

Amoris Laetitia

The Joy of Love in the Light of the Word: Mary Invites Us to Open the Door of Our Heart

*featuring: Monthly Reflection of Don Silvio Roggia, SDB, for ADMA
Strenna 2017 words of Don Angel Fernandez Artime, SDB, Rector Major*



First Encounter – Introduction

First Family Gathering on *Amoris Laetitia* and *We Are Family* Introduction to the Apostolic Exhortation

I. WELCOME and OPENING PRAYER – at Holy Mass or in the place where the gathering is to be held

- ◆ We gather as faithful sons and daughters of the Church
- ◆ And as faithful sons and daughters of Don Bosco
- ◆ To live the call being made to us by the Holy Father and by the Rector Major

“BLESSED IS THE FAMILY” FROM THE SALESIAN FAMILY SPIRITUALITY DAYS 2017*

Blessed is the family whose God is the Lord, and that walks in His Presence.

Blessed is the family founded on love and whose attitudes, words, gestures, and decisions spring forth from love.

Blessed is the family open to life, welcoming children as a gift, valuing the presence of the elderly, and sensitive to the poor and suffering.

Blessed is the family that prays together to praise the Lord, entrusting to Him its concerns and hopes.

Blessed is the family that lives what ties it together with freedom, allowing everyone the autonomy to grow as a unique individual.

Blessed is the family that finds time for dialogue, to relax and have fun and to celebrate together.

Blessed is the family that is not a slave to the television and that chooses programs of value and meaning.

Blessed is the family in which differences do not create “drama” but which provide the setting where each one can grow in respect, goodness, and mutual forgiveness.

Blessed is the family where peace reigns within and among all: therein are found the roots that will nourish world peace.

Blessed is the family that lives in harmony with the universe, and that commits itself to construct a world that is ever more human.

Blessed is the family that decides that it is possible to live some of these beatitudes even if it does not recognize itself in all of them.

Blessed is the family in which life is a joy, being apart brings homesickness, and returning there is a cause for celebration.

*Opening prayer if gathering held outside of Holy Mass

II. STRENNA PRESENTATION BY DON ANGEL

On January 1, 2006, my predecessor Fr. Pascual Chavez Villanueva, the Rector Major at that time, gave us as a Strenna: “‘And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years and in favor with God and man’ (Lk 2,52).”[1] It was an invitation by the Rector Major to renew our commitment on behalf of the family, taking up the invitation issued by John Paul II to defend life through the family. It also marked the 150th anniversary of the death of Mama Margaret, Don Bosco’s mother and a true mother to the boys of the Oratory of Valdocco.

Ten years later I offer the whole Salesian Family around the world this new strenna, which is meant to focus our attention on families in the most diverse situations in which we find ourselves. The subject has been suggested, and it could not be otherwise, by the priority that the Church is giving to the need for ever greater and more appropriate pastoral care for families.

Pope Francis decided to devote two synods to reflection on the family, following up some of the pastoral ideas that he had proposed in his apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* in 2013. There was the extraordinary synod in 2014 and the ordinary one in 2015. After these synods came the apostolic exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*, signed by the Pope on March 19, 2016.

I think that this present period in the Church’s life demands that we, the Salesian Family of Don Bosco throughout the world, ought to give priority to the educational-pastoral care that we must devote to families.

As is the case every year, the strenna is addressed to every one of the members and all the groups of the Salesian Family, with the aim of making us more aware of our task and our duty toward families, so that we may find practical ways of carrying out the service of accompaniment that is expected of us.

THE TOPIC OF THE STRENNA

When we say, “We are Family! Every home, a school of life and love,” we want to declare from the start that all of us, each one of us, has had the experience of having been born into the bosom of a family, with the beauty and the limitations of every single family; so it was for us. We were born into the bosom of a family and are marked as having been part of a family where, ideally, we find a school of life and love. We are convinced that the family is the concrete human reality in which we should learn the art of life and love.

The family, all families throughout the world – while being different – are made up of individuals who love, speak to, and communicate with each other, who share and make sacrifices for each other, who look out for each other and protect each other’s lives.

In general, we developed as persons living in a family, enjoying the warmth of that home and receiving in that home our name, from one or both of our parents, and the dignity this brings. In the family we experienced affection for the first time and enjoyed the intimacy of “feeling at home.” In the family we learned to say thank you, ask for forgiveness, and ask for permission.

We are well aware that not all babies who are born have the good fortune of experiencing this, but while taking into account the diversity of contexts and cultures, I think it can be said that most of us have experienced this kind of family life.

Someone might say: What does this have to do with us as the Salesian Family? It is relevant precisely because we ourselves, as the Salesian Family of Don Bosco, are the first to whom this message is addressed, since we are well aware of the links that bind us together as a religious family. It is a family within which, while taking into account the diversity of our 31 groups (congregations, institutes of consecrated life, societies of apostolic life, associations of the faithful, etc.), the respective constitutions, regulations, or statutes present the family spirit and the family atmosphere as the constitutive element of our being, our identity, and they make explicit reference to pastoral activity in the family and with families.

This helps us realize our responsibility as Salesian Family, a responsibility that in practical terms means that we cannot turn our gaze in a different direction than the one to which the Universal Church under the guidance of Pope Francis is strongly committed. It is a responsibility that demands that we as educators of boys and girls, teenagers and young people, gaze through “Salesian eyes” at the real situation of families nowadays, and offer our humble contribution.

III. REFLECTION BY DON ROGGIA

Pope Francis is a prophet of joy. His smile is contagious. He is never forgetful of the tragedies that afflict the world. He is always close to those who are rejected and forgotten, and he always reaches out to those on the margins. Francis knows that love conquers and the hope that springs from faith is greater than all our weakness and misery.

With this look of mercy, hope and joy, Pope Francis has led the Church and the world to look to the primary source of human love, which is the family. We want to be guided by his eyes to help us to discover step by step throughout these months **the joy of love:** in our families, in the family of the Church, in the Salesian Family and in the whole human family of which we are all part, and which today needs more than ever new eyes to rediscover the path of love and joy.

CLICK TO HYPERLINK FOR VIDEO:



There are two other looks which are precious to us, so much so that we are unable to depart from them, like the child who feels secure only when he knows he is under the gaze of his father and mother. They are the eyes of Mary Help of Christians and the eyes of Don Bosco. As we make our way through *Amoris Laetitia* chapter by chapter, month by month, the Help of Christians and Don Bosco will help us to see how we can take concrete steps to grow as children in love and joy with our hearts in tune with the Pope's heart. We are encouraged in this journey by the Strenna for 2017 given by the Rector Major to the entire Salesian Family: **"WE ARE FAMILY! Every home is a school of Life and Love."**

Start from the beginning

The starting point of *Amoris Laetitia* is the 'principle' with which the Bible begins, and which is cited by John as the first word of his gospel. Francis invites us to direct our gaze there because this was the direction in which Jesus invited his disciples to look in order to comprehend the beauty of marriage, going beyond even the Law of Moses.

They embody the primordial divine plan clearly spoken of by Christ himself: "Have you not read that he who made them from the beginning made them male and female?" (Mt 19:4). We hear an echo of the command found in the Book of Genesis: "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife, and they shall become one flesh (Gen 2:24)". (AL 9)

The family is really the beginning of everything because it is the closest thing there is on earth to the life of God, from which everything originates and where everything will find its fulfilment.



The triune God is a communion of love, and the family is its living reflection. Saint John Paul II shed light on this when he said, "Our God in his deepest mystery is not solitude, but a family, for he has within himself fatherhood, sonship and the essence of the family, which is love. That love, in the divine family, is the Holy Spirit." The family is thus not unrelated to God's very being. (AL 11)

We have already seen that Pope Francis is an expert on family life from what he has written and the way he was able to guide the family of the Church, especially on the occasion of the two synods dedicated to the family. He never fails to point out that the Church is by its nature the Virgin, Bride and Mother, who responds without reserve to Christ, corresponding fully to his perfect sacrifice, and becoming fruitful for the salvation of all. The Church is in this sense like a 'holy door' through which we enter the mystery of God, just as in the plan of creation we enter life through a bride and mother made fruitful by the love of a father. In fact, we are all children of a mother and spouse, even when the beginning of life is not under the light of the sun but under the shadow of heavy clouds.

Francis knew admirably how to guide his sons and daughters, putting himself as one of the flock, sometimes behind, sometimes in front, carrying the torch that allows us all to make the journey together. **Synod, sun-odos:** on the road together. Even before he says it in the chapters of the apostolic exhortation, he made us see that in practice it is possible to be guided by love and ensure that differences do not become division, but opportunities to grow and come together in even greater communion.

IV. VIDEO, POWER POINT PRESENTATION, OR GUIDED GROUP READING

[Introduction by Fr. Pat Angelucci, SDB*](#) (also on [Don Bosco Salesian Portal YouTube Channel](#))

Power Point Series on *Amoris Laetitia* by Sr. Theresa Kelly, FMA*

Diocese of Broken Bay Study Guide*

Monthly Reflections of Don Ruggia, SDB, for ADMA*

World Meeting of Families' Amoris Programme (beginning in the Fall)*

The Joy of Love: Group Reading Guide by Bill Huebsch (will need to be purchased)

N.B. – All of the above come with prepared discussion questions

*Available for linking to/downloading from the homepage of <https://DonBoscoSalesianPortal.org>

V. PERSONAL REFLECTION TIME and MEAL & SHARING AT TABLE/SMALL GROUP SHARING

VI. LARGE GROUP SHARING

Bringing back to the large group the discussion held at table or in the small groups

VII. INTRODUCTION TO THE ROSARY AS THE PRAYER OF MARY AND THE HOLY FAMILY (continuation of Don Roggia's reflection)

In the light of the Word

If the Word of God is the starting principle it does not mean that we can forget it as we proceed on our journey. We look to Mary. For her too, in the beginning was the Word: Ave. In the original Greek it is very close to 'joy of love'. It is an imperative (Kaire): 'Hail, full of grace'. From then on, the Word will be the whole of her life. It will be part of her flesh, until she, who is a creature like us, is transfigured and resurrected like her Son.

This journey of the Word from the first joyful mystery to the fifth glorious mystery has become for millions of families in history their domestic Bible, as they contemplate the history of our salvation around the kitchen table of, and with the eyes of, Mary, taking her into our own home just as John did from Good Friday onwards.

It is touching to see that Mary is the mother of the family well beyond the confines of churches and even beyond Catholic homes. In Africa and Asia there are millions of non-Christian believers who honour Mary - also through the rosary! – with great respect and reverence, beginning with Muslims. Mary occupies a prominent place in the Qur'an (34 times she is referred to). It even speaks of her assumption into heaven.



The rosary helps us to make the mysteries of salvation our own. They show how the mercy of God has come close to every person. Mary's presence ensures that the mysteries of every man and every woman, of every home, are brought close to God's mercy. While we pass the rosary beads through our fingers she guides 'our feet into the way of peace' as Zechariah said when Mary visited his family. This is what happens when we pray the rosary together, especially in the evening after a wearying day.

Pope Francis wanted the three days of 'Marian Jubilee' during the Year of Mercy, to begin on the feast of Our Lady of the Rosary. The rosary has been prayed for about 800 years. It is like a great river of mercy in the history of the church in which all, saints and sinners alike, feel at home, always welcomed, always loved by 'her eyes of mercy'.

VIII. APPLICATION TO THE SALESIAN FAMILY

The mysteries of the rosary in the Salesian Family of Don Bosco

The rosary was the first word of God that Margaret taught John and his brothers. It was a small hidden seed which would nurture many other mysteries of salvation. It is enough to zoom in on two or three details of the history of the Salesian Family to realize this.

On 8 October 1848, just two years after the beginning of the Oratory at Valdocco, in his brother Joseph's house at the Becchi, Don Bosco dedicated a small room on the ground floor which he had converted into a chapel of Our Lady of the Rosary. For over twenty years it was to be the goal of the memorable autumn walks with the boys and the band of the oratory. There in 1852 Michael Rua received the clerical habit. And it was there, on 2 October 1854, that Dominic Savio met Don Bosco for the first time.



These were quiet beginnings but what grace, what abundance of life and holiness has grown from those 'Salesian joyful mysteries', held together by the prayer of the rosary and limitless trust in Mary. Don Bosco inherited from Mamma Margaret, as Dominic Savio and Michael Rua inherited from Don Bosco: a family school of evangelization and faith.

That was a long time ago. Thank God today we are able to access the Word of God in a way that is immediate and yet so profound which was never possible before in human history: everything is just a click away. The scriptural text is available in all languages, with the best commentaries and the exegesis most appropriate to our level of understanding. The Word illuminates the journey of faith of many families and each family has its own way of receiving it.

The form may change, but the essence is the same: **the principle and the foundation of family life is the Lord**, through dialogue with him in prayer, contemplation of the mysteries of our salvation in the text of the scriptures and through the recitation of the rosary. This is what we mean by building on the rock.

There is a popular saying in the English-speaking world: **‘The family that prays together stays together’**. This is the anchor of the family unit that goes straight to the centre in the mystery of the Trinity, as Pope Francis says in the early paragraphs of *Amoris Laetitia*. This is the first and ultimate source of communion, of which the union of man and woman in conjugal love is the closest image.

Mary is our teacher – the one who teach us to pray, to know and live the mystery of the 'Word made flesh' in a form accessible to all. Don Bosco is a very credible witness, along with all the other saints, each in their own unique way, that if we go to Jesus through Mary we can never go wrong, and it bears fruit beyond all expectation.

Seeds ... to be opened

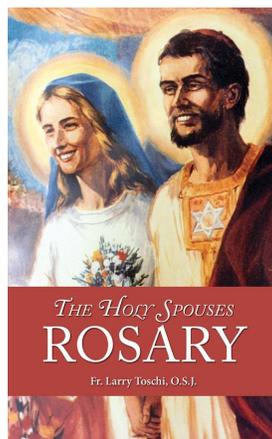
I will become familiar with the letter that the Pope wrote to me. I will not let myself be frightened by the number of pages. It is neither difficult nor too long (just read a bit at a time, as he suggests ...). Having a free heart makes a difference immediately, just as the good soil of the Gospel parable is different from the stony path.

Trusting the wise eyes of Pope Francis, I will make an effort to look at the principle: the love to which I am called as a son or daughter and as a member of my family, whatever my condition and situation, has its deepest roots in the fact that we are made in the image of God, which is the family, which is the COMMUNION from which everything is born and to which all life is directed.

Praying with the word, contemplating the mysteries of God and the mystery of my life through the recitation of the Rosary is the way to build our house on the rock. I entrust to Mary the beginning of the new working year, or academic or pastoral year ... letting myself be guided by her on a daily basis to ensure the proper time to give my heart the life-breath of prayer. I ask her to help me to be a Christian with this kind of fidelity.

‘The family that prays together stays together.’ What does it mean for me to take this call seriously ... to pray together? Perhaps others in the home are better prepared to believe it and more wiling to pray together than I might have imagined.

To purchase a copy of the book, *The Holy Spouses Rosary*, please click here on the book:



IX. MOVING FORWARD, INCLUDING HOMEWORK

We follow the call of the Rector Major, as he stated here, in Strenna 2017, to read the Introduction to and Chapter 1 of *Amoris Laetitia*:

AN INVITATION TO A CALM AND QUIET READING, WITH A HEART PREPARED FOR DIALOGUE AND ENCOUNTER WITH THE APOSTOLIC EXHORTATION AMORIS LAETITIA

I now invite all of you to read carefully and calmly, with a heart open to dialogue and personal involvement, what the apostolic exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* (AL) is saying to us, in order to discover what the document is offering to us and requesting from us.

Anyone who is a believer and loves the Church will realize that this apostolic exhortation is indeed a service to the human race and a true spiritual and pastoral treasure. It is from our awareness of being the “Salesian Family” that we want to become involved.[2]

Pope Francis’s exhortation is based on the magisterium of the recent Popes, Saint John Paul II and Benedict XVI, and on the two synods of 2014 and 2015, whose final reports are quoted in abundance. It therefore sums up the Church’s reflection over many years, but at the same time it introduces a change of tone, language, and perspective that moves from the canonical plane to a more pastoral one. The Supreme Pontiff himself declares: “We also need to be humble and realistic, acknowledging that at times ... we have proposed a far too abstract and almost artificial theological ideal of marriage, far removed from the concrete situations and practical possibilities of real families. This excessive idealization, especially when we have failed to inspire trust in God’s grace, has not helped to make marriage more desirable and attractive, but quite the opposite.”[3]

Introduction (AL nos. 1-7)

The exhortation speaks about the joy of love as it is lived in the family and about the Church’s rejoicing over this reality. As we have said, it brings together the contributions of two synods [4] and points out that the family has very many complex and varied features in which religious, political, cultural, economic, and legal aspects all come together. In this vast context, we are all called to safeguard family life with love. Rather than being a problem, families are an opportunity. In fact, we can say that in spite of the crises with which the family nowadays is faced, the new generations still see it as the safest place for them, a place where they can find unconditional acceptance.

[1] Pascual Chavez Villanueva, Letter of the Rector Major: “‘And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years and in favor with God and man’ (Lk 2,52),” AGC no. 392, pp. 3-46.

[2] Editor’s note: This paragraph is not in the Spanish version of the commentary, but it is in the Italian.

[3] *Amoris Laetitia*, 36.

X. CONCLUDING PRAYER:

PRAYER TO THE HOLY FAMILY FROM *AMORIS LAETITIA*

“Let us make this journey as families, let us keep walking together. What we have been promised is greater than we can imagine. May we never lose heart because of our limitations, or ever stop seeking that fullness of love and communion which God holds out before us.” – Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, 325.

Jesus, Mary and Joseph,
in you we contemplate
the splendor of true love;
to you we turn with trust.

Holy Family of Nazareth,
grant that our families too
may be places of communion and prayer,
authentic schools of the Gospel
and small domestic churches.

Holy Family of Nazareth,
may families never again experience
violence, rejection and division;
may all who have been hurt or scandalized
find ready comfort and healing.

Holy Family of Nazareth,
make us once more mindful
of the sacredness and inviolability of the family,
and its beauty in God’s plan.

Jesus, Mary and Joseph,
graciously hear our prayer.

Amen.



“Those who put their trust in Mary will never be disappointed!”

Materials necessary:

Laptop, LCD Projector, and Internet

Handouts: Reflection Booklets or Photocopies of Readings/Reflection Questions

Folders, pens, and a holy card with the Prayer to the Holy Family

Copies of *We Are Family* and *Amoris Laetitia* (also available on Don Bosco Salesian Portal in multiple languages)