

Dearest Sisters,

At the beginning of the new year, we welcome with joy and gratitude the comment of Strenna 2019 that the Rector Major, Fr Ángel Fernández Artime, presented at the Generalate on December 27th. This annual event brought a breath of Salesian and ecclesial air to all of us, thanks to the enthusiasm and depth with which the theme was presented to us:

**“That my joy may be in you” (Jn 15:11)
HOLINESS ALSO FOR YOU**

The Strenna is like a wakeup call to keep us alert and in full harmony with what Pope Francis writes in the Apostolic Exhortation *Gaudete et exsultate*.

For this I interpret all of you in expressing profound gratitude to Fr Ángel, which translates into the commitment to live as a Salesian Family, the path of daily holiness, not alone, but together with and for the young and in the style of Salesian holiness: the daily life that Don Bosco and Mother Mazzarello lived with the young people of Valdocco and Mornese.

The Strenna intends to highlight the ‘least visible treasure of holiness’, that of ‘next door holiness’ as Pope Francis calls it. Holiness is not a word frequently used by young people, but it is desired because of the profound yearning of every person: to reach that horizon of transcendence and fullness that we all carry in our hearts, believers and non-believers. The proposal of holiness, the Rector Major emphasizes, is addressed to everyone: adults and young people.

For Christians in particular, *holiness* is fullness of life and synonymous with *happiness*, the beatitude that challenges every woman and every man of today and in all situations of life.

I am sure, dear sisters, that reading, reflecting on, and sharing the Strenna with the educating community will be a good opportunity to discover that holiness generates life and hope. The Lord asks us for everything and what He offers us is true life, the happiness for which He created us. He wants us to be saints and has very high expectations in our regard. He does not want us to settle for mediocrity, for an inconsistent and watered-down existence. No, He wants us to be saints and saints willing, at any cost, to embody the *vocation to holiness* in the current context, with its challenges, its risks, and its opportunities (cf. *Gaudete et exsultate* Nos. 1-2).

I would like to dwell in particular on the second part of the Strenna, which bears the title: *Jesus is happiness*. I consider it significant for the real aspirations of all of us and the many young people described as ‘restless dreamers’, because I think they want something great, beautiful, true. It is a restlessness that also affects us as adults so that we will help them to dream big with courage and determination.

It is a page of profound evangelical spirituality interpreted with Salesian sensibility. It presents a brief overview of the wonderful messages launched to young people by St. John Paul II: “It is Jesus whom you seek when you dream of happiness.” And Benedict XVI: “Dear young people, the happiness you seek, the happiness you are entitled to enjoy has a name, a face: that of Jesus of Nazareth.... Let yourself be surprised by Christ! Give him the ‘right to speak to you’.” And Pope

Francis with great sincerity emphasizes that happiness is not negotiable: “Your happiness is priceless and it is not sold; it is not an ‘app’ that you download on your smart phone”.

Dear Sisters, holiness is not the privilege of a few, but is a right of everyone. Every human being as such, says Pope Francis, has the right to live and be happy (cf. *Laudato si* n.43). As consecrated women we desire to realize this right to happiness by bringing to everyone the joy of the Gospel and, above all, by walking in holiness in order to invite young people to become so and ‘wake up the world’ with a coherent and radiant lifestyle, with a language that all men and women of today can understand: the language of holiness (cf. *Final Document of the Synod* No. 166). Studying the Strenna in its richness raises many questions that we welcome as a valuable gift. Do we believe it is possible to walk towards the goal of holiness and consider it a “vocation, a responsibility, a commitment, a gift”?

Do we ask the Lord with confidence to reach the degree of holiness that He has always thought for each of us? Do we allow the invitation to be holy as God is holy to resound in us (cf. 1 Pt 15:16)? I am convinced that if we were all firmly oriented towards this *high goal of life*, our realities would show more clearly the union of hearts, the contagious joy that radiates and reaches the young and the poorest youth, the vulnerable and forgotten, and even those searching for authentic happiness, for the meaning of an existence worthy of the person who is a child of God. Our happiness is to see the young happy: is this not so, sisters?

Permit me to share a personal reflection with you and that I wish would reach the depths of your heart. I am certain that holiness is at home in our communities. It is up to us to discover the signs present in us and around us: sisters, young people, adults, families. St. Paul VI would say that Christian life is certainly not an easy journey, but it is a happy one! I invite each of us to be attentive each day to discover some sign of holiness in the sisters and in the young people.

Holiness and happiness: are two inseparable values; they cannot be separated from each other. For us, it is a daily call to “live for the glory of God by our service for the evangelization of young people, walking with them on the path to holiness” (C 5). This path requires apostolic daring, courage, overcoming timidity or possible resistances, joy in the heart like that which the disciples of Emmaus felt in their heart after they had encountered Jesus.

As the Strenna highlights, Mary of Nazareth is a unique light on the journey of holiness. She is the most beautiful model and the one closest to us. With her ‘Behold’ and “Let it be done to me according to Your word,” she declares that she possesses fullness and profound happiness. Let us entrust ourselves to Her so that she may keep alive in us the desire to be saints, so we can also share with young people the happiness that no one can take away from us.

As I renew my gratitude to Fr Ángel for the gift of the Strenna, let us welcome his invitation to pray to the Lord for the 28th General Chapter which will see the Confreres engaged in reflecting on a very important theme: *Which Salesians for today's youth?* We invoke the presence of the Holy Spirit to guide them in this event of grace. This year we are also invited to pray for the success of our General Chapter XXIV for which we are preparing.

I conclude by wishing you, the educating communities, the young people, and your families a happy new year 2019, grateful for the holiness that enriches the Church and our great Family.

God bless you!
Rome 1 January 2019

Affectionately, Mother