

STRENNA 2019

Presentation of the theme

So that my joy may be in you (Jn 15: 11)

Holiness for you, too

I.- GOD CALLS US TO HOLINESS

It is evident that Pope Francis wants to focus attention in his Exhortation on what is essential in our Christian life, helping us to have a broad outlook, without falling into the temptation of losing sight of the end in view. This is why the Pope tries to help us by addressing to us a call to holiness embodied in the current context, with the risks, challenges and beautiful opportunities that God offers in the journey of life, so that “My joy may be in you” (Jn 15: 11).

1. Sacred Scripture invites us to be holy: “Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Mt 5: 48), and “Be holy, because I [the Lord] am holy” (Lev 11: 44).

- Holiness is a gift, a mandate and a task. Holiness is for everyone because it corresponds to God’s fundamental plan for us. To become saints is not to become alienated from oneself or to move away from one’s own brothers and sisters, but to *live one’s life to the full* in an intense (and sometimes difficult) experience of communion.

2. A close-by God who reveals himself in Christ: “Apart from me you can do nothing” (Jn 15: 5); “I have set you an example that you also should do as I have done to you” (Jn 13: 15).

- Holiness is not a theory of moral perfection, but a life that conforms to that of Jesus. Some characteristics of the life of Jesus, which are close-by, concrete, beautiful, exciting for everyone, about which people may never think or think very little.

II. A CALL TO HOLINESS FOR EVERYONE

3. Over the centuries, many men and women have lived holiness, but only a few have been declared saints. There are many examples.

→ What is important is to be holy, not to be declared as such. The canonised saints are like the façade of a church; but the church contains many precious treasures inside, which however remain invisible. The *Strenna* invites us to discover and to develop a thirst and nostalgia for this inner, less visible part.

4. “Next-door holiness” and the universal call to holiness: St Francis de Sales, Don Bosco; the Second Vatican Council; Jan Tyranowski and Karol Wojtyła at the school of Don Bosco.

III. DON BOSCO WANTS HIS YOUNG PEOPLE HAPPY IN THIS WORLD AND IN THE NEXT

5. In the beginning of his Letter from Rome, written on 10th May 1884, Don Bosco wrote to his young people: “I have only one wish, to see you happy both in this world and in the next”. At the end of his earthly life, these words summed 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 dreamt about by every young person, today, tomorrow, throughout time. Not only that. “In eternity is found that *extra* that only Jesus and his proposal of happiness, i.e. holiness, can offer”. It is the answer to the deep thirst for “forever” that burns in every young person.

The world, the society of all nations, cannot propose this “forever” and eternal happiness, but only God can.

For Don Bosco all this was very clear. His last words to young people were, “Tell my boys that I wait for them all in Paradise”. In this sense, we understand the “Da mihi animas, cetera tolle”.

IV. JESUS IS THE HAPPINESS THAT YOU, DEAR YOUNG PEOPLE, ARE LOOKING FOR

6. This was the great challenge by St John Paul II at the Prayer Vigil of the Fifteenth WYD (2000 Rome, Tor Vergata) 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 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 grounded down by mediocrity, the courage to commit yourselves humbly and patiently to improving yourselves and society, making the world more human and more fraternal”.

V. “I FEEL WITHIN ME A DESIRE AND A NEED OF BECOMING HOLY” (Dominic Savio)

7. Salesian texts on holiness:

→ In the Constitutions of the SDB, FMA, Salesian Co-operators, and many groups of the Salesian Family.

→ Various calls to holiness in the Magisterium of the Congregation (SDB).

→ Some points on which Salesian spirituality has a lot to say:

- Holiness is the flowering of human aspects. Where there is a saint, one can see a true man or woman. (Cf. Fr Rinaldi to the VDB: be true women, with a touch of femininity, etc.)
- Holiness and community: to become holy *together*.
- *Saints-with*: saints for the young, but above all saints *with* the young. In a certain sense, it is quite logical that Dominic Savio is the first one who was canonised after Don Bosco, that is to say, the fruits of the holiness of the Salesians are young saints, and the holiness of the young is a signal pointing back to the holiness of the members of the Salesian Family.
- Holiness and wounded families; sanctity and personal limits (Francesco Convertini, Ignazio Stuchlý, etc.); holiness stemming from biographical, historical, social limits ... There is no personal, biographical or historical condition that can block holiness.

- Youth holiness ... young saints and the youthfulness of the saints (cf. n. 214 *Instrumentum Laboris* of the next Synod).

VI. HOLINESS LIVED IN THE SALESIAN CHARISM

8. The message of sanctity on the way to being recognised helps us to re-read and integrate the Salesian charism.

→ Missionary dimension: missionaries in the strict sense; missionaries who “returned” to their home country (Stuchlý); people who had been proposed to become missionaries, but who chose to stay back (Zeman) ...

→ Sanctity of the Salesian bishops

→ Holiness with an explicit Marian flavour (many beautiful figures of FMA, and also T. Zeman, Stuchlý, Lustosa, etc.)

→ Holiness with a foundation charism ...

→ Holiness of the Salesian Brothers (Zatti, Srugi, Sandor, etc.)

→ The message of the martyrs in the years before and after the bicentenary (Sandor, Zeman, Fr Rodolfo and Bororo Simao, Comini ...)

→ The dimension of self-offering as a victim as incarnation of the “*cetera tolle*”. Augustus Chartorywski, Andrew Beltrami, Aloysius Variara, Ann Mary Lozano, Laura Vicuña, Alexandrina Maria da Costa, etc. This dimension is expressed in many ways:

- physical suffering, forced immobility
- separation or removal from community dynamics
- lack of understanding by the superiors (Variara, Zeman, Della Torre, etc.)
- the impossibility of implementing their own projects due to external constraints (Vicuña, Lozano ...) or health (Zatti, etc.)
- a legacy of suffering from one’s family of origin (Laura Vicuña, Braga, Stuchlý who tragically lost his father, etc.)
- the explicit participation in and conformation to the sufferings of Christ (Alexandrina, Vera Grita, etc.)
- Salesian holiness and contemplation ...

VII. WHAT DOES IT MEAN, “Holiness for you, too!”?

- It is a close-by *thing*, real, concrete, possible. Indeed, it is everyone’s fundamental vocation.
- Being holy is not difficult; indeed, it is easy and God awaits us in heaven after our journey of holiness. “Far from being timid, morose, acerbic or melancholy, or putting on a dreary face, the saints are joyful and full of good humour”. (*Gaudete et exsultate*, 122).
- The path of holiness cannot bypass the dimension of the cross, but it is also full of joy: “Here we make holiness consist in being very happy”.
- Sanctity does not distance us from our duties, interests, affections, but it integrates them in charity. Holiness is the *perfection of charity* and it therefore responds to the fundamental human need: to be loved and to love. The more human, the holier because, “life does not have a mission, but is a mission” (*Gaudete et exsultate*, 27).
- Holiness is not an “extra”, an optional and a goal only for some. It is life to the full, according to God’s plan and gift. It is therefore a path of humanisation. True spiritual life is the flowering of whatever is 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.” (*Gaudete et exsultate*, 31)

- Holiness is a duty (that is, a vocation, a responsibility, a commitment), but above all it is *a gift*. Holiness is participation in the life of God, not a perfection that is moralistically understood and presumed to be achieved only with one’s own strength. On the other hand, it is not a goal that is accessible only to the “best”, in the sense of the “best prepared”, either. It is above all welcoming God, drawing on the instruments of the Church, including a solid sacramental life and piety.
- Together, it is easier. Holiness and walking together and an experience of communion. This is beautiful and at the same time demanding.

VIII. Some possible pointers to holiness. Some dynamisms to help young people and all of us on this journey

- ***The fruits of the Holy Spirit***: love, joy, peace, patience, benevolence, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, self-control. Holiness is not quarrelling, contention, 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”. (*Gaudete et exsultate*, 34).
- ***Virtues***: not only rejecting evil and attaching oneself to Good, but being passionate about good, *doing good well*, [doing well] *all* what is good ... “We grow in holiness by responsibly and generously carrying out our proper mission”. (*Gaudete et exsultate*, 26).
- ***Communion***: holiness is experienced and achieved together. Saints are always together (even integrating the male and female component). Where there is one of them, we always find many others.
For example:
→ Fr Cafasso, Don Bosco, Mother Mazzarello, Rosmini, the Marquises of Barolo, Fr Guanella, Fr Rua, Sr Maria Romero Meneses, Laura Vicuña, Ceferino Namuncurá, the young martyrs of Poznań, Bro. Zatti, Chartoryswki, Beltrami, Stuchlý, Zeman, Braga ..., and many others.
The holiness of daily life makes communion flourish and is a “generator of relationships”.
- ***Creativity and inventiveness of the Spirit***. Holiness is never repetitive: the 31 groups of the Salesian Family – and others undergoing recognition – have flourished from Don Bosco, and they have sometimes been able to express very different sensitivities, even if they are converging towards their root. Imitating the saints does not mean copying them.
- ***Ecclesial communion***. Nobody is “for Paul, Cephas, Barnabas”, but all “are Christ’s and Christ is God’s”. Being Salesian Family does not mean turning Don Bosco’s message into an absolute, but enhancing it by including it in the fullness of the Church. Some things cannot be asked of Don Bosco, since God has given them to the Church through others. Therefore, those things will be asked of other non-Salesian

saints, of other spiritual traditions in the Church. This does not mean being less Salesian, but believers in love with the Church, in the variety of its charisms, and conscious of becoming part of it starting from one's own specific perspective. Don Bosco himself drew on this plurality and *polyphony* of holiness that preceded him: Ignatius of Loyola and Philip Neri, for example, not only Francis de Sales, etc. This approach cutting across various types of holiness is also present in some figures of our holiness: Ignatius Stuchlý was close to the Jesuits; Vandor initially was attracted by the Franciscans. In the prison camp, Vendrame lived an intense experience of fraternity with the Carmelites and was a great devotee of St Therese of Lisieux.

- The fame of holiness and of signs, understood as a persistent echo of the beauty of the life [of a person], of its evangelical fragrance, of the richness of its message. The effects are always much larger compared to the apparent causes. Thus, even in "*ordinary next-door holiness*", it is important to value the bonds that generate good relationships and friendships, joy.

IX. PATHS OF HOLINESS TODAY

- "We must not put into sanctity more perfection than what is really there" (Adrienne von Speyr). That is, heroic Christian living is not heroism; Christian perfection is not superhero perfectionism.
- We know that some are holy, but we never know who is holier than somebody else. God alone knows the hearts. There is a special beauty in everything. There are many paths to get to **Heaven**. One should not ask of a person what he/she cannot and should not give. To say this is encouraging, healing. Otherwise, many will be convinced that they cannot be saints, because they will never succeed in being so in the manner of some saints proposed to them as models.
- So, even "small sizes" (Adrienne von Speyr) can, in their own way, be perfect.
 - That is, holiness is never discouraging. Let us not be afraid of sanctity. "In my Father's house there are many dwellings". Paradise is like a garden: there is the humble violet or the sublime lily and the rose.
- *Every saint is a word of God made flesh*. There are no two equal saints. Imitating the saints does not mean copying them. Everyone needs one's own time and has one's own path.
 - What word of God am I?
 - What does this call me to?
 - What word of God do I understand the young person next to me is? How to help him/her understand and live it?
- Holiness is also measured through the category of fruitfulness, but not that of the practical efficiency we are used to today.
- Holiness makes one responsible. There is something that only YOU can do. – "Apart from me you can do nothing".
- The experience of a "healthy dependence". The path of holiness is commitment, but never self-sufficiency. Holiness is lived together and it generates communion. Saints for sure, but saints together! First of all, saints are God's masterpiece.

- Holiness is leaving a mark and experiencing the fruitful dependence on ties with others.