

Dearest Sisters,

I have the joy of presenting to you for the first time, the Strenna of the Rector Major for 2022:

**“Do all through love, nothing through constraint”
(St. Francis di Sales)**

Mother Mazzarello is also in line with this: “Freely do all that charity requires” (L 35 - 3) and puts into effect the same principle of the freedom of love, which gives itself, is renewed and, is always creative.

I thank Fr. Ángel Fernández Artime for the richness of the content that helps us to deepen the spirituality of Saint Francis de Sales on the occasion of the fourth centenary of his death.

The holy Bishop of Geneva became the inspirer of Salesian spirituality and a model shepherd to whom Don Bosco looked from the very beginning of his work, for his ability to make himself lovable, for his intense apostolic activity, and the desire that everyone would know and meet the God of mercy and forgiveness. In fact, where he could not reach with evangelization, St. Francis de Sales arrived with understanding and patient intelligence and the sweetness of charity, managing to lead even non-Catholics to conversion.

Don Bosco chose him as Patron and model of life from his priestly Ordination and then from the foundation of the first Oratory and of the Salesian Congregation itself because the mission to the young required “*great calm and gentleness*”.

In the Strenna we are offered an itinerary of reflection to take on more consciously the spirituality of Saint Francis de Sales, to appreciate it as the foundation of Don Bosco's educational style and of Salesian youth spirituality.

The Rector Major reminds us that the most revolutionary proposal of St. Francis de Sales was that of addressing the invitation to holiness to ordinary Christians, living daily life to the full, in the serene synthesis between action and contemplation, in valuing what is proper to human nature created by God and which, therefore, brings us closer to Him, making filial relationship and holiness possible for all. Therefore, each group of the Salesian Family can live this call to holiness by applying it in their own mission with original and specific nuances.

His humanism makes the centrality of love of God and love of neighbor the preferential way to enter into dialogue with everyone, living friendship as an important dimension in personal accompaniment. Don Bosco understood this and translated it into the synthesis, “*Education is a thing of the heart*”. *It is necessary that young people “not only be loved, but that they themselves know that they are loved.”* The effectiveness of the educational work starts from here and if the heart is not reached, the work will be difficult and the outcome uncertain.

The Holy Bishop is also masterly in teaching us trust in Providence, which he nourishes with the constant exercise of knowing how to read the signs of the Lord's presence in daily events and circumstances, to the point of abandoning himself in His hands and welcoming everything with 'holy indifference'.

This same trust is at the basis of the Salesian educational system rooted in the charity that hopes for everything, endures everything because it knows that the life of young people is first of all in the hands of Jesus Christ who, '*a bruised reed he will not break, a smoldering wick he will not quench*' (cf. Mt 12: 20). Mother Mazzarello expresses it in her recommendation: "*With the girls practice endless patience and unlimited gentleness*" (L 27-11). It is trust in the human heart, open to God's action and always destined for the fullness of life.

In the Strenna we also find the invitation to live the Eucharistic spirituality that nourished the missionary passion of Saint Francis de Sales, accustomed to seeking souls by letting himself be moved by the ardor of the *da mihi animas cetera tolle*, an ideal that sustains and revives the educative and evangelizing passion of Don Bosco. He too discovered in the Eucharist and in the presence of Mary, the daily strength to carry out the educational mission and transform it into a path of holiness for the young.

The Rector Major again underlines an interesting aspect in highlighting another typical harmony between St. Francis de Sales and Don Bosco. It is the art of communication with which he knows how to weave effective relationships both with those who are more capable and culturally rich and with those who do not have sufficient tools or means to express themselves.

In GC XXIV we made the commitment to welcome the digital age wisely as a sign of the times, a significant possibility of education and evangelization; to privilege, as an educating community, communication formation to inhabit digital environments in a conscious and responsible way, to know the dynamics of the information culture, and to develop a critical and creative mentality.

Another typically Salesian dimension is that of joy. Saint Francis de Sales invites us to awaken in our hearts and in our environments, the spirit of joy and gentleness, to rejoice in doing good joyfully. In a different way, Pope Francis addressed the same recommendation to the Chapter members. During his visit, he invited us to listen attentively to reality, to grasp situations of need, especially when the 'wine', that is, the joy of love, is lacking, to bring Christ, not in words but in service, in closeness, with compassion and tenderness.

I have offered you just a few points and I leave to each of you and to the educating communities the commitment to reflect on the Strenna, trying to grasp its relevance and fruitfulness as we begin this new year. Thus, we share the journey as a Salesian Family on the fourth centenary of the death of Saint Francis de Sales, in the desire to offer a useful and beautiful proposal to the Church in this particular period of history.

By revisiting these aspects of Salesian spirituality, we move further and further into the 150th anniversary of the foundation of the Institute and we entrust ourselves to Mary, to help us to be women who know how to bring the 'new wine' of hope in our age marked by so much suffering and hard work, but blessed by the sweet Providence of the Father.

I would like to thank the Rector Major once again, on behalf of everyone, for this opportunity he offers us by calling the Salesian Family to measure itself with the inspiration of its origins. I wish you, the Salesian Confreres, the various groups of the Salesian Family, the educating communities, a serene and holy year 2022.

Rome, 1 January 2022

Affectionately, Mother