

Dearest Sisters,

We are still surrounded by the wealth of graces that the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy has roused in millions of people throughout the world: children, young people, adults, families, and communities of diverse cultures and religions. Our heart as well, was invaded by the tenderness of the Father, by His essence as Mercy. He reached those who invoked Him and awaited the embrace of God who, in His Son Jesus, came close to all who suffer and are silenced, the invisible, those who possess much but are deprived of love. He also reached those who remain indifferent, those who are far from God's grace because of their own life choices.

"Many pilgrims crossed the Holy Doors and, beyond the noise of the news, they tasted the great goodness of the Lord. Let us be grateful for this and remember that we have been invested by mercy to clothe ourselves in sentiments of mercy so as to become instruments of mercy" (Pope Francis, Homily at the close of the Jubilee of Mercy 11-20-2016).

Listening to the words of the Holy Father on the memorable day of the closing of the Holy Door, I thought of all of you, my dear Sisters, with emotion. I cannot silence the gratitude, the hope, the deep joy I have in my heart for your readiness to live this Year of Grace together, receiving the various proposals of the universal and local Churches: Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, Salesian Family, educating communities, children, young people, and people sensitive to this event that brought an uninterrupted cascade of good to every part of the world.

We have allowed ourselves to be 'touched' by Mercy and we live it as a providential occasion to really feel ourselves a family according to the original design of the Father. He patiently waits, I dare say with humility, for all His children to succeed in finding the 'golden thread' that weaves the identity of His family, free of violence, compromises, wars, various kinds of discrimination. A family instead, with a beautiful face because it is open to dialog, to values that unite, to the search for peace, and to respect for the dignity of every person.

Above all, the Holy Year has been an interior pilgrimage! Now the Holy Door is closed, but our heart must remain, not only open, but wide open as is the merciful Heart of the Father, to be missionaries of mercy always, with courage, with trust, with joy, and with fraternity. In other words, to be 'jubilee' people to let a new ray of light shine on the family through concrete signs of collaboration, of communion, of defense of the dignity and of the identity of the family itself. Never before as in these times has it been so subjected to external attacks and internal fragility that weaken it.

For this reason I deem Strenna 2017 of the Rector Major, Fr. Ángel Fernández Artime, as providential and very opportune in what it offers the Salesian Family with deep educational sensitivity, with an evangelical and Salesian heart open to hope.

The Strenna is entitled: 'We Are Family! Every house, school of Life and of Love', develops ecclesial and Salesian contents that are very meaningful and find their bases in the two Bishops' Synods on the Family followed by the post-Synod Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Francis *Amoris laetitia*. There is also the family experience of our Founders, experience on which the family style proper to the Salesian charism is founded.

“We were born in the heart of a family” with its beauty and its limitations; a vital space where the *art of life and of love is learned*. It is a family formed by people who love each other, dialog, and share; where affection is experienced and intimacy is enjoyed, and where we learn to ask permission, to live forgiveness, and to be grateful.

The Rector Major explicitly declares that the Salesian Family, with the 31 groups that comprise it, are the first recipients of this message in the power of our identity. The family climate is, in fact, one of the constitutive elements of our being and of our acting in the family and with the family. It is a common responsibility that places us in synergy with the magisterium of Pope Francis in the universal Church.

The Strenna invites us to an attentive reading of the Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris laetitia*, with our heart ready for dialog and the acceptance of what it proposes. The rich synthesis of this document clearly expresses how it is a spiritual and pastoral treasure for everyone and it must be so, above all, for those dedicated to the education of the young.

Some points and perspectives of *Amoris laetitia* can be found in Circular no. 963. Together with those proposed by the Strenna, they can be useful for sharing with the educating community, with groups of the Salesian Family, and with the young people.

Among the other reflections, there are also those on the family of Nazareth that paid a high price to be the family of God, in its progressive journey of faith that was not lacking difficulties and risks. This experience brings us close to the families of all times. In fact, it was a family that ‘humanized the Son of God’ and this confers an exceptional sacred value on the family.

There is also reference to the family life of Don Bosco and of Mother Mazzarello. They had different experiences, but both positively marked the personalities of our Founders, preparing them for the mission that God would entrust to them. Fr. Angel notes that for many the reading of these pages will be an opportunity to revisit the family experience each one has lived.

Today, the family is traversing a deep crisis due to complex and varied causes as the Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris laetitia* shows. In the face of this complex reality, it still remains the original structure of society, and the Rector Major asks what we can do as educators, pastors, and evangelizers. He suggests concrete steps that can be proposed from the point of view of educational journeys. Among them, I emphasize accompaniment as a priority service and a challenge to face together. How can we accompany the parents, the children? How can we accompany with our pastoral action the young people who are maturing a life project for the choice of matrimony? Therefore, a vocational accompaniment that is translated into a proposal of spirituality and a faith journey.

At this point, I think it is interesting to remember the theme chosen by Pope Francis for the XV Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops that will be celebrated in 2018: “Youth, faith, and vocational discernment”. This theme is in continuity with the two Synods on the family and with the post Synod Exhortation *Amoris laetitia* that gathers their orientations and is, I think, very pertinent to what the Strenna presents to us.

It ends with a beautiful prayer to the Holy Family of Nazareth that could be used in various encounters with the families, with the educating communities, and with the young.

Strenna 2017 traces out for us a clear and important proposal for deep educational quality that unites us as Salesian Family. It opens a vast horizon to rediscover the beauty of the family and the joy of feeling we are a family. Not only this, it also offers us precious indications so that it will be the privileged and irreplaceable place of vocational discernment.

Dear Sisters, I interpret all of you as I thank Fr. Ángel for the precious gift of the Strenna. It is a gratitude that is translated into commitment on our part, to collaborate in living it in communion with the Salesian Family groups. It is a concrete thank you that we wish to express to the Tenth Successor of Don Bosco who is the animator and center of unity of the Salesian Family (Cf. C 3).

We entrust ourselves to the Family of Nazareth so that we can bring to fulfillment the mission of the Institute entrusted to us in the Church, in society, for and with the young in favor of the family today.

I assure you of my constant prayer.
May God bless you!

Rome, January 1, 2017

Affectionately, La Madre