



SOCIETÀ DI SAN FRANCESCO DI SALES

SEDE CENTRALE SALESIANA
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Il Rettor Maggiore

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MESSAGE TO THE YOUNG PEOPLE OF THE SALESIAN YOUTH MOVEMENT

JANUARY 2026

"Do whatever he tells you."

The wine of truth and friendship

Dear young people,

It is with great joy that I address you on the feast day of our Father and Teacher, Don Bosco. It is my sincere desire to continue this beautiful tradition whereby the Rector Major addresses a message to the young people of *the Salesian Youth Movement* on this occasion. I do so in the light of **the Strenna for 2026**, which takes as its starting point the episode of the wedding at Cana. Mary observes: "They *have no more wine*," and after telling Jesus, she simply says to the servants: "*Do whatever he tells you*." I also share this message in light of what the world is experiencing and in listening to Pope Leo's invitation to live challenges as opportunities to be witnesses of the good news today.

I. Mary's invitation: a gesture of prophetic listening

"*They have no wine*." This is how Mary addresses Jesus at Cana, not because she already knows the solution, but because she senses that a different intervention is needed. And when she asks the servants, "*Do whatever he tells*

you," she is not uttering a word of simple bureaucratic obedience. It is an invitation to **recognize the presence of the One who can transform the crisis into something new**, and to **be willing to do exactly what He commands**, even when it seems absurd.

At this historic moment in which we live in a heavy and dramatic atmosphere, where war seems to be the only possible grammar and the law of the strongest dominates international and personal relations, where human bonds are reduced to commercial transactions and profit logic, the theme of **the Strenna 2026** is not naive. On the contrary, it is a **prophetic cry** that invites the *Salesian Youth Movement* to recognize that the moment we are living in – where we notice that the wine of harmony and respect for the weakest is lacking – is also a moment of grace that calls us to respond with a witness rooted in the person of Christ. We want to commit ourselves as servants who listen because they believe.

II. An authentic word in the face of ambiguous language and lost truth

In his address to the Diplomatic Corps on January 9, 2026, Pope Leo XIV points to a radical problem of our age: language, which is normally the privileged means of knowing and encountering one another, is being used in an ambiguous way: it "is increasingly becoming a weapon with which to deceive or strike."

In this context, the Pope states as an example, words are losing their true value: "peace" can also mean domination through military power, "freedom" can also translate into imposed ideological uniformity, "rights" become self-referential and mutually exclusive. This highlights a shift towards a humanity marked by a "short circuit of human rights," where the pursuit of goods and power "kills" peaceful coexistence.

This is the "field" where the *Salesian Youth Movement* is called to live and dwell: **to recover the true word, not deliberately ambiguous, in order to understand and say things, and marked by authentic friendship**, embodied in the daily pastoral journeys and fraternal experiences, within which and as a guarantee of them, an unambiguous word flourishes and resounds, one that does not betray the truth.

III. Sincere listening as transformation

Mary's invitation is not trivial conformism. "*Do whatever he tells you*" presupposes, first of all, **deep listening**. This mature, attentive, and penetrating

listening requires hearing the voice of Jesus amid the noise and half-truths of the world. His is a voice that recognizes the authority of truth, not brute and arrogant force.

In the contemporary context, "*do whatever he tells you*" means **learning to recognize and give space to the voice that speaks of truth, of love without calculation, of unconditional dignity**. It is the opposite of the logic that dominates contemporary public discourse, where every word is filtered through the interests of power.

The *Salesian Youth Movement* is called to be **a listening community capable of transformation**: listening to the Lord in the Gospel, listening to young people in their deepest questions, listening to the cries of the poor, listening to the signs of the times. If our educational and pastoral journeys are not nourished by the Word of God, there is a risk that any alternative word will not resist the widespread ambiguity that is becoming a style and method. Only the Word has the power of truth that unmasks ambiguity and repairs that "short circuit" that has caused true fraternity to fall into a void. True and authentic friendships are born from a community of mature listening.

IV. The prophecy of fraternity and true friendship as a countercultural witness

Speaking to the Roman Curia (December 22, 2025), Pope Leo quotes a master of truth and clarity, St. Augustine: "In all human things, nothing is dear to man without a friend." Yet, how much authentic friendship is there among people beyond the temptation of "likes," power, the desire to excel, and the pursuit of one's own interests?

This is where friendship becomes **a political choice** in the noblest sense of the word: **a choice of principle for the good of the city, of the polis**. When, in a fluid world, we choose to say "I love you not for what you give me, but for who you are," we are performing an act of resistance to the culture that consumes even human relationships. When we welcome those who are not useful, those who are discarded by the logic of productivity, we are witnessing to another grammar.

The Pope observes that this becomes "a sign also to the outside world, in a world wounded by discord, violence, and conflict." And he adds a thought that is very eloquent for us Salesians: "We are not little gardeners intent on tending our own

garden, but we are disciples and witnesses of the Kingdom of God, called to be in Christ the leaven of universal fraternity."

The fraternity and friendship embodied in the life of the Salesian Youth Movement is not an escape from the world; it is a ferment in the world. It is not an intimate experience in a closed garden, reserved for a few, but a real "laboratory" where we can already experience, here and now, the bonds that make the future sprout.

V. Don Bosco as a teacher of this "new culture"

Don Bosco did not write treatises on the subject of peace. He did not theorize about fraternity. He placed himself as a pilgrim alongside young people rejected by society. In a simple but pertinent way, he told them that they mattered, that they were loved. And he said this by offering them educational opportunities, spiritual experiences, and authentic friendships that helped them to grow in an integral way.

Valdocco was a **"laboratory" of welcome, generosity, and authentic friendship. This is where the Salesian Youth Movement has its roots**, and today it continues to strive to recreate the Valdocco experience: a space where the "law of the strongest" was disarmed by the logic of preventive love.

Don Bosco continues to be revolutionary by living and communicating the love of Jesus' Gospel. The family spirit handed down to us as a legacy was the breaking of the logic of domination through the recognition of dignity. He lived fully *"what Jesus said to him"*: to welcome, accompany, and believe in possible change even when the world takes another turn.

VI. Three concrete paths for the Salesian Youth Movement

Starting from the event at Cana, and bringing it into our personal and community experience through listening to Jesus and his Vicar, we have identified some avenues for reflection that can help you understand the world in which we live, in its beauty and its risks. I would now like to continue in a concrete way, with some practical suggestions that I invite you to consider, discuss, and put into practice.

1. The revolution of friendship

We are committed to **the "revolution** of friendship" as an act for the good and growth of the human city, the *polis*, convinced that this **is the** only **way to break the "short circuit of rights"** mentioned by Pope Leo. When a young person chooses to love freely – without expecting anything in return, without calculating utility – they are saying no to the commodification of relationships.

This is embodied in everyday life:

- In the refusal to build conditional friendships, where the other person is only valuable if they are useful, likable, or "interesting";
- In the choice to welcome those who are discarded, marginalized, those who do not "produce" value in the world of entertainment and social media;
- In the courage to tell the truth to a friend, humbly, not to dominate them but to help them grow;
- In working together not to "win" against others, but to build more just and fraternal cities.

2. Living in and promoting "workshops of welcome"

The Salesian charism thrives on the "grace of unity" between the human and the divine, the spiritual and the cultural, educational, and professional dimensions. The *Salesian Constitutions* (n. 21) outline this unity, calling it a "splendid harmony of nature and grace." We see in Don Bosco a human depth, "rich in the virtues of his people... open to earthly realities." But we also see a person deeply in love with God, "filled with the gifts of the Holy Spirit." This is our heritage: the Salesian charism that unites the desire for happiness in time and eternity, ensuring that earthly life is filled with God's love, inspired and guided by it.

The *Salesian Youth Movement*, in its spaces – oratories, parishes, reception centers, schools, formation communities, groups – should be **a promoter of the "grace of unity" that brings forth healthy, concrete experiences in the present, "wombs" of the future, "laboratories of welcome," where:**

- the atmosphere is different from that of the competitive world – where one does not win "against" someone, but builds "together";
- relationships are not transactions – not "what can you do for me," but "who are you for me";
- the care of the fragile is experienced as recognition of their infinite dignity;

- the joy that emerges is not triumph over the enemy, but *communio*, the regenerated fabric of relationships.

This is doing "what he will tell you": concretely embodying the Gospel of fraternity.

3. From small daily choices to public prophecy

It is not a question of separating personal witness from public voice. Let us not underestimate the powerful, albeit hidden, value of gestures of daily fraternity. Members of *the Salesian Youth Movement* should be convinced that **every gesture of authentic love, closeness, and welcome leaves an invisible mark, just as invisible is the power contained in yeast in dough.**

Concretely, the SYM is called to:

- witness that peace is possible, not through nuclear deterrence, not through increasingly sophisticated weapons, but through dialogue, forgiveness, and the search for the common good;
- make the voice of young people heard in the protection of human dignity: in the defense of life, refugees, migrants, prisoners, and the elderly who are alone and forgotten;
- educate people to critically discern the media and the ambiguous language that uses words as weapons, proposing words that are anchored in truth;
- build networks of concrete solidarity that show that another relational grammar is possible—not only virtual, but embodied in the territory.

Conclusion: new wine as embodied hope

In Cana, there is no wine. This is not a minor narrative detail. It is a sign that a way of living together has come to an end – that of the bride and groom, that of the guests, that of the traditional banquet. **Through his miracle, Jesus does not restore the past; he transforms water into new, better wine, inaugurating a new covenant.**

And Mary does not propose nostalgia for the old wine. She simply says, "Do whatever he tells you." **He will transform.** We do not know how. We do not know when. But we know that He is capable of transforming the ordinary – water – into something extraordinary: words that become transparent again, bonds that

are not commodified, fears transformed into hope, death transfigured into resurrection.

The Strenna 2026 invites the *Salesian Youth Movement* to this radical trust.

Not to build a better future "on our own," as if everything depended on our organizational skills: that would be dangerous utopia! But to listen to the voice of the One who, born in the humility of the cave in Bethlehem, took on our fragile and weak humanity to give everyone the dignity of children of God, even in their fragility and weakness, and even in sin.

The task of *the Salesian Youth Movement* is not salvific – salvation comes only from Him. **Our task is prophetic:** to embody in our spaces, in our choices, in our friendships, in our groups, the alternative that the Kingdom of God proposes. To be "**yeast of universal brotherhood**" in a world where brotherhood seems impossible.

"Do whatever he tells you": these are powerful words. Not words of resignation, but of well-founded hope. Don Bosco knew this. That is why he was able to look at thousands of young people rejected by the world and say to them: you are important, you can change the world, you can be saints.

This is our vocation: "*to do whatever he tells us*," aware that the water we bring him will be transformed by him into new wine. We will be servants of that wine which the world does not yet know but desperately awaits.

Always yours IN XTO

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