

Strenna 2019

Commentary of the Rector Major

“So that my joy may be in you” (John 15:11)

HOLINESS FOR YOU TOO

My dear Brothers and Sisters, my dear Salesian Family,

Continuing our century-old tradition, at the beginning of this New Year 2019 I address myself to each one of you, in every part of this “Salesian world” that we constitute as the Salesian Family in more than 140 countries.

I do so while giving a commentary on a subject very familiar to us, with a title taken directly from the apostolic exhortation of Pope Francis on the call to holiness in today’s world: *Gaudete et Exsultate*[1].

In choosing this subject and this title I want to translate into our own language, in the light of our charismatic sensitivity, the strong appeal to holiness that Pope Francis has addressed to the whole Church.[2] Therefore I want to emphasize those points that are typically “our own” in the context of our Salesian spirituality, shared by all 31 groups of our Salesian Family as the charismatic inheritance received from the Holy Spirit through our beloved Father Don Bosco, who will certainly help us to live with the same deep joy that comes from the Lord: “So that my joy may be in you” (John 15:11).

To whom are these words addressed?

I can assure you that they are addressed to everyone.

To all of you, my dear SDB confreres.

To all of you, sisters and brothers of the various congregations and institutes of consecrated and lay life in our Salesian Family.

To all of you, brothers and sisters of the associations and various groups of the Salesian Family.

To the dads and moms, to the teachers, to the catechists and leaders in all our presences throughout the world.

And to all the teenagers and young people in our great Salesian world.

I accept the invitation addressed by the Pope to the whole Church. His exhortation is not a treatise on holiness, but a call to today’s world, and especially to the Church, to live life as a vocation and as a call to holiness; a holiness incarnated in this present time, today, in the real life of each one, in our current circumstances.

I make my own this always fascinating call to holiness because this “present time” in the Church demands it of us. Like me, all the recent Rectors Major have made very significant contributions concerning Salesian holiness and our holy patrons[3].

As in previous years, I believe that in addition to being read personally, these ideas may be suitable “guidelines” for the educational and pastoral programs needed in the different contexts and situations of the “Salesian world” in which we are working.

I. GOD CALLS EVERYONE TO HOLINESS

I should imagine that not a few people, even among ourselves and certainly among the many young people who heard the Pope’s call, have felt that the word *holiness* sounds somewhat remote, in many cases very remote and unfamiliar in the language of today’s world. It is quite possible that there are cultural obstacles or interpretations that tend to confuse the path of holiness with a kind of spiritualism that alienates and makes one flee from reality. Or perhaps, at best, the term *holiness* is understood as a word applied to and applicable only to those who are venerated in the images in our churches.

Therefore, what the Pope is doing is admirable and even “daring” as he presents the perennial relevance of Christian holiness, which is to be seen as a call coming from God himself in his Word, and is proposed as the destination of every person’s journey. God himself “wants us to be saints and not to settle for a bland and mediocre existence” (GE, 1).

The call to holiness is a familiar part of our Salesian tradition (St. Francis de Sales). The appeal of Pope Francis attracts attention above all on account of the force and determination with which he maintains that holiness is a call addressed to everyone, not just to the few, insofar as it corresponds to God’s fundamental plan for us. It is aimed, therefore, at ordinary people, at those people whom we accompany in their ordinary daily lives, consisting in the simple things typical of ordinary people.

It is not about a holiness for the heroic few or for exceptional people, but about an ordinary way of living an ordinary Christian life: a way of living Christian life incarnated in the present day with the dangers, the challenges, and the opportunities that God offers us on life’s journey.

Sacred Scripture invites us to be holy: “You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matt 5:48); and, “Be holy, for I [the Lord] am holy” (Lev 11:44).

There is, then, an explicit invitation to experience and bear witness to the perfection of love, which is identical with holiness. Holiness, in fact, consists in the perfection of love: a love that above all was made flesh in Christ.

In the letter to the Ephesians St. Paul, too, referring to the Father, writes: “He chose us in [Christ] before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. He destined us in love to be his sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace which he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved” (Eph 1:4-6). We are no longer servants, therefore, but friends (cf. John 15:15); no longer strangers and sojourners but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God (cf. Eph 2:19). Therefore each and every one of us is called to holiness: that is, to a life full and fulfilled life according to God’s plan, in complete communion with him and with our brothers and sisters.

It is, therefore, not a question of a perfection reserved to a few, but of a call addressed to everyone.

Something infinitely precious yet not rare, it is rather part of the common vocation of believers. It is the beautiful proposal that God makes to every man and woman.

The call to holiness is not the pursuit of a false spirituality that takes one away from the fullness of life, but the fullness of being human made perfect by grace. “Life to the full,” as Jesus promised.

Not with standardized, trivialized, and rigid characteristics but as a response to the ever-new breath of the Spirit, which creates communion while showing appreciation for differences – indeed, the Spirit “is at the origin of the noble ideals and undertakings which benefit humanity on its journey through history.”[4]

It is not a question of a collection of abstract values subscribed to and shown outward respect, but of a harmony of all those virtues that incarnate the values of life.

It is not merely the ability to reject evil and embrace good, but a constant attitude ready with joy *to live the good life well*.

It is not a goal that is reached in an instant, but an ongoing journey accompanied by God’s patience and kindness, involving personal freedom and commitment.

It is not an attitude that excludes what is different, but rather a fundamental experiencing of what is true, good, just, and beautiful.

Finally, holiness is living according to the Beatitudes, so as to become salt and light in the world; it is a journey toward being fully human, as is every genuine spiritual experience. Therefore becoming holy does not require cutting ourselves off from our own nature or from our brothers and sisters, but living an intense, courageous human life and an experience (sometimes hard-won) of communion and relationship with others.

“Becoming a saint” is the first and most urgent task for a Christian.

St. Augustine declares, “My life will be true life, all full of You.”[5] It is in him, in God himself, that we find the possibility of the path of holiness in following Christ. The path of holiness is made possible for a Christian by the gift of God in Christ: in him – of whom the saints and especially the Virgin Mary are a marvelous reflection – is revealed simultaneously the fullness of the face of the Father and the true face of man and woman.

In Jesus Christ the face of God and the face of man and woman shine out “together.” In Jesus we meet the man from Galilee and the face of the Father: “He who has seen me has seen the Father” (John 14:9).

Jesus, the Word made flesh, is the complete and definitive Word of the Father. From the moment of the incarnation, the will of God is met in the person of Christ. He shows us in his life, his words, and his silences, in his choices and his actions, and above all in his passion, death, and resurrection, what God’s plan is for man and woman, what his will is and the way to correspond to it.

This plan of God for each of us today is simply the fullness of Christian life, which is measured *according to the extent to which Christ lives within us and to the degree in which, with the grace of the Holy Spirit, we model our lives on that of Jesus the Lord*. Therefore, it does not mean doing extraordinary things but living in union with the Lord, making ours his actions, thoughts, and behavior. In fact, going to Holy Communion means expressing and bearing witness that we want to take up and make our own the style of life, the way of living, and the very mission of Jesus Christ.

In the Constitution on the Church, the Second Vatican Council firmly proposed *the universal call to holiness* and declared that no one is excluded: “In the various types and duties of life, one and the same holiness is cultivated by all who are moved by the Spirit of God, and who obey the voice of the Father, worshipping God the Father in spirit and in truth. These souls follow the poor Christ, the humble and cross-bearing Christ, in order to be made worthy of being partakers in His glory.” (LG, 41)

The “holiness of next-door neighbors” and the universal call to holiness

While still an atheist, Edith Stein wrote about having received a decisive impetus toward conversion from two encounters: one with the wife of a friend killed in war, who having become a widow, in spite of intense sorrow demonstrated the surprising light and strength of faith; the other was in a church (where Edith had gone simply out of artistic interest) when an elderly woman came in with her shopping bags in the middle of a busy day to spend a moment of deep trust and adoration with Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament.

Don Bosco had as his mom and first teacher Margaret Occhiena: a simple, uneducated peasant woman with no theological training, but with a wise heart and an obedience based on faith.

St. Therese of Lisieux used to say that as a child she understood little of what the priest was saying, but it was enough for her to look at the face of her papa Louis to understand everything.

None of these lay people – Edith’s friend Anna Reinach, the unknown woman with the shopping bags, Mama Margaret, or papa Louis Martin – ever thought in their lifetimes that they were holy, nor were they aware of the influence they were having on the people around them through their ordinary way of acting.

The presence of these simple and determined people, of these “next-door” saints – as Pope Francis describes them (GE,7) – reminds us that what is important in life is to be holy, not to be declared saints one day. In addition, it helps to reflect that the canonized saints attained first of all the simple holiness of the people of God. All the saints share the same glory in a deep and unswerving communion.

To live holiness, then, is the experience of being preceded and saved, and learning to correspond to this faithful love. It is the responsibility of responding to a great gift.

From this point of view, perhaps one of the most important contributions to Christian spirituality is that made by the bishop of Geneva, Francis de Sales, with his efforts to propose *holiness for everyone*, taking “devotion” out of the cloisters into the world. In his splendid work *Introduction to the Devout Life*, he writes: “As in the creation God commanded the plants to bring forth their fruits each one according to its kind, so he commands all Christians, who are the living plants of his Church, to bring forth the fruits of devotion, each according to his quality and vocation. Devotion ought, then, to be not only differently exercised by the gentleman, the tradesman, the servant, the prince, the widow, the maid, and the married woman, but its practice should be also adapted to the strength, the employments, and the obligations of each one in particular.... Wherever we are, then, we may and should aspire to a perfect life.”^[6]

The history of the Church is strongly marked by many women and men who with their faith, their love, and their lives have been like beacons that have illumined and continue to illumine so many generations throughout time, including the present. They are a living testimony to how the power of the Risen Lord in their lives has reached such a level that like St. Paul they have been able to declare (so many times without using the words): “It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me” (Gal 2:20). And they have demonstrated this, sometimes through the heroism of their virtues, sometimes through the sacrifice of their lives in martyrdom, and at other times through “a life constantly offered for others even until death” (GE, 5). At the same time there is a holiness without a name, that of those who have not achieved the honors of the altar, whose “lives may not always have been perfect, yet even amid their faults and failings they kept moving forward and proved pleasing to the Lord” (GE, 3). This is the holiness of our own mom or a grandmother or others close to us; it is the holiness of matrimony, which is a most beautiful path of growth in love; the holiness of fathers who develop, grow to maturity, and give themselves generously to their children, often with unforeseen sacrifices; men and women, the Pope recalls, who work hard to earn bread for their families; the sick who bear their illness patiently and with a spirit of faith, in union with the suffering Jesus; elderly nuns who have given and consumed their lives and never lose their smile or their hope. (cf. GE, 7)

It can be said with certainty that in every epoch of the Church's history and everywhere in the world there have been and still are saints of all ages and all conditions of life, with very different personal characteristics.

Pope Benedict XVI expressed this very well when speaking about his personal experience. He said: "I should like to add that for me it is not only the great saints whom I love and know well who are 'signposts,' but also the simple saints, that is to say, the good people whom I see in my life, who will never be canonized. They are ordinary people, one might say, without visible heroism, but in their everyday goodness I see the truth of the faith."^[7]

Certainly we find all this in the way so many people have incarnated the Christian way in their lives. Some may seem "small" and others "great"; but all have pursued an attractive and fascinating journey.

Pope Benedict concludes with a very valuable expression that in my judgment sums up magnificently the message of this year's stenna, when he says: "*Dear friends, how great and beautiful but also simple is the Christian vocation seen in this light! We are all called to holiness; that is the measure of the Christian life.*"^[8]

Mary of Nazareth: a unique light on the path of holiness

All these simple and very often anonymous paths of holiness always have a model to look to and on which to reflect. Christian holiness has in Mary of Nazareth, the Mother of the Lord, of the Son of God, the most beautiful and closest model.

Mary is the woman of "Here I am," of full and total availability to the will of God. Saying: "Let it be to me according to your word" (Luke 1:38), Mary is saying that she finds full and deep happiness in everything that "let it be" implies in faith – not only when the Son leaves home and is separated from her because he has to carry out the Father's mission; but also at the final moment in which Mary experiences the pain of his crucifixion and death, an awful pain for a mother to experience.

In Mary, Mother of the Lord, we can find the richness of a *life that has accepted God's plan at every moment*; a life that has been a constant "Here I am" said to God. How fascinating it is, from this angle, to contemplate Mary and meditate on the value of human existence and its full meaning in the perspective of eternity!

The courageous acceptance of God's mysterious plan leads Mary to become the mother of all believers, the model for each one of us in listening to and welcoming the Word of God and the sure guide toward holiness. And this because she teaches us that only God can make our life great. "Only if God is great is humanity also great. With Mary, we must begin to understand that this is so. We must not drift away from God but make God present; we must ensure that he is great in our lives. Thus we too will become divine; all the splendor of the divine dignity will then be ours."^[9]

For this reason it is impossible to think that the easy path of holiness can be followed by Christians without looking to Mary as their Mother. Looking to her is *to learn how to believe, how to hope, how to love*. And if we pray like her and with her, we shall certainly experience in our daily journey that consolation that can come only from God. In addition, by invoking her as the Mother of the Son of God we shall open our hearts to the gift of her intercession as Mother of her Son and of her children.^[10]

With Salesian sensitivity

Therefore it may be said that if one becomes a saint, one has everything. If one does not become a saint, one loses everything. The goal of holiness and the invitation, almost tender, to achieve it is also the great message of Don Bosco, the pivot on which hinges his whole spiritual proposal and his life witness.

The holiness that Don Bosco proposes is easy and pleasant, but also strong, as he suggests. In Dominic Savio's declaration: "I want to become a saint, I must become a saint. I can have no peace until I become a saint,"^[11] one can hear much – if not everything – of what Don Bosco knew how to convey to him, following the sermon in which Dominic had heard these encouraging words: "It is God's will that each one should become a saint; it is easy to become a saint; there is a great reward waiting in heaven for those who try to become saint [sic]."^[12] Don Bosco himself continued writing that this talk was like a spark that set into a consuming blaze the love of God in Dominic Savio's heart.

In the wisdom of Don Bosco, who curbed Dominic's desire for penance and recommended to him instead fidelity in his life of prayer, in his studies, and in duties done well, and diligence in recreation (and we can also say in the whole area of relationships in life), there emerges the awareness, typically Salesian, of the universal call to holiness.

In founding the Society of St. Francis de Sales in the first place, and then the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians (together with Mary Domenica Mazzarello, co-foundress), Don Bosco proposed as the object, right up to today, the sanctification of its members.^[13]

Father Rua reminded the Salesians of this shortly afterwards when he exhorted them in these words: "This is what our beloved Don Bosco taught us in the first article of the Holy Rule, where it says that the object of our Pious Society is, first, the Christian perfection of its members, and then various works of charity, both spiritual and temporal, on behalf of the young."^[14] Without that the whole apostolic endeavor on behalf of youth would prove sterile. Don Bosco knows perfectly well that the first, most radical, and decisive way to help others is to be saints.

In this "school of new and attractive apostolic spirituality,"^[15] Don Bosco interpreted the Gospel with a pedagogical and pastoral originality that "meant a new 'fusion' of the common elements of Christian holiness that was well balanced, congenial and regulated; the virtues and the means to holiness had their own proper place, quantity, symmetry and beauty that were characteristic."^[16]

II. JESUS IS HAPPINESS

The proposal of holiness is addressed to every Christian because it is the fullness of life and synonymous with happiness, with blessedness. We Christians find happiness when we follow Jesus Christ.

These words are directed toward the young. They are meant for them. But we know very well that "holiness is for you too" concerns everyone: the young, educators, fathers and mothers, consecrated lay people, religious, priests. In short these words of mine are directed toward all and toward each of the members of our Salesian Family, in such a way that we all feel included, and naturally they concern all the People of God.

Very beautiful are the messages that with great conviction, Pope John Paul II, Pope Benedict XVI, and Pope Francis have sent to young people, and we should not feel detached from them. I shall put together only a small sample of these messages, with one common denominator: in all of them the Popes ask the young to take the chance of accepting Jesus as the guarantee of their happiness.

This was the great challenge that St. John Paul II issued when he told the young people of the world: "***It is Jesus in fact that you seek when you dream of happiness***"; he is waiting for you when nothing else you find satisfies you; he is the beauty to which you are so attracted; it is he who provokes you with that thirst for fullness [*radicalità*] that will not let you settle for compromise; it is he who urges you to shed the masks of a false life; it is he who reads in your hearts your most genuine choices, the choices that others try to stifle. It is Jesus who stirs in you the desire to do something great with your lives, the will to follow

an ideal, the refusal to allow yourselves to be ground down by mediocrity, the courage to commit yourselves humbly and patiently to improving yourselves and society, making the world more human and more fraternal.”[17]

Pope Benedict XVI was no less explicit when he told young people: “Dear young people, the happiness you are seeking, the happiness you have a right to enjoy, has a name and a face: it is Jesus of Nazareth, hidden in the Eucharist. . . . Be completely convinced of this: Christ takes from you nothing that is beautiful and great, but brings everything to perfection for the glory of God, the happiness of men and women, and the salvation of the world. . . . Let yourselves be surprised by Christ! Let him have ‘the right of free speech!’”[18]

And Pope Francis told young people that happiness is not negotiable, that they should not allow any reduction in their expectations so that in the end happiness is not ensured in any genuine and serious way, but only as something that can be experienced in “small doses,” that, as so often happens, does not last, and naturally is not true happiness, nor does it bring full human satisfaction: “Your happiness has no price. It cannot be bought; it is not an app that you can download on your phones.”[19]

Don Bosco wanted his boys to be happy in time and in eternity.

At *the beginning* of his letter from Rome on May 10, 1884, Don Bosco writes to his boys: “I have only one wish: to see you happy both in time and in eternity.”[20]

At the end of his life on earth these words sum up the heart of his message to young people of every age and of the whole world. He wants them to be happy, as a goal that every young person dreams of, today, tomorrow, always. But not just that. “In eternity” is that extra that only Jesus and his proposal of happiness, which is holiness, can offer. It is the answer to the deep thirst for “forever” that burns in the heart of every young person.

The world, the society of all nations, has no way to offer this “forever” or eternal happiness. But God can.

For Don Bosco all this was very clear, and he was able to sow in the hearts of his boys the strong desire to become saints, to live for God, and to reach paradise: “He guided the young along a path of holiness that was simple, serene, and joyful, uniting into a single experience their life in the playground, serious study, and a constant sense of duty.”[21]

III. SAINTS FOR THE YOUNG AND WITH THE YOUNG

The holiness characteristic of the Salesian charism in which there is room for everyone, consecrated people and lay people, has its most specific expression in relation to youth holiness. Father Pascual Chavez, my predecessor, wrote at the beginning of his ministry in the letter “My Dear Salesians, be saints!”: “The youngsters themselves helped Don Bosco to begin, in the context of everyday experience, a new style of holiness tailored to the typical requirements of a boy’s development. In this way they were to some extent both pupils and teachers at the same time. Ours is a holiness both for and with the young; because in the search for holiness, ‘Salesians and youngsters walk side by side’: either we sanctify ourselves with them, walking and learning with them in their company, or we shall not become saints at all.”[22] The genuine Salesian heart of our Family needs to be holy in order to reach the young, while it does not neglect the even more radical duty to make itself holy among the young and *together* with them.

This desire can be applied to all and to each of the 31 groups that make up our Salesian Family. With a real interest I looked for the references to holiness in the constitutions and regulations of the various congregations in our Family, in the *Project of Apostolic Life* of the Salesian Cooperators, in the plans,

statutes, and regulations (according to their own proper names) of all the groups that belong to our charismatic tree. I can assure you that in one way or another all of them consider holiness as an aim and a purpose for which we have been born as religious institutions, with the intention of achieving it in our lives – therefore a holiness that is proposed to each of the members and which is proposed as the purpose of the apostolate that we direct toward others.

Youth, a time for holiness

Convinced that “holiness is the most attractive face of the Church” (GE, 9), before proposing it to the young we are all called to live it and bear witness to it, in this way becoming a community “that enjoyed favor,” as on various occasions the Acts of the Apostles puts it (cf. GE, 93). Only living in this consistent manner is it possible to accompany the young on the ways of holiness.

If St. Ambrose declared that “every age is ripe for holiness,”^[23] so too without doubt is youth! In the holiness of numerous young people the Church recognizes the grace of God, which anticipates and accompanies the life story of each one, the educational value of the sacraments of the Eucharist and Reconciliation, the fruitfulness of journeys shared in faith and charity, the prophetic impact of these “champions” who have often sealed in their blood their being disciples of Christ and missionaries of the Gospel. The language most requested by today’s young people is *the witness of an authentic life*. For this reason the life of young saints is the real word of the Church; and the invitation to undertake a holy life is the one that is most necessary for today’s young people. An authentic spiritual vitality and a fruitful pedagogy of holiness do not disappoint the deep aspirations of the young: their need for life, for love, for growth, for joy, for freedom, for a future, and also for mercy and reconciliation.

Certainly the proposal has the flavor of a real challenge. If on the one hand it is very attractive, on the other it can give rise to fear and indecision. One must overcome the risk of “settling for a bland and mediocre existence” (GE, 1). It implies conquering the temptation just to “struggle along” since the challenge of holiness is nothing other than everyday life; it is precisely this ordinary existence lived in an extraordinary manner, made beautiful by the grace of God. In fact, the fruit of the Holy Spirit is a life lived in joy and love, and this is what holiness consists of. In this regard the example the Pope offers us in the apostolic exhortation of the testimony of the life of Cardinal Francis Xavier Nguyen Van Thuan, who spent many years in prison, is precious. He refused to waste time waiting for the day he would be set free and made another decision: “I will live the present moment, filling it to the brim with love,” and “I will seize the occasions that present themselves every day; I will accomplish ordinary actions in an extraordinary way.” (GE, 17)

Young saints and the youth of the saints

“Jesus invites every disciple to give their entire lives, without expecting any human advantage or benefit. Saints welcome this demanding request and meekly and humbly start following the crucified and risen Christ. The Church gazes at the sky of holiness and sees an increasingly large and bright constellation of young men and women, adolescents and young saints and blessed who, ever since the time of the first Christian communities, have endured until our time. When the Church invokes them as our patrons, she indicates them to young people as references for their existence.”^[24] In various surveys including those in preparation for the Synod of Bishops on the young, the young people themselves recognize that they are “more receptive when faced with a ‘life story’ [compared with] an abstract theological sermon,”^[25] and they consider the lives of the saints to be very relevant to them. Therefore it is certainly important to present them in a way that is adapted to their age and condition.

It is also worth remembering that besides the “young saints” we must present to young people the “youth of the saints.” All the saints were in fact once young, and it would be useful to today’s young people to

show them how the saints lived when they were young. In this way it would be possible to begin to deal with many youth situations that are neither simple nor easy, in which, however, God is present and active in a mysterious way. Showing that his grace is at work through complex processes in the patient construction of a holiness that matures with the passing of time in many unforeseen ways, can help all young people without exception to cultivate hope for a holiness that is always possible.

The last number of the final document of the Synod declares, in harmony with what we have been saying, that the holiness of the young also forms part of the holiness of the Church because “young people are an integral part of the Church. So is their holiness, therefore, which in recent decades has produced a manifold flowering in all parts of the world: contemplating and meditating during the Synod on the courage of so many young people who have given their lives while remaining faithful to the Gospel has been very moving for us; listening to the testimony of the young people present at the Synod who in the middle of persecutions have chosen to share the passion of the Lord Jesus has been life-giving. Through the holiness of young people the Church can renew its spiritual ardor and its apostolic vigor.”[26]

IV. WHAT DOES “HOLINESS IS FOR YOU TOO!” MEAN?

Pope Francis says it simply and directly. After saying that to be saints it is not necessary to be bishops, priests, or religious, he adds: “We are all called to be holy by living our lives with love and by bearing witness in everything we do, wherever we find ourselves. Are you called to the consecrated life? Be holy by living out your commitment with joy. Are you married? Be holy by loving and caring for your husband or wife, as Christ does for the Church. Do you work for a living? Be holy by laboring with integrity and skill in the service of your brothers and sisters. Are you a parent or grandparent? Be holy by patiently teaching the little ones how to follow Jesus. Are you in a position of authority? Be holy by working for the common good and renouncing personal gain.” (GE, 14)

This encourages us to put into simple words the challenge facing us – one that is a valuable provocation for every one of us, at all ages and stages of life.

So what is holiness, this holiness that is presented to us as being close and accessible to the young person, to the woman and man of today?

→ It is something close, real, concrete, possible. Indeed **it is the fundamental vocation to love** as Vatican Council II recognizes (LG, 11); the soul, the essence, of this call to holiness for every person is love completely lived: “God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God and God abides in him” (1 John 4:16).

→ It is a question of making fruitful **the grace of Baptism, without being afraid that God is asking too much of us**: “Let the grace of your baptism bear fruit in a path of holiness. Let everything be open to God; turn to him in every situation.” (GE, 15) In practical terms it is a question of living in the Spirit, allowing ourselves to be guided in the simplicity of daily life by the Holy Spirit without being afraid to aim high, and letting ourselves be loved and made free by God himself.

Pope Benedict XVI invited young people, all young people, to “open themselves to the action of the Holy Spirit, who transforms our lives so that we too may become tiles in the great mosaic of holiness that God is creating in history, so that the face of Christ may shine in its full splendor. We are not afraid to aim high, toward God’s heights, *we are not afraid that God is asking too much of us.*”[27]

→ It is a question of **being glad to be saints because God has dreamed of us in that way**

“Far from being timid, morose, acerbic or melancholy, or putting on a dreary face, the saints are joyful and full of good humor. Though completely realistic, they radiate a positive and hopeful spirit.” (GE, 122)
 When he was a youth, John Bosco founded the Happy Times Association, and Dominic Savio used to say to new arrivals at the Oratory: “Here at the Oratory we make holiness consist in being very cheerful” [28] (even though we know that Savio’s was not a superficial joy but deep-seated, in his inner life, in a sense of responsibility before life and before God himself).

Don Bosco understood very well and so taught his boys that commitment and joy go hand in hand, and that holiness and joy are an inseparable pair. So his invitation is also a call to the “holiness of joy,” a joy lived out in a holy life. This does not mean ignoring that a commitment to holiness demands courage, since it is, to put it another way, a course that goes “against the current,” a path at times leading to opposition, faced with which at times we have to be “signs of contradiction” like Jesus.

→ It is a question of a journey, that of holiness, which accepts the **dimension of the cross**

Pope Francis reminds us of the need for inner strength in order to be persevering and constant in doing good; he recalls the need for vigilance: “We need to recognize and combat our aggressive and selfish inclinations, and not let them take root” (GE, 114). He encourages evangelical boldness [*parrhesia*] so as not to allow ourselves to be overcome by fear; above all, he invites us not to leave off our contemplation of the Crucified One, the source of grace and freedom: “If, gazing on the face of Christ, you feel unable to let yourself be healed and transformed, then enter into the Lord’s heart, into his wounds, for that is the abode of divine mercy” (GE, 151).

Perhaps nowadays reference to the Cross is not so common among us, but certainly also in this we need to change. It is not possible to live a genuine Christian life and follow the path of holiness in daily life while putting the Cross to one side.

Having taken part during the last Synod in the canonization of St. Paul VI, celebrated together with that of six other saints, I find these words of his most appropriate: “What would a Gospel be, that is, a Christianity, without the Cross, without suffering, without the sacrifice of Jesus? It would be a Gospel, a Christianity, without the Redemption, without salvation, which we absolutely need. The Lord saved us with the Cross; he has given us back hope and the right to life with his death. Carrying the Cross! It is a great thing, a great thing, my dear children! It means facing up to life with courage, without weakness and without cowardice; it means transforming into moral energy the inevitable difficulties of our existence; it means knowing how to understand human suffering and finally knowing how to love truly!” [29]

→ It is a question of living **holiness so that it does not come between us and our obligations, concerns, or affections** but takes them all up in love. Holiness is the *perfection of love* and therefore responds to the fundamental human need: that of being loved and of loving. The holier a man or woman may be, the more human one is, because “life does not have a mission, but is a mission” (GE, 27).

Holiness, therefore, is **a process of becoming more human**. “We need a spirit of holiness capable of filling both our solitude and our service, our personal life and our evangelizing efforts, so that every moment can be an expression of self-sacrificing love in the Lord’s eyes. In this way every minute of our lives can be a step along the path to growth in holiness.” (GE, 31)

So holiness coincides with the **complete flowering of what is human**. It is not proposed as a way of detaching oneself from the human condition and its circumstances, but as one that enables people to experience ever more fully and truly their own humanity and that of their brothers and sisters. In the face of the true saint, one always recognizes clearly the man or woman he or she really is with all his or her richness of heart, mind, and will and openness to relationships: “In the saints one thing becomes clear: those who draw near God do not withdraw from men, but rather become truly close to them.” [30]

Right now I invite you to remember, when, at the end of the commentary we shall speak about the saints, blessed, servants of God, and venerables of our Salesian Family, the precious witness that they offer us in their lives.

Don Bosco himself, so fully human, was the first to find, heal, and reconcile the boys who often arrived at the Oratory after going through difficult situations of affective poverty, economic difficulties, being orphaned and abandoned. To these boys he offered all the riches of the family spirit and the Preventive System in a magnificent atmosphere, including the spiritual, which helped heal them. Those wounds were healed thanks to the fatherly approach of Don Bosco himself, the joyful family atmosphere, and the pathway of faith and friendship with Jesus, to whom Don Bosco led his boys.

In Mornese Mother Mazzarello and the first sisters experienced, with the particular sensitivity of women, this encounter with the humanity of those poor babies and girls taken into the first house of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians.

In this way our history has been repeated in many groups of our Salesian Family, with a feature typically ours, which is also that of the Gospel, that has allowed us to care for and heal the humanity of every person with whom we have come in contact.

→ It is a question of a holiness that is also a **“duty” and a gift** (that is a vocation, a responsibility, a commitment, and a gift). Holiness is a sharing in the life of God, not a moral perfection that one presumes to attain with only one’s own efforts. In fact a holy life is not principally the fruit of our own effort, our actions. It is God the thrice Holy (cf. Isaiah 6:3) who makes us saints through the action of the Holy Spirit, who gives us the interior strength and will.

Holiness is a commitment and a responsibility. It is something that only you can do: “May you come to realize what that word is, the message of Jesus that God wants to speak to the world by your life” (GE 24).

For the consecrated persons of our Salesian Family, this duty becomes indispensable. Paul VI said so in a radical manner: “Religious life must be a holy life, or it has no further reason to exist.”^[31]

V. SOME POSSIBLE INDICATORS OF HOLINESS

I offer some suggestions that may be suitable for each one personally and for our mission. Allow me to indicate some particular points.

→ ***Living everyday life as the place to meet God***

The heart of the Salesian spirit, which is our distinguishing feature as a charismatic Family, can be identified by the fact that it thinks of life in a positive way and sees it day by day as the *place where we meet God*. This place is traversed by a rich network of relationships, work, joy, relaxation, family life, the development of one’s personal capabilities, giving, service, etc., all lived in the light of God. This is expressed in simple, practical terms in that very Salesian conviction that comes from Don Bosco himself: to be a saint you have to do well what you have to do.

It is the proposal of the holiness of everyday life. If Teresa of Avila found holiness among the dishes in a kitchen, and Francis de Sales shows that a Christian can live in the world amid life’s chores and preoccupations and be a saint, Don Bosco with the simplicity of joy, with the exact fulfilment to one’s duties, and with a life lived all for the love of God, creates with his boys at Valdocco a real school of holiness.

*** *Being individuals and communities of prayer***

Holiness is the greatest gift that we can offer to the young, and – I add – nowadays adolescents, kids, and their families need the witness of our lives. And, as I have said, this simple holiness will be the most precious gift that we can offer them.

Nevertheless, this path is not possible without cultivating depth in our lives, without a genuine faith, and without prayer as the expression of this faith. Pope Francis declares: “I do not believe in holiness without prayer” (GE 147). And in fact all of this is impossible without intimacy with the Lord Jesus: prayer of thanksgiving, the expression of our gratitude to the transcendent God; prayer of supplication, the expression of a heart that trusts in God; prayer of intercession, the expression of fraternal love; prayer of adoration, the expression of our recognition of God’s transcendence; prayer of meditation on the Word, the expression of a docile and obedient heart; Eucharistic prayer, the summit and source of the path to holiness.

*** *Developing in our lives the fruits of the Holy Spirit:*** love, charity, joy, peace, patience, benevolence, goodness, fidelity, mildness, faith, rule over oneself, etc. Holiness is not quarrelling, arguing, envy, division, haste. “Holiness does not make you less human, since it is an encounter between your weakness and the power of God’s grace” (GE, 34).

*** *Practicing the virtues:*** not only rejecting evil and pursuing good, but being passionate for good, *doing good things well, everything* that is good. Prayer and action in the world, service and self-giving, and also times for silence. Family life and a sense of responsibility at work. “Everything can be accepted and integrated into our life in this world, and become a part of our path to holiness. We are called to be contemplatives even in the midst of action, and to grow in holiness by responsibly and generously carrying out our proper mission” (GE, 26).

So then, following the good life of the Gospel in joyful and constant practice of virtue will truly be a simple way of holiness.

*** *Bearing witness to communion***

The path of holiness is followed together, and the road to holiness is one lived in community and pursued together. The saints are always together, a company. Where there is one of them, others will always be found. Everyday holiness makes communion flourish and fosters “relationships.” **We become saints together.** It is not possible to be saints alone, and God does not save us alone: “no one is saved alone, as an isolated individual” (GE, 6). Holiness is nourished by relationships, by familiarity, by communion because Christian spirituality is essentially communitarian, ecclesial, profoundly different, and very far from a vision of holiness that is elitist or heroic.

On the contrary, there is no Christian holiness where communion with others is forgotten, where one forgets to seek and to look at the face of the other, where one forgets fraternity and the revolution of tenderness.

*** *Understanding that everyone’s life is a mission***

The Pope clearly asks that the whole of one’s life be understood as a mission. Sometimes, in difficult moments, people ask what is the purpose of their lives, the point of living, the reason for their being in the world, what personal contribution could they make. In all these cases the question being asked is: what is my mission? And in the light of all this, one discovers that “a Christian cannot think of his or her mission on earth without seeing it as a path of holiness” (GE, 19), always giving the best of oneself in this commitment.

Some Salesian houses, such as Valdocco, Mornese, Valsalice, Nizza, Ivrea, and San Giovannino from their very beginnings provide proof of a holiness that is a shared experience, that flourishes in friendship, dedication, and service (today we speak about life as “vocation and mission”).

- Seeking the simplicity (which is not facility) of the Beatitudes (cf. GE, 70-91)

In announcing the Beatitudes, Jesus offered us a real path to holiness. “The Beatitudes are like a Christian’s identity card” (GE, 63).

In them a way of life is proposed to us which includes processes that go from poverty of heart, which also means austerity of life, to reacting with humble meekness in a world where quarrels easily arise over the slightest thing; from the courage of allowing ourselves to be “pierced” by other peoples’ sorrow and show them compassion, to seeking justice with a true hunger and thirst, while others share out the spoils obtained by means of injustice, corruption, and the abuse of power.

The Beatitudes lead the Christian to look and to act with mercy, which means helping others and also forgiving them; they encourage him or her to keep a heart that is pure and free from all that taints love for God and neighbor. The proposal of Jesus asks us to sow seeds of peace and justice and build bridges between people. It also asks us to accept the lack of understanding, deceitfulness in those who deal with us, and finally all persecutions, even the subtlest ones that exist today.

- Growing through small gestures (GE, 16). This is another simple indicator, practical and within everyone’s reach. God calls us to holiness through small gestures, through simple things, which we undoubtedly discover in other people and reproduce in ourselves in everyday life; encouraged also by the fact that the path of holiness is neither unique nor the same for everyone.

One follows a path of holiness according to one’s own state as either man or a woman. From this point of view, feminine tenderness and the delicacy of small details and gestures are a magnificent example for all. For this reason Pope Francis says: “I would stress too that the ‘genius of woman’ is seen in feminine styles of holiness, which are an essential means of reflecting God’s holiness in this world,” and “I think too of all those unknown or forgotten women who, each in her own way, sustained and transformed families and communities by the power of their witness” (GE, 12).

*** Everything, except refusing to fly when we were born for the heights!**

There are so many small steps that can help us make the journey of holiness, this simple holiness, anonymous but shaping our lives in a beautiful way. As I have said, everything can help us; everything except refusing to fly when we have been born for the heights! Because we are “God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved” (Col 3:12).

What I want to say is expressed magnificently by Mamerto Menapace^[32] in a beautiful story, a fine metaphor that speaks of the dilemma between staying on the ground or flying up toward God, toward holiness, toward the heights.

The story goes this way:

Once upon a time, a countryman who was walking along a path in the high mountains found in the rocks close to the summit a strange egg: too big to be a hen’s and too small to be an ostrich’s.

Not knowing what it might be, he decided to take it with him.

Back at home he showed it to his wife. She had a turkey which was sitting on its nest. Seeing that the egg was more or less the size of the others, she put it under the turkey’s tail.

The chicks began to break the shells, and the little one from the egg taken from the mountain did the same. It seemed to be an animal different from the others, but the differences were not sufficient to make it stand out among the rest of the clutch, even though it was a small condor. Although hatched by a turkey, it had another origin.

Given that it had no other model to learn from, the little condor imitated what he saw the turkeys do. He used to follow the large turkey looking for worms, seeds, and scraps. He scratched the earth, and jumping up tried to pluck fruit from the bushes. He lived in the henhouse and was afraid of the dogs that often came to steal food. At night he climbed up the branches of the carob tree afraid of the weasels and other predators. He lived this way imitating what he saw the others do.

At times he felt a little strange, especially when he had the chance to be alone. But that did not happen often. In fact, turkeys do not like solitude, nor that others should be alone. It is a species that likes to move about always in flocks, swelling their chests to make an impression and opening their tails and dragging their wings. In the face of whatever happened, there was always a strong scornful response.

The characteristic of turkeys is this: in spite of being large, they do not fly.

One midday when the clear sky was being crossed by white clouds, the little animal was surprised to see some strange birds flying majestically, almost without moving their wings. He felt a jolt in the core of his being, something like an old call that wished to reawaken him from the core of his being. His eyes, used to looking always at the ground searching for food, were unable to distinguish what was happening in the heights. His heart was awakened with a strong nostalgia: why can't I fly like that too? His heart was beating quickly and with anxiety.

At that moment a turkey approached him and asked him what he was doing. He laughed when he heard what the condor had to say. He told him that he was a romantic and should stop joking. They were something different. He should return to reality, and he suggested that he would accompany him to a place where he had found a lot of ripe fruit and a large number of worms.

Confused, the poor animal woke from his enchantment and followed his companion, who took him back to the henhouse.

He took up his normal life again, always tormented by a profound dissatisfaction that made him feel strange.

He never discovered his true identity as a condor.

Having become old, one day he died. Yes, unfortunately, he died exactly as he had lived.

And to think that he was born for the heights!

This concerns the way of Christian growth toward holiness: "We are not be afraid to aim high, toward the heights of God; *we are not afraid that God will ask too much of us.*"^[33]

VI. PATHS OF HOLINESS TODAY IN THE LIGHT OF OUR SALESIAN FAMILY HISTORY

- There are many paths along the road to holiness

We know that some are saints, but we never know who is holier than another. Only God knows our hearts. There is a special beauty in each one. One should not ask of someone what he or she cannot and should not give. Saying this is encouraging, healthy. Otherwise we would convince ourselves that we cannot become saints because we shall never be like the saints who have been proposed to us as

models. “There is no need to put into holiness more perfection than is actually there.”[34] That is, Christian heroism is not heroics; Christian perfection is not the perfection of the superhero. “In my Father’s house are many rooms” (John 14:2). Paradise is like a garden: there is the humble violet or the sublime lily and the rose. *No state of life represents an insurmountable obstacle to the fullness of joy and of life.*

With Don Bosco we meet not only Dominic Savio, John Massaglia, and Francis Besucco, but also Michael Magone and many other difficult boys whose stories are characterized by deep wounds.

In the first foundations of the Salesians and the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians are to be found the first real orphanages and people of various kinds who have been victims of injustice and trauma (Charles Braga, Laura Vicuña, et al.).

Then there are those with particular personal wounds: such as Beltrami or Czartoryski, who knew that they would never be able to lead a regular oratorian life because of their illness. Artemides Zatti was rejected from the priesthood, also because of sickness. Francis Convertini showed very modest intellectual gifts, and it was only his outstanding holiness that convinced the superiors to allow him to continue toward the priesthood. Alexandrina Maria da Costa was confined to bed with a progressive paralysis. Nino Baglieri lived through the same situation. Vera Grita, a Salesian mystic, lived a similar Calvary, following a trauma suffered in an accident.

Thus **in Don Bosco’s house** there is room and welcome for a whole variety of those wounded in all sorts of ways by sorrowful family or personal events; people who, according to the normal criteria of human prudence or efficiency, should never have been accepted; people who at a cursory glance seem to be completely at odds with the joyful and even “robust” vivacity of the Salesian spirit. Yet in the light of faith the facts show that no personal situation constitutes an impediment to holiness.

- Every saint is a word of God incarnated

No two saints are the same. Imitating the saints is not copying them. Each one needs his own times and has his own path because “the paths of holiness are personal.”[35]

The galaxy of holiness is vast and varied: therefore it should not be levelled out into a generic orientation toward good, but should be considered as an inexhaustible source of inspiration and potential development. Living reflections of the Gospel, the saints interpret its most authentic spirit and are a mirror that reflects the face of Jesus Christ, the Holy One of God. They spread abroad the gifts of goodness and beauty, not giving in to the passing and ephemeral fashions of the age, and with the flare of hearts forever young make the miracle of love possible. With the power of grace, the saints change the world, but also the Church, made more evangelical and more credible by their witness.

It is the same Holy Spirit who inspired the sacred authors who animates the saints to give their lives for the Gospel. Their different ways of “incarnating” holiness constitute a sure way of undertaking a living and effective hermeneutic of the Word of God.

- Every saint in our Salesian Family tells us that holiness is possible.

All our saints, blessed, venerables, and servants of God bring with them a wealth of elements that deserve further consideration and appreciation. It is a matter of contemplating a diamond with multiple facets, some more visible and attractive, others less immediate and “pleasing,” but not for this reason less true and impelling. To know and make known these extraordinary examples of believers leads to an ever more progressive involvement in their journey, a passionate interest in the events of their lives, a joyful sharing in the plans and the hopes that guided their steps.

I offer you some examples.

→ **The holiness of the young people “of our own house”**

With the witness of Dominic Savio, Laura Vicuña, Ceferino Namuncurá, the five oratory youths of Poznan, Albert Marvelli, and others, there are 46 canonized and beatified young people from the Salesian Family under 29 years of age.

In particular some of the aspects of the witness of St. Dominic Savio deserve to be highlighted:

* A reminder that preventive reality is not only a pedagogical or educational factor, but also a theological one. In his life, as Don Bosco himself testifies, there is a preventive grace at work that can be seen.[36]

* The decisive value represented by the First Communion.[37]

* The fact that he is a sort of leader and teacher in the ways of God (just as Don Bosco saw him even in the Lanzo dream of 1876) is confirmed in the lives of many of our blessed, venerables, and servants of God who model themselves on Dominic: Laura Vicuña, Ceferino Namuncurá, Joseph Kowalski, Albert Marvelli, Joseph Quadrio, Octavio Ortiz Arrieta.

* The role of Dominic in the founding of the Immaculate Conception Sodality, training ground of the future Salesian Congregation, in conjunction with John Massaglia, a true friend of spiritual things, of whom Don Bosco declared: “If I were to write about the good example and virtues of John Massaglia, I should be largely repeating what I have already written about Dominic, whose faithful follower he was, as long as he lived.”[38]

→ **The missionary holiness of the Salesian charism**, expressed in a notable number of men and women, consecrated and lay, who evidence the proclamation of the Gospel, the inculturation of the faith, the advancement of women, the defense of the rights of the poor and of indigenous populations, and the foundation of local Churches. Deeply impressive is the fact that a very large proportion of the brothers and sisters of our Salesian Family who are on the way toward recognition of their heroic virtues and their holiness are missionaries: Blessed Maria Romero Meneses, FMA; Blessed Maria Troncatti, FMA; Venerable Vincent Cimatti.

→ **The oblativity holiness of the “victim,”** expressing the deep roots of “Da mihi animas, caetera tolle.” Leading the way in this group is Venerable Father Andrew Beltrami (1870-1897), whose witness provides a pattern for a long list of others living Salesian holiness in this way, starting from the trio Andrew Beltrami, August Czartoryski, and Louis Variara. It continues over time with other great figures such as Blessed Eusebia Palomino, Blessed Alexandrina Maria da Costa, and Blessed Laura Vicuña, without forgetting the numerous host of martyrs (among whom should be mentioned the 95 martyrs of the Spanish civil war, among whom were many young confreres in formation and young priests).

→ **The dimension of the “broken home”:** families in which at least one of the parents is absent, or where the presence of the mother and/or the father, for different reasons (physical, psychological, moral, or spiritual), creates problems for the children. Don Bosco, who himself had experienced the early death of his father and had to live away from home following Mama Margaret’s prudent decision, wanted Salesian work to be particularly dedicated to “poor and abandoned youth.”

* **Blessed Laura Vicuña**, born in Chile in 1891, who had not known her father and whose mother in Argentina began to cohabit with rich landowner Manuel Mora. Laura, suffering from the irregular moral situation of her mom, offered her life for her.

* **The Servant of God Charles Braga**, born in Valtellina in northern Italy in 1889. While still very young, he was abandoned by his father, and his mom was sent away because, through a mixture of ignorance

and gossip, she was considered emotionally unstable. Charles met with great humiliations and several times saw the authentic nature of his Salesian vocation put in doubt, but in this great suffering he was able to bring to maturity a great capacity for reconciliation and to show a deep sense of fatherliness and goodness especially with regard to the parents of confreres.

→ **The vocational dimension:** in the context of the bicentennial of Don Bosco's birth, two martyred confreres were beatified, whose lives reflect some constitutive aspects of our charism.

* **The figure of Stephen Sandor** (1914-1953), beatified in 2013 (his cause was introduced in 2006), recalls the complementarity of the two forms of the single consecrated Salesian vocation: the lay (coadjutor brother) and the priestly. The shining testimony of Stephen Sandor as a Salesian coadjutor brother expresses a clear and determined vocational choice, an exemplary life, an educational expertise, and an apostolic fruitfulness, in which we see a presentation of the vocation and mission of the Salesian coadjutor brother, with a special love for young apprentices and the world of work.

* **Titus Zeman** (1915-1969), beatified in Bratislava on September 30, 2017 (his cause was introduced in 2010). When the Czechoslovakian Communist regime in April 1950 outlawed religious orders and began to send religious to concentration camps, it became necessary to organize secret journeys to Turin to enable young Salesians to complete their studies. Titus took upon himself this dangerous enterprise and organized two expeditions for about 20 young Salesians. During a third expedition, Father Zeman with the other fugitives was arrested. He endured a severe trial during which he was described as a traitor to the fatherland and a Vatican spy and was condemned to death. He accepted his Calvary with a great spirit of sacrifice and oblation: "Even if I lose my life, I would not consider it wasted, knowing that at least one of those I helped has become a priest in my place."

→ **The dimension of "Salesian paternity and maternity":** after the great example of Don Bosco's fatherliness, among others we recall St. Mary Domenica Mazzarello, Blessed Michael Rua, Blessed Philip Rinaldi, Blessed Joseph Calasanz, Venerable Mama Margaret, Venerable Vincent Cimatti, Venerable Teresa Valsè Pantellini, Venerable August Arribat, the Servant of God Father Charles Braga, the Servant of God Father Andrew Majcen.

→ **The episcopal dimension:** in the varied examples of holiness that flourished at Don Bosco's school, there is a significant number of bishops who in the episcopal ministry incarnated in a special way the pastoral charity typical of the Salesian charism: Louis Versiglia (1873-1930), martyr and saint; Louis Olivares (1873-1943), venerable; Stephen Ferrando (1895-1978), venerable and founder; Octavio Ortiz Arrieta (1878-1958), venerable; August Hlond (1881-1948), venerable, cardinal; Anthony de Almeida Lustosa (1886-1974), servant of God; Orestes Marengo (1906-1998), servant of God.

→ **The dimension of "charismatic sonship."** It is also very interesting to notice that we venerate some saints who shared with Don Bosco some stages of their lives, appreciated his holiness and his apostolic and educational fruitfulness, but who then followed their own path with evangelical freedom, becoming founders in their turn, with their own perceptive intuitions, a genuine love for the poor, and unlimited trust in Providence: St. Leonard Murialdo, St. Louis Guanella, and St. Louis Orione.

This reality that I am describing is so beautiful that it fills us with a sense of responsibility and encouragement. It can be seen clearly that we are the depositories of a precious inheritance which deserves to be better known and treasured. The danger is to reduce this heritage of holiness to liturgical celebrations, not fully appreciating its potential in the spiritual, pastoral, ecclesial, educational, cultural, historical, social, and missionary fields. The saints, blessed, venerables, and servants of God are precious nuggets that have been extracted from the darkness of the mine so that they may shine and reflect in the Church and in the Salesian Family the splendor of truth and of Christ's love.

→ **The pastoral aspect** of these people is connected to their effectiveness as successful examples of Christianity lived in the particular socio-cultural and political situations of the world, the Church, and the Salesian Family itself.

→ **The spiritual aspect** involves the invitation to imitate their virtues as a source of inspiration and the quality of our planning for our style of life and our mission. The pastoral and spiritual care involved in a cause is a genuine form *of education to holiness*, to which, given our charism, we must be particularly sensitive and attentive.

I end this commentary on the strenna with the wealth of up-to-date information from our postulator's office. It will certainly be of great interest to our Salesian Family and especially to all the groups in this beautiful tree of Salesianity who can see one or other of their members included in one of these canonical processes. As Father Rua wrote, the holiness of us sons and daughters will be a proof of the holiness lived by and handed down to us by Don Bosco himself, the beloved Father of the whole Salesian Family spread around the world.

My dear brothers and sisters, I can confidently state that the greatest and the most pressing need that we have today in our Salesian world is not to do more things, not to plan or re-plan new initiatives, to venture to new presences – but rather to show what our lives personally and collectively communicate, our way of living the Gospel, which develops and expands in time as the continuation of Jesus' life.[39] What really is *at stake is **our holiness!***

We are saints, as was our Father, the Founder of our beautiful Salesian Family, which today is spread throughout the world!

Pope John Paul II, now a saint, made an enthusiastic appeal to us that, though at the time he was addressing the Salesians, applies to the whole Salesian Family in general and to each of its groups. Let us listen to it once again as a word addressed to each of us and to our own institute. This is what he said:

You want to “propose once again with courage as the principal response to the challenges of the contemporary world ‘tending towards holiness’. In short, it is a matter not so much of taking up new activities and initiatives as of living and bearing witness to the Gospel without any compromises, so as to encourage towards holiness those young people that you meet. Salesians for the third millennium! May you be enthusiastic teachers and guides, saints and formers of saints, as was Don Bosco.”[40]

Let us ask Mary, our Mother and the Help of Christians, that she may grant us the light necessary to see clearly and follow personally with true hearts this path of life. May she give her support to the commitment of each of us and of our whole Salesian Family along *the path of Salesian holiness*, for the good of those to whom we are sent and for our own benefit.

May she, the Mother, expert in the Spirit, work in us the marvels of grace as she has done in all our saints.

May the Help of Christians accompany and guide us.

I wish you a year full of the fruits of holiness.

Affectionately,

Angel Fernandez Artime

Rector Major

HOLINESS LIVED OUT IN THE SALESIAN CHARISM

From now on let our watchword be:

May the holiness of the children be a proof of the holiness of the father (Father Rua)

LIST AS OF DECEMBER 31, 2018

Our postulator's office details 168 saints, blessed, venerables, and servants of God.

There are 50 causes conducted directly by the postulator's office.

There are another 5 causes entrusted to our postulator's office.

SAINTS (9)

- Saint John Bosco**, priest (canonized April 1, 1934) – (Italy)
- Saint Joseph Cafasso**, priest (June 22, 1947) – (Italy)
- Saint Mary Domenica Mazzarello**, virgin (June 24, 1951) – (Italy)
- Saint Dominic Savio**, adolescent (June 12, 1954) – (Italy)
- Saint Leonard Murialdo**, priest (May 3, 1970) – (Italy)
- Saint Louis Versiglia**, bishop, **martyr** (October 1, 2000) – (Italy, China)
- Saint Callistus Caravario**, priest, **martyr** (October 1, 2000) – (Italy, China)
- Saint Louis Orione**, priest (May 16, 2004) – (Italy)
- Saint Louis Guanella**, priest (October 23, 2011) – (Italy)

BLESSEDS (118)

- Blessed Michael Rua**, priest (beatified October 29, 1972) – (Italy)
- Blessed Laura Vicuña**, adolescent (September 3, 1988) – (Chile, Argentina)
- Blessed Philip Rinaldi**, priest (April 29, 1990) – (Italy)
- Blessed Madeleine Morano**, virgin (November 5, 1994) – (Italy)
- Blessed Joseph Kowalski**, priest, **martyr** (June 13, 1999) – (Poland)
- Blessed Francis Kesy and 4 companions**, laymen, **martyrs** (June 13, 1999) – (Poland)
- Blessed Pius IX**, pope (September 3, 2000) – (Italy)
- Blessed Joseph Calasanz Marques**, priest, and **31 companions, martyrs** (March 11, 2001) – (Spain)
- Blessed Louis Variara**, priest (April 14, 2002) – (Italy, Colombia)
- Blessed Artemides Zatti**, religious (April 14, 2002) – (Italy, Argentina)
- Blessed Maria Romero Meneses**, virgin (April 14, 2002) – (Nicaragua, Costa Rica)

Blessed August Czartoryski, priest (April 25, 2004) – (France, Poland)
Blessed Eusebia Palomino Yenes, virgin (April 25, 2004) – (Spain)
Blessed Alexandrina Maria da Costa, laywoman (April 25, 2004) – (Portugal)
Blessed Albert Marvelli, layman (September 5, 2004) – (Italy)
Blessed Bronislaus Markiewicz, priest (June 19, 2005) – (Poland)
Blessed Henry Saiz Aparicio, priest, and **62 companions, martyrs** (October 28, 2007) – (Spain)
Blessed Ceferino Namuncurá, layman (November 11, 2007) – (Argentina)
Blessed Maria Troncatti, virgin (November 24, 2012) – (Italy, Ecuador)
Blessed Stephen Sandor, religious, **martyr** (October 19, 2013) – (Hungary)
Blessed Titus Zeman, priest, **martyr** (September 30, 2017) – (Slovakia)

VENERABLES (17)

Ven. Andrew Beltrami, priest (decree super virtutibus, December 15, 1966) – (Italy)
Ven. Teresa Valsè Pantellini, virgin (July 12, 1982) – (Italy)
Ven. Dorothy Chopitea, laywoman (June 9, 1983) – (Spain)
Ven. Vincent Cimatti, priest (December 21, 1991) – (Italy, Japan)
Ven. Simon Srugi, religious (April 2, 1993) – (Palestine)
Ven. Rudolf Komorek, priest (April 6, 1995) – (Poland, Brazil)
Ven. Louis Olivares, bishop (December 20, 2004) – (Italy)
Ven. Margaret Occhiena, laywoman (October 23, 2006) – (Italy)
Ven. Joseph Quadrio, priest (December 19, 2009) – (Italy)
Ven. Laura Meozzi, virgin (June 27, 2011) – (Italy, Poland)
Ven. Attilio Giordani, layman (October 9, 2013) – (Italy, Brazil)
Ven. Joseph August Arribat, priest (July 8, 2014) – (France)
Ven. Stephen Ferrando, bishop (March 3, 2016) – (Italy, India)
Ven. Francis Convertini, priest (January 20, 2017) – (Italy, India)
Ven. Joseph Vandor, priest (January 20, 2017) – (Hungary, Cuba)
Ven. Octavio Ortiz Arrieta, bishop (February 27, 2017) – (Peru)
Ven. August Hlond, cardinal (May 19, 2018) – (Poland)

SERVANTS OF GOD (24)

The Positio or Report in process of examination

Elijah Comini, priest (Italy)

Ignatius Stuchly, priest (Czech Republic)

Anthony De Almeida Lustosa, bishop (Brazil)

Charles Crespi Croci, priest (Italy, Ecuador)

Constantine Vendrame, priest (Italy, India)

John Swierc, priest, and **8 companions, martyrs** (Poland)

Orestes Marengo, bishop (Italy, India)

Charles Della Torre, priest (Italy, Thailand)

Awaiting the decree of the validity of the diocesan inquiry

Anna Maria Lozano, virgin (Colombia)

The diocesan inquiry in progress

Matilda Salem, laywoman (Syria)

Andrew Majcen, priest (Slovenia)

Charles Braga, priest (Italy, China, Philippines)

Antonino Baglieri, layman (Italy)

Antonietta Böhm, virgin (Germany, Mexico)

Rudolf Lunkenbein, priest (Germany, Brazil) and **Simon Bororo**, layman (Brazil), **martyrs**

ENDNOTES

[1] Henceforth GE.

[2] I express my gratitude to Fr. Pier Luigi Cameroni, postulator general for the causes of saints, and to Lodovica Maria Zanet, expert collaborator of our postulator's office and renowned lecturer. Thanks to their foresight, I have been able to embellish these pages with material from the postulator's office which can throw so much light on the subject.

[3] Pascual Chavez, "Let us draw on the spiritual experience of Don Bosco in order to walk in holiness according to our specific vocation," AGC 417 (2014); idem, "My dear Salesians, be saints," AGC 379 (2002); Juan Edmundo Vecchi, "Beatification of Brother Artemides Zatti: a sensational precedent," AGC 376 (2001); idem, "Sanctity and Martyrdom at the dawn of the third millennium," AGC 368 (1999); Egidio Viganò, "Don Bosco, saint," ASC 310 (1983); idem, "Replanning our holiness together," ASC 303 (1982); Luigi Ricceri, "Don Rua, a call to holiness," ASC 263 [1971]

[4] John Paul II, encyclical *Redemptoris Missio*, December 7, 1990, n. 28.

[5] *Confessions*, 10,28.

[6] *Introduction to the Devout Life* I, 3.

- [7] Benedict XVI, catechesis at the general audience on April 13, 2011 [*Teachings VII* (2011), 451].
- [8] *Ibid.*, 450.
- [9] Benedict XVI, homily on the feast of the Assumption of Mary, August 15, 2005.
- [10] As a continuation of this “Marian journey,” we shall be celebrating in Buenos Aires between November 7 and 10, 2019, the Eighth International Congress of Mary Help of Christians with the theme *Mary, the woman who believed*.
- [11] Salesian Historical Institute, *Fonti Salesiane 1. Don Bosco e la sua opera: Raccolta antologica* (Rome: LAS, 2014), *Vita del giovanetto Savio Domenico, allievo dell’Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales*, p. 1047. English translation: *Salesian Sources 1. Don Bosco and his work: Collected works* (Bangalore: Kristu Jyoti, 2017), *Life of the young Dominic Savio, pupil at the Oratory of St Francis de Sales*, p. 1187. The complete passage I am referring to says: “Another day explanations were being given about the meaning of words. ‘What does Dominic mean?’ he asked. The reply was: ‘Belonging to God.’ ‘There you are,’ he said, ‘you see how right I am in asking you to make me a saint. Even my name says that I belong to God, so I must at all costs become one. I can’t be happy if I do not.’” For an alternative translation, see St. John Bosco, *The Life of St. Dominic Savio*, trans. Paul Aronica, 3d ed. (New Rochelle: Salesiana, 1996), p. 64.
- [12] *Fonti Salesiane*, p. 1046. *Salesian Sources*, p. 1186. Aronica trans., p. 63.
- [13] Cf. SDB Const., 2, 25, 65, 105; FMA Const., 5, 46, 82.
- [14] Michael Rua, “The sanctification of our souls and of those entrusted to us,” letter of the Rector Major to the provincials and directors of America, Valsalice, September 24, 1894.
- [15] John Paul II, address on the occasion of his visit to the Salesian Pontifical University, January 31, 1981, in *L’Osservatore Romano*, February 8, 1981 (ASC 300 [1981], 58).
- [16] Egidio Viganò, “Rediscovering the spirit of Mornese,” ASC 301 (1981), 25.
- [17] John Paul II, prayer vigil at the 15th WYD, Rome, Tor Vergata, August 19, 2000, n. 5.
- [18] Benedict XVI, address at the welcoming ceremony for young people in Cologne, August 18, 2005.
- [19] Francis, homily at the Mass for the Boys’ and Girls’ Jubilee, Rome, April 24, 2016.
- [20] *Fonti Salesiane*, p. 444. Cf. *Salesian Sources*, p. 501.
- [21] Juan Edmundo Vecchi, *Andate oltre: Temi di spiritualità giovanile* (Turin: Elle Di Ci, 2002).
- [22] Chavez, “My Dear Salesians, be saints,” pp. 21-22.
- [23] *De Virginitate*, 40.
- [24] 15th Ordinary Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, “Young people, the faith and vocational discernment,” *Instrumentum Laboris* (Rome: Vatican Press, 2014), n. 214.
- [25] “Young people, the faith and vocational discernment,” *Instrumentum Laboris: Pre-synodal meeting. Final Document* (March 19-24, 2018),
- [26] “Young people, the faith and vocational discernment,” *Final Document* (Rome: Vatican Press, 2018), n. 167.
- [27] Benedict XVI, general audience, April 13, 2011.

- [28] “Happy Times Association”: Fr. Arthur Lenti’s rendition of *Società dell’Allegria*. Savio: BM 5:228.
- [29] Paul VI, address during the Way of the Cross, March 24, 1967.
- [30] Benedict XVI, encyclical *Deus caritas est* (2005), n. 42.
- [31] Paul VI, address on June 27, 1965, in Viganò, *Replanning our holiness together*.
- [32] Mamerto Menapace, *Cuentos rodados, Patria Grande* (Buenos Aires, 1986).
- [33] Benedict XVI, general audience, April 13, 2011.
- [34] P. Catry, “Le tracce di Dio,” in *La missione ecclesiale di Adrienne von Speyr. Atti del 2° Colloquio Internazionale del pensiero cristiano*, Jaca Book (= Già e non ancora) (Milano 1986), p. 32, quoted in L. M. Zanet, *La santità dimostrabile: Antropologia e prassi della canonizzazione* (Bologna Dehoniane, 2016), p. 204.
- [35] John Paul II, apostolic letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte* (2001), n. 31.
- [36] Don Bosco recalls: “I recognised in him a soul where the Holy Spirit reigned supreme, and I marvelled at the way grace had already worked in his young heart and mind.” (*Fonti Salesiane*, p. 1039. *Salesian Sources*, p. 1179; Aronica trans., p. 49.)
- [37] Rapture in the life of Dominic Savio is typically connected to the Eucharist and finds its moment of grace on the day of his First Communion, seen as a seed that if it is cultivated becomes the source of a joyful life and of decisive commitments: “It was a wonderful and never-to-be-forgotten day for him; it was a renewal of his life for God, a life that can be taken as an example by anyone. If one got him to talk about his First Communion several years later, his face lit up with joy and happiness as he said: ‘That was the happiest and most wonderful day of my life.’ He made some promises that day which he preserved carefully in a little book, and often re-read them. . . . 1. I will go often to Confession and I will go to Holy Communion as often as I am allowed by my confessor. 2. I will try to keep Sundays and holy days holy. 3. My friends will be Jesus and Mary. 4. Death, but not sin.’ These promises, which he often went over, were the guiding light of his life until he died.” (*Fonti Salesiane*, p. 1032. *Salesian Sources*, p. 1171; Aronica trans., p. 34.)
- [38] *Fonti Salesiane*, p. 1067. *Salesian Sources*, p. 1210; Aronica trans., p. 110.
- [39] Cf. VC, 62.
- [40] John Paul II, message at the beginning of GC25, in *Documents of GC25* (AGC 378), p. 118, n. 143.