

INSTITUTE OF THE DAUGHTERS OF MARY HELP OF CHRISTIANS

Founded by St. John Bosco

and St. Mary Domenica Mazzarello

N. 1034

The Dream that makes you dream

Dearest Sisters,

We begin this new year with trust and hope, despite living in a global situation that leaves room for uncertainty and precariousness. The celebration of the second centenary of the dream that Don Bosco had at nine years of age in 1824, is for us and for the entire Salesian Family a reason for charismatic renewal.

The theme of Strenna 2024 that the Rector Major Fr. Ángel Fernández Artime proposes to us

"The dream that makes you dream"

A heart that transforms 'wolves' into 'lambs'

arises precisely from the need to return with mind and heart, to the dream that guided Don Bosco's pastoral-missionary choice and his relationship with the Lord Jesus, the Good Shepherd.

Fr. Ángel states that this dream deserves to be considered the heart of the Strenna, "which will guide the educational-pastoral year of the entire Salesian Family. It can be taken up and explored in depth in the evangelizing mission, in the educational interventions, and in the actions of social promotion which in every part of the world are headed by our Family which finds in Don Bosco its inspirer and father" (*Presentation of the Strenna*).

Among the various narrations made by Don Bosco, the Rector Major chose the one that is considered the most authentic, because it was told by Don Bosco himself in the *Memoirs of the Oratory* written when he was already sixty years old, a considerable age in which it was easier to remember the concrete connection between the dream and reality.

He had faced, suffered, and overcome numerous difficulties, experiencing how much the grace of God and the presence of Mary, Mother and Help, had worked in the lives of his boys and of those Salesians, Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, and Salesian Cooperators who had shared and followed the same charismatic ideal from the first hour.

The intent of the Strenna is to propose for our reflection the dream of Don Bosco, which still today animates the Salesian mission in the world, not only to remember our origins, but above all, to help us rethink our vocation and our fidelity today. To use Mother Mazzarello's effective expression, we can say that

"now is the time to rekindle the fire," to renew our being Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, and the educational passion that distinguishes us in the Church.

In his best wishes to the Roman Curia, Pope Francis states that it takes courage to love and to walk, in order to go further. The struggle today is to convey passion to those who have already lost it long ago. He also declares that the real difference in the Church is not between conservatives and progressives, but between those 'in love' and those who have become 'accustomed'.

Dear sisters, we believe that God wants to do and is able to do great things in each of us! His Word, received with faith, deepened with patience, interiorized with love, followed with trust, is a light on our journey (cf. *Ps.* 119:105). It is capable of awakening the best resources and energies to respond, at this historical moment, to the mission that the Lord entrusts us. In His Word, we have the experience of living 'in love' rather than as 'accustomed'. We are called, in fact, to animate and accompany in continuous discernment, the vocational growth of every person entrusted to us.

The priority of our mission is to direct young people to the encounter with the Lord Jesus. They ask us to adopt new styles and new strategies for a more open and synodal pastoral (cf. *Acts GC XXIV*, no. 22) to become protagonists and implementers of educational proposals in the style of Gospel and Salesian spirituality.

Let us preserve as a precious heritage, Johnny's dream with its symbolic and charismatic value. Let us reflect on the centrality of the figure of Mary that the mysterious Character identifies as the 'Teacher'. In the last visit made by Don Bosco in 1885 to the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians in Nizza

Monferrato, the indication of the effective and consoling maternal presence of Mary in our Institute is evident. Mary is here and walks in this house (cf. *Cronistoria V* 52). Indeed, it is always She who continues to do wonders in our life and in our educational mission.

Two centuries after the dream at nine years of age, we note how much good has been achieved in the total gift to the young people of the world, as well as the timeliness of the mandate given to Johnny: "Here is your field; here is where you must work. Make yourself humble, strong, robust and what in this moment you see happening of these animals, you will have to do for my children." Thus, Mary is present from the beginning, at the birth of the Salesian charism precisely because her mission is to carry it in her womb and generate new life. Therefore, the Lord entrusts to His Mother, Virgin of Pentecost and Immaculate Model of the Church, the precious task of being the *Teacher* (cf. *Strenna* 1.4). It will be

She who will take care of the continuity of the dream so that Don Bosco can understand everything.

In its timeliness, the dream helps us to read today's reality and to rethink our presence among and with young people. With our gaze turned to Don Bosco and Mother Mazzarello, in fact, we chose to return to the *prophecy of presence*, which they themselves lived fully and that Mother Mazzarello herself embodied in Mornese in a brilliant way, with all its feminine nuances.

To achieve a significant *presence* in contemporaneity, we must have the courage to constantly invest in the formation on which depend the quality of life of the Institute and the fruitfulness of its mission.

Fidelity to the prophetic dynamism of the charism also requires a far-sighted vision and planning mentality, which are translated into awakening and nourishing the *vocational culture* that will truly make our communities generative in the Church and in the various contexts where God calls us today (cf. *Presentation Acts GC XXIV*).

I also want to thank, on behalf of all the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, the Rector Major, Cardinal Ángel Fernández Artime, for having asked us through the Strenna to renew our commitment to be generative communities of life in the Salesian Family, in the feminine-maternal-Marian dimension which, as Daughters, we are called to make shine in daily life and in the mission.

I offer my best wishes to the Salesian Confreres, to the various groups of the Salesian Family, to the Educating Communities, to the young, to all of you dear Sisters, and to your families, for a year 2024 of peace and hope.

Let us continue to invoke the Holy Spirit to enlighten the governments, to give courage to all those who work for peace and the good, to console those who suffer because of war, violence, and persecution. May He sustain and encourage those who work, young people and adults, for a future of social fraternity that respects human rights.

Let us entrust all humanity to the protection of Mary, Guide, Help, and Queen of Peace.

Rome, 1 January 2024

Affectionately, Mother

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Chiara Carraro". The script is fluid and cursive, with a distinct flourish at the end.