

Dearest Sisters,

Also this year, the Rector Major, Fr. Ángel Fernández Artime, presented to us Strenna 2020 at the Generalate on 27 December. We thank him for the powerfully innovative proposal, even if historically known in its formulation:

### **Good Christians and Honest Citizens.**

It is a theme that involves the Salesian Family and we in it, Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, educating communities, lay adults, and young people. I speak for all of you to express our deep gratitude to the Rector Major who with a heart that is Salesian and full of Gospel wisdom, gave us this precious gift that will accompany us in an efficacious way during the pastoral year already begun and not only that.

Reading and studying the Strenna aroused in me, and I think it will be the same for you, a stream of reflections in the awareness of restoring charismatic strength to our personal and community life through a decisive pastoral conversion, open to horizons of hope, lived with joy, able to radiate light where the darkness tries to obscure the beauty of life.

Resuming in the concreteness of daily life, the mission of *forming ourselves and forming* “good Christians and honest citizens” according to the dream of God and of Don Bosco requires the consolidation of our identity as apostles and evangelizers in the spirit of the *da mihi animas cetera tolle*, restoring to the young the task that is theirs: to be active protagonists for a new humanity.

In the premise to the comment of the Strenna, the Rector Major says, “I sincerely believe that in our Salesian Family, in each of our groups, in the various nations where we find ourselves, and with the most varied works, we need to turn our gaze on these aspects that regard the formation of the Christian and of the citizen.”

He then appropriately questions whether Don Bosco's educational binomial, which guided him in nineteenth-century Italy, can still be considered valid in a Salesian world that operates in countries with different religions or with a non-Christian majority, or in post-Christians societies, or even in officially secular or anti-religious nations. To this question the Strenna answers clearly and convincingly, evoking the need to “maintain balance in an attitude of openness and inclusion in the educational process ‘for and with’ young people and non-Christian lay people, starting from the first proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ through the Preventive System that creates relationships, a family atmosphere where it educates and where faith is transmitted by osmosis.”

I wanted to quote this reflection verbatim because I think it is an important indication even for all of us who work in diversified situations that often arouse uncertainties and doubts about our specific mission among the poorest young people.

The Strenna offers us a guideline of deep Salesian spirituality, rooted in fidelity to historical memory and open to actual challenges projected towards a future of hope.

It is a mission that enthuses and, at the same time, challenges. But this does not discourage us because God's grace, the presence of Mary Help of Christians, and the intercession of our Founders guide our steps as at the time of the origins in a social, political, and ecclesial context that was not any easier than the present one.

I thank you for the acceptance you will give to the Strenna that is offered with trust by the 10<sup>th</sup> Successor of Don Bosco, animator and center of unity of the Salesian Family (cf. C 3). I invite you to find the opportune time and way to share this with the educating communities, so that it may be translated into concrete actions animated by one interior movement, love for God and love for the young, especially those subject to various forms of poverty and disadvantage, whom we are called to educate with the same heart of Don Bosco and of Mother Mazzarello. Mary Domenica knew how to translate with wisdom and with feminine sensitivity, the same journey that today resounds in ever new tones, “I entrust them to you.”

The ‘key points’ of the Strenna that progressively guide us in this sharing throw light on the “*Politics of the Our Father*” as it was understood and carried out by Don Bosco with keen educative intuition. There then follows the presentation of the fundamental aspects that give a face to “the good Christian and honest citizen,” explaining the expression in concrete and current choices. Lastly, the Strenna opens a beautiful page by making us almost hear Don Bosco himself speaking of politics.

There are many reflections I would like to share with you. I pause on some that I am strongly convinced of and that I am sure you will certainly receive with an open heart. We are all called by vocation to be “good Christians” and “honest citizens” in the style of Salesian Spirituality, ready to witness in whatever environment we are, a *faith lived together* that has community and social repercussions. “That is why it is always better to live the faith together and to show our love by living in community and sharing with other young people our affection, our time, our faith, and our troubles. The Church offers many different possibilities for living our faith in community, for everything is easier when we do it together.” (*Christus vivit*, no. 164)

As it was for Don Bosco, also for us today being “good Christians” and “honest citizens” means living in the faith, as the Rector Major points out. Faith is the most precious gift that we can share in any state of life, age, vocation, and even religion. Living the harmony between faith and life is the heart of the charism of Don Bosco that has given a face to the environment where numerous young people experienced at Valdocco the joy of walking towards the goal of holiness. And this is possible in our environments today as well, if we believe in it!

I am struck by how Fr. Ángel stresses the importance of returning to our ‘first love’ that gives new life, making our witness radiant and credible. The ‘first love’ that decentralizes us from ourselves to become a gift for others “when we recognize in others their hidden beauty, their dignity and their grandeur as images of God and children of the Father. The Holy Spirit wants to make us come out of ourselves, to embrace others with love and to seek their good.” (*Christus vivit*, n. 164)

I think it is an essential condition for educating the young people to active citizenship animated by Gospel values, ready to make their life a gift and service for others, to refuse every kind of corruption, to cultivate solidarity towards the poor, and especially the immigrants, to defend the beauty of creation and of the ‘common home’ as a patrimony of humanity, to promote and defend human rights.

Dear Sisters, I have noted with joy in the Strenna’s proposal a clear harmony with the journey we are making as Institute in preparation for GC XXIV. In fact, we are all involved in accepting Mary’s suggestion, “Do whatever He tells you” (Jn 2: 5). To be “Communities that generate life in the heart of contemporaneity,” in the light of the Holy Spirit, we are called “to have a educative gaze on reality, to intuit the needs of the young today, and to consider them interlocutors together with the laity in the mission, valuing their potential” to “reawaken the original vocational fruitfulness of the Institute” (Circular 985).

It is a journey that makes us attentive to the empty jars of so many young people that need to be filled with the new wine of love, of trust, of the certainty that in everyone there is a small seed that can be made to bloom in a marvelous way the “good Christian and honest citizen” where we least expect it. Everyone, especially the poor, can give an innovative contribution to the building of a world that is more open to fraternity and to peace.

Therefore, let us continue our journey with responsibility and joy, entrusting ourselves to Mary Immaculate Help of Christians. She intercedes with God, as the Rector Major invokes at the conclusion of the Strenna, so that the Father will give us His Spirit to continue to implement the *politics of the Our Father* for the young today, in a society that calls to us in the face of inequality, corruption, various forms of violence, to not remain silent or passive in a world that needs God more and more.

I end by renewing my gratitude to Fr. Ángel for the gift of the Strenna and in the name of the whole Institute I assure him of our prayer to the Holy Spirit for the **28<sup>th</sup> General Chapter** that is now near and that will see our Confreres committed to reflect on the theme, *Which Salesians for the young today?*

To you, dear Sisters, to the educating communities, to the young people, to your families I wish with all my heart a Happy New Year 2020, rich in many blessings also at the vocational level for all the Provinces. May the blessing of the Lord and of Mary Help of Christians render us more and more *communities that generate life*, courageous in keeping lit the dreams of the young; *communities* that recognize in everyone without exception, the capacity to be active and responsible protagonists, “good Christians and honest citizens” for a society that is more human and in solidarity with the poor.

May God bless you!

Rome, 1 January 2020

Affectionately, Mother