Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Nine hundred years ago, the Diocese of Stavanger and the city of Stavanger were founded. I therefore take this opportunity to congratulate Bishop Anne Lise Ådnøy of the Church of Norway, and Cille Ihle, head of the Committee for Culture, Sports and Social Dialogue in the Municipality of Stavanger, on this jubilee. I also thank them for allowing our parish here in the city to take part in and contribute to the celebrations. It is also a joy to celebrate this day together with former Dean Tormod Wasbø, who for so many years has promoted the celebration of St. Swithun here in Stavanger, and who is also an honorary canon of Winchester Cathedral.

The city's patron saint, St. Swithun, was a bishop. Church history remembers him as an outstanding and exemplary shepherd. The readings for this Mass express the essential qualities that every shepherd must possess. All these qualities reflect "the Good Shepherd," our Lord Jesus Christ. A good shepherd works tirelessly for the sheep. He will "seek the lost, bring back the strayed, bind up the injured, strengthen the weak, guard the fat and the strong, and feed them with justice" (Ezek 34:16). He does not live for himself but guards the flock selflessly. He tends the flock "not by constraint but willingly, as God would have it; not for shameful gain, but eagerly" (1 Pet 5:2). And his pastoral ministry is not his own work, but is founded upon God's call, grace, and help: "It was not you who chose me, but I who chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit that will remain" (John 15:16).

Depictions of the saint show him as a bishop, like the statue here in the church. It is beneath this statue, at the side altar, that the relic from Évreux will be placed for our veneration and prayer (see SC 111). Sacred relics are the body or significant parts of a saint's body, a saint's personal belongings and clothing, or objects that have been in contact with a saint's body (see Directory on Popular Piety, 236).

The veneration of relics and devotion to the saints are ancient expressions of the Latin — that is, the Western — tradition of the Church. But relics are rooted in an even older truth of faith. Since the beginning of time, the Father has extended his hand to us by making use of the created, the concrete, the physical — of creation itself (see Catechism, 54). For everything created — which God brought forth out of nothing and saw that it was good (see Gen 1:31) — points back to God, and through what is familiar to human beings, God is made known. That is why the Father used fire, and water, and the storm in the Old Testament to form Israel in faith. That is why the Son — our Savior and Lord — used water, the fruits of the earth, bread and wine to reveal to us God's greatness and His eternal plan and law for the human race (see Catechism, 65).

This did not end with Jesus Christ. From the earliest days of the Church, the Holy Spirit has guided the development of the faith as defined by popes and councils. The Holy Spirit has also, through the Church's shepherds, shaped the liturgy, popular piety, and everything that flows from these fundamental expressions of our belonging to Christ (see Catechism, 98).

That is why our worship and devotions are permeated by what is concrete, created, and physical — and everything points to God and draws our attention toward Him (see Catechism, 1145–1148). That is why incense and candles are used to make our prayers more tangible and intense. That is why we go on pilgrimages and walk the Way of the Cross to journey with the Lord and toward His mysteries. That is why we look to and pray before the statues and relics of the saints: to be strengthened in our Christian lives and helped forward on our path to holiness. All of these are aids in the life of faith; they form us in a true understanding of God and faith in

Him. God's power and majesty, His grace and love, are so great that He also uses created things to bring about our eternal salvation.

Furthermore, the example of the saints and their relics should awaken in us zeal and effort for the Kingdom of Heaven. Every saint and every feast of a saint bears witness to how God's plan of salvation worked in a particular person (see Directory on Popular Piety, 229), and therefore can work in us as well. That is why every saint should "challenge us." When we encounter a saint, each of us should look inward and ask: What are we doing with our lives? St. Swithun, the faithful bishop and shepherd, gave his life for the faithful, for the poor. He prayed for his enemies, for the enemies and murderers of his people. He lived according to the words and example of Jesus. What do we do? To ask for a saint's intercession, to pray before his statue or relic, places us face to face with holiness — in a concrete human being — and should awaken in us conversion from sin and a more fervent search for holiness in our own lives.

May the small relic of the holy bishop and patron of Stavanger, which now takes its place in our church, help us to fix our eyes on God and allow our lives to be more clearly marked by His work, His law, and His holiness.