the promise of ever-expanding opportunities, slowly growing wealth, a social welfare state that would take care of emergencies and, after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the promise of global peace.

Decolonization and globalized trade held out the promise of leaving poverty behind for many of the poorer nations. And that promise has been fulfilled in many parts of the world.

It was a narrative that kept us going, even though it perhaps emphasized material dimensions rather too much.

That narrative is broken. And as we look back at those decades—and I do so quite nostalgically, because there was a lot to be appreciated in them—we also realize that the spiritual hunger, the spiritual side of human life, has been slowly hollowed out. We contented ourselves with a vision of the future that would be a bit more of the same: satisfied general well-being, a world in which transcendent values were not necessarily actively combated, but simply allowed to fade away.

But perhaps we Christians have something to contribute precisely at this moment when the old narratives of progress are falling apart. Not because we have a better prediction of the future, but because our hope rests on something different.

The central event of our faith is not a story of uninterrupted progress. It is Easter, a strory of redemption that does pass through the Cross.

This is the great difference between optimism and Christian hope. Optimism expects things to turn out well. Christian hope trusts that God remains faithful, even when things do not turn out as we expected. The Resurrection does not promise that our plans will succeed, that our institutions will survive, or that history will become less turbulent. But it tells us that failure, destruction and death do not have the last word.

And this brings me to Saint Benedict.

Benedict lived in an age that was in some ways remarkably similar to our own. The Roman world in which he had grown up was disintegrating. Political structures were collapsing, wars and migrations were radically and violently transforming societies, and the future was deeply uncertain.

Benedict did not respond by developing a grand programme for the reconstruction of Europe. He did something much more modest. He gathered people into communities where they could seek God together, pray, work, study, welcome strangers, care for the sick and learn to live with one another.

He had no idea what would become of these communities, let alone what contribution they would make to European civilization over the following centuries. He simply established a way of life that was worth living, whatever the future might bring.

And that is perhaps the most important lesson for us today. We may not have the great new narrative. We do not need to know what the future will look like in order to begin building something good. St Benedict was concerned with the everyday, the ordinary. „But the workshop in which we perform all these works with diligence is the enclosure of the monastery, and stability in the community.“

This is where I see a particular responsibility for Benedictine education.

Young people today are often presented with a future that is either frightening or reduced to questions of professional success, economic security and personal fulfilment. We owe them something more. Not easy reassurance, and certainly not the promise that everything will turn out well. But we owe them an education that enables them to face an uncertain future with courage, inner freedom and hope.

They should learn to listen, to discern, to serve, to forgive, and to recognize the presence of God in other people.

We must help them understand that they are not merely passive recipients of a future that others have created for them. They can themselves become builders of a better world. They can make a difference, even when they cannot control the outcome of their efforts.

As we prepare for the great Benedictine Jubilee, we have chosen the motto **"Places of Hope since 529."** I like that expression because it is not simply a statement about the past. It is a challenge for the present and reches into the future.

Our monasteries and our schools have been places of hope for many generations. But the real question is whether they are places of hope today. Whether young people who pass through our classrooms leave with more than knowledge and qualifications. Whether they have discovered something that will sustain them when their plans fail, when the world changes around them, and when the familiar narratives no longer make sense.

Saint Benedict speaks in the Prologue of his Rule about the enlargement of the heart. As we progress in faith, he says, our hearts expand, and we begin to run on the path of God's commandments with the inexpressible sweetness of love.

Perhaps that is a better definition of progress than the one with which my generation grew up. Not simply the expansion of wealth and opportunities, but **the enlargement of the human heart**.

If our schools can contribute to that, they will truly be places of hope. And they will be giving the next generation something that no political disruption, ecological disaster or technological revolution can take away from them.