

# Presentation of Strenna 2021

## Moved by hope: “Behold, I make all things new” (Rev 21: 5)

### Foreword

As every year, in these weeks, I send to all the provinces of the Salesian Congregation and to all the groups of the Salesian Family the title chosen for the strenna of the new year. Although there are still five months to go before the end of the calendar year, programming for the new educational and pastoral year requires that this communication be brought forward before the calendar deadline. I do all this very willingly.

At the same time, the lines that I offer are not, of course, the commentary on the strenna, but only a few ideas that are the guiding thread of the strenna. I believe they are essential to grasp the development of reflection and some of the pastoral lines.

### 1. A WORLD REALITY THAT QUESTIONS US AND THAT WE CAN'T IGNORE

Thinking of the message that can unite us as the Salesian Family in 2021, it is impossible not to take into account that for many months, to a greater or lesser extent, the world, all nations, have remained, if not paralyzed (although many are), certainly blocked. One cannot travel, and it has not been possible to celebrate some appointments at international and world level. The “global village” has returned to be, once again, and certainly will be for some time, the union of many “villages” that look at each other with suspicion. Walls have fallen, but to “protect oneself,” borders have become even more reinforced.

In front of this reality, we can repeat the thousands of messages that say that this situation will be overcome, that we must have confidence in ourselves, that we are strong, that the pride of each nation has overcome worse situations, etc. Many of these messages, which are also a mentality, a way of interpreting current events, have much of the “Promethean” claim described in the well-known Greek myth in which one person alone is able to rebuild himself, to reinvent himself, to draw strength from his weakness so as to overcome adversity. It is a very pagan mentality. Many of these messages have nothing to do with the meaning of life, of every life, let alone with God and the path we have lived in today's history.

But this is not our vision, nor is it the message that we want to transmit in the many places where we are present as the Salesian Family.

Our message underlines and reaffirms that, in the face of this harsh and painful reality with its heavy consequences, we continue to express the certainty of **being moved by hope**: because God in his Spirit continues to make “all things new.”

Pope Francis invited the world to be infected with “the necessary antibodies of justice, charity, and solidarity”<sup>[1]</sup> for reconstruction after the days of the pandemic.

How much pain is being experienced in the world right now is undeniable. How many millions of poor people have been infected and lost their lives is undeniable. If we are invited to keep a safe distance, how can we imagine that the occupants massed in the favelas, in the slums, near the dumps, can respect social distancing?

The loss of work is affecting millions of families; the mourning that could not be done leaves millions of hearts in pain; the poverty that looms (sometimes hunger) affects, disorients, paralyzes, and threatens *to bury all hope*.

## **2. DON BOSCO IS NOT FAR FROM THESE SITUATIONS, SINCE HE LIVED THEM HIMSELF.**

We refer to our Father Don Bosco because throughout his life he himself had to face the harshness of so many situations, so many tragedies and pain. He is a master in showing us how the paths of faith and hope not only illuminate but also give the necessary strength to change unfavorable or adverse conditions, or at least to limit them as far as possible. Our Father distinguished himself for his extraordinary tenacity and for his special and profoundly realistic vision. He knew how to look beyond problems. The cholera situation was a circumstance—on a local level—similar to what is being experienced now in each country. And as an educator and pastor he accompanied these situations together with his boys. While there were people who cared only about themselves and their needs, Don Bosco and his boys, like many others, “worked hard” to help overcome the tragedy. We can affirm that this deep vision of faith and hope manifested itself throughout his life: when he left his mother and his house and went to live as “attendant” at the Pianta Cafe while studying in Chieri, facing loneliness and difficulties; crying and suffering for not knowing where to take and welcome his boys in the afternoons of the Oratory until the meeting with Joseph Pinardi, etc. All this confirms how Don Bosco lived moved by the virtue of hope.

## **3. A MOVEMENT OF THE SPIRIT CAPABLE OF “DOING ALL THINGS NEW” (Rev 21:5)**

Christian faith continually shows how God, through his Spirit, accompanies the history of humanity, even in the most adverse and unfavorable conditions. That God who does not suffer but who has compassion, according to the beautiful expression of Saint Bernard of Clairvaux: “Impassibilis est Deus, sed non incompassibilis” (God is impassible, but not without compassion).<sup>[2]</sup> In the history of salvation God never abandons his people; he always remains united with them, especially when the pain becomes very strong: “Behold, I am doing something new: right now it is sprouting, don’t you notice it? (Is 43:19).”<sup>[3]</sup>

This time and this situation will undoubtedly be propitious for

- becoming aware of the suffering of many people;
- paying attention to the many constant and silent epidemics such as the hunger that so many suffer, complicity in wars, lifestyles that enrich some and impoverish millions of people;
- asking ourselves whether we can live—those among us who have more—with a more sober and austere lifestyle;
- seriously considering that our world, the whole of creation, suffers, gets sick, while continuing to deny the evidence;
- realizing how important it is “to unite the whole human family in the pursuit of integral and sustainable development.”<sup>[4]</sup>

## **4. A SALESIAN READING OF THE PRESENT MOMENT**

Many are the readings that have been made of this historical moment, a moment that—it is said—occurs every hundred years, with great crises that affect humanity for one reason or another. Not even the bloodiest wars have been as “global” as the situation we are experiencing. In any case, what response can we give? What contribution can we offer as the Salesian Family? What Gospel values, read in a Salesian perspective, do we feel we can offer? How can we, as educators, offer as an alternative an “education to hope”?

4.1. Alternative processes to the dominant culture. Change of values and vision:

- from *closure* to *opening*
- from *individualism* to *solidarity*
- from *isolation* to *authentic encounter*
- from *division* to *unity and communion*
- from *pessimism* to *hope*
- from *emptiness and lack of meaning* to *transcendence*.

4.2. God speaks to us through many people who have known how to live with hope:

- in borderline situations God continues to speak to us through the hearts of people who see and respond in original and different ways.
- the Salesian holiness of our Family is rich in models who have known how to *live moved by hope* (Blessed Stephen Sandor, Blessed Madeleine Morano, and others).

4.3. Nobody saves themselves by themselves.

The meaning of what I want to express is contained in this quote from Pope Francis: “If there is one thing we have been able to learn in all this time, it is that nobody saves themselves, by themselves. Borders fall, walls collapse, and all fundamentalist discourses dissolve before an almost imperceptible presence that manifests the fragility of which we are made.... It is the breath of the Spirit that opens horizons, awakens creativity, and renews us in fraternity to say ‘present’ (or, ‘here I am’) before the enormous and urgent task that awaits us. It is urgent to discern and find the pulse of the Spirit to promote, together with others, the dynamics that can testify and channel the new life that the Lord wants to generate at this specific moment in history.”[\[5\]](#)

4.4. As the Salesian Family we have tried to give answers in the moment of emergency as a sign of charity and hope, and today we must be alternatives:

- accompanying young people along the path of existence, opening them to other horizons, to new perspectives;
- learning to live “within the limits” within a society “without limits.” That is, helping young people and adults to discover the “normality of life” in simplicity, in authenticity, in sobriety, in depth;
- letting ourselves be challenged by the many voices of hope of young people in difficult times: the ecological movement, solidarity with the needy.

## 5. PLACES WHERE TO LEARN AND EXERCISE HOPE

5.1. Faith and hope walk together. ***We propose faith as an authentic path*** because “a world without God is a world without hope” (cf. Eph 2:12).

5.2. ***Prayer*** as a school of hope and a personal encounter with the love of Jesus Christ, who saves us.

5.3. ***Action, fatigue in daily life*** since, ultimately, when human beings move, act to transform a situation, at the base they always have a hope that sustains them. “Every serious and upright act of man is hope in action.”<sup>[6]</sup>

5.4. The ***suffering*** and ***pain*** present in every human life as a necessary door to open up to hope. In many cultures people try in every way to hide or silence suffering and death. What allows a human being to heal, however, is not to avoid or hide this suffering and pain, but to mature in it and find meaning in life when it is not immediately or easily visible. In fact, “the greatness of humanity is determined essentially by its relationship with suffering and with those who suffer.”<sup>[7]</sup>

5.5. The ***poor*** and the ***excluded***, who are at the center of God’s attention, must be our privileged recipients as the Salesian Family.

5.6. In the greatest crises, so many things disappear, “certainties” that we thought we had, meanings of life that, in reality, were not such. But, in fact, ***the great values of the Gospel and its truth remain***, when opportunistic or momentary philosophies and thoughts disappear. Gospel values do not vanish, they do not become “liquid,” they do not disappear. That is why as the Salesian Family of Don Bosco we cannot give up showing what we believe in; we cannot lose our charismatic identity in the answers we have to give in any situation.

## **6. MARY of Nazareth, Mother of God, Star of Hope**

Mary, the Mother, knows well what it means to trust and hope against all hope, trusting in the name of God.

Her “yes” to God awakened all hope for humanity.

She experienced helplessness and loneliness at the birth of her Son; she kept in her heart the announcement of a pain that would pierce her heart (cf. Luke 2:35); she experienced the suffering of seeing her Son as a “sign of contradiction,” misunderstood, rejected.

She knew hostility and rejection toward her Son until, at the foot of his cross on Golgotha, she understood that hope would not die. That is why she remained with the disciples as mother—“Woman, behold your son” (John 19:26)—as Mother of Hope.

“Holy Mary,  
Mother of God, our Mother,  
teach us to believe,  
to hope, and to love with you.  
Show us the way to the Kingdom.  
Star of the Sea,  
shine above us  
and guide us on our path.”

Amen.

Fr. Angel Fernandez Artime, SDB

*Rector Major*

Rome, August 2, 2020

*Memorial of Blessed August Czartoryski*

[1] Francis, "Un plan para resucitar" a la Humanidad tras el coronavirus (PDF), in *Vida Nueva Digital*, April 17, 2020, pp. 7-11.

[2] Bernard of Clairvaux, *Sermon on the Song of Songs*, XXVI, 5; PL 183, 906.

[3] Francis, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

[4] *Ibid.*

[5] *Ibid.*

[6] *Ibid.*, p. 35.

[7] *Ibid.*, p. 38.