



SOCIETÀ DI SAN FRANCESCO DI SALES
SEDE CENTRALE SALESIANA
Via Marsala 42 - 00185 Roma
Il Rettor Maggiore

SALESIAN COOPERATORS
V MEETING — 150th ANNIVERSARY
DRAWN BY YOUR MERCIFUL LOVE
***DO WHATEVER HE TELLS YOU* (JN 2:5)**
THE WEDDING AT CANA
INTERPRETIVE KEY TO THE PREVENTIVE SYSTEM
Saturday, 1 August 2026

The 2026 Strenna hands us a word of Mary — ***Do whatever he tells you*** — which is not merely a devout invitation but a genuine educational and pastoral programme. At the heart of the Strenna we discover that in the wedding at Cana (Jn 2:1-11) there is enclosed, in narrative form, the very wisdom that Don Bosco lived among his young people and then handed on to the Salesian Family in the pages on the Preventive System. This is no artificial pairing: Cana is the interpretive key that holds together the Strenna and the charism, the Gospel and Salesian pedagogy. What Mary does at Cana — to look, to awaken trust, to generate an environment of involvement, to make the servants protagonists — is what every Salesian educator, every Salesian Cooperator, is called to live today with and for the young. In the anniversaries we are celebrating — the foundation of our Association and the memory of the Preventive System — this icon becomes both mirror and programme. Let us look closely at the scene.

– Mary looks at the human with the eyes of faith.

In the midst of the feast, she alone notices the emergency: «they have no wine» (Jn 2:3). Hers is a gaze at once contemplative and realistic: she sees the concrete lack, she lets herself be touched by it, and at the same time she sees beyond the lack — she sees the possibility of God's intervention. She does not look at the human as a spectator, nor with fear or judgement: she looks with faith.

- Mary awakens in the servants a response of trust and faith in Jesus.

She does not solve the problem herself, she does not take anyone's place: she directs them to Christ. Her word — «Do whatever he tells you» — generates faith where there was only embarrassment. This is the masterpiece of all true education: not to bind others to oneself, but to lead them to the encounter that saves.

- And so an environment of involvement emerges.

The servants do not obey blindly: they adhere in an adult manner and form, in freedom, filling the jars «to the brim» (Jn 2:7) — a sign of a generosity that goes beyond the minimum required. And this is possible because Mary's authority is believed: hers is a trusting and authoritative presence, credible because it is born of love and attention. In that environment people trust, and trusting becomes reasonable.

- Finally, the protagonism of the servants.

It is they who fill the jars, who draw the water, who bring it to the head steward. The miracle passes through their hands, and only they — the Gospel notes — know where the new wine comes from (cf. Jn 2:9). The Lord does not bypass them: he associates them with his work.

In this dynamic we recognise the three pillars of the Preventive System. Three points, then, that travel along the track of reason, religion and loving-kindness, setting out from the wedding feast of Cana.

1. REASON — They have no wine: a gaze that takes reality seriously

Mary's word is sober, concrete, reasonable: she states a fact, without dramatising and without judging anyone. This is the reason of the Preventive System: always to start from the concrete life of the young, from their real needs, their questions, their capacities. Before any project comes a gaze that sees.

How do we look at the world of the young today? With the gaze of fear, of judgement, of nostalgia for times past? Or with a gaze that is at once evangelical and reasonable, able to recognise their struggles and limits but also to discover the signs of God, the deep desires, the thirst for authenticity that dwells in the hearts of the young? This gathering offers us a precious opportunity to broaden our gaze beyond our local point of view: the young of the urban peripheries, those living in countries at war, migrants, the young without work, those immersed in the digital world, those living in contexts of first evangelisation or as a Christian minority.

In each of these faces the same cry resounds, in different forms: they have no more wine.

Reason is also listening. To listen to the young and to cultural contexts means learning their languages, entering their environments — including digital ones — welcoming their unease, letting ourselves be challenged by their questions about the Church, faith and justice. And it means listening to one another: without genuine listening, our Centres risk becoming places of weariness or conflict; with mutual listening, differences of viewpoint, of spiritual sensibility, of pastoral experience become richness for a shared vision.

Let us note, finally, that at Cana the obedience of the servants is an adult obedience: not a blind execution, but a free adherence to a credible proposal. So too Salesian reason does not impose: it proposes, motivates, dialogues, persuades. The questions it hands us are precise: where, today, does the Lord show us that the wine has run out? Where is the gift of the Salesian charism most needed? Where might our being believers and free generate greater fruitfulness?

2. RELIGION — Do whatever he tells you: the faith that listens and chooses

The second pillar is religion: not a devout superstructure added to education, but the heart that makes it fruitful. At Cana, Mary does not offer the servants a technical solution: she offers a relationship. She entrusts them to the word of Jesus. All the rest — the water, the jars, the service — receives its meaning from that entrustment.

For us this means first of all to listen to God. Without a daily listening to the Word, we risk building many generous initiatives that are nonetheless scarcely evangelical. Listening to Jesus — in personal and communal prayer, in the liturgy, in meditation on Scripture — allows us to recognise his voice amid the noise of the world. It means, then, to listen to ourselves: mission does not cancel our limits, our wounds, our weariness; often it brings them to the surface. To listen to one's own heart is part of discernment, for it is precisely there that the Lord speaks to us and shapes us as leaven.

Yet there is another kind of listening that is highly significant in every educative and pastoral process: listening to the questions of meaning and searching that the young carry in their hearts. In this dynamic, Mary's invitation to the servants awakens in their hearts a process that makes them protagonists. The invitation to do whatever Jesus tells them finds in their hearts a resonance that sets in motion gestures of collaboration

and mature availability. Without that invitation meeting a ready and generous heart, the miracle could not have come about.

In the light of this dynamic, which meets and makes positive values grow in the young through our presence beside them — a presence humanly rich and marked by faith — we are called to ask ourselves: which priorities should we take up? Which youth peripheries should we place at the centre? Which spheres of social and ecclesial life do we sense as more urgent? To choose does not only mean to add new activities, but also, at times, to have the courage to leave behind what no longer bears fruit or what absorbs energy without really touching the lives of the young. It means concentrating on a few strong lines: the vocational formation of Salesian Cooperators, presence amid the new youth poverties, collaboration with the local Churches, commitment to peace and to the care of creation, an educative presence in the digital world.

And the call to offer the young valid and meaningful proposals invites us to have that pastoral intelligence which is able to read their capacities and potential in filling the jars. We know that it is the Lord who makes the wine, and that it is not we who save the young. It falls to us, however, to foster and promote those environments and paths where Christ, together with the power of the Spirit, can work in their hearts. Through our being present with them and for them, we generously put into play what we are and what we have — our jars, our water — knowing that encouraging the young to fill the jars is the fitting gesture so that true fruitfulness may then change the water into wine. This awareness not only frees us from every anxiety of performance, but allows us to work with serenity, humility and joy.

3. LOVING-KINDNESS — the feast safeguarded: an environment that involves and makes protagonists

The third pillar is loving-kindness. Let us not forget: the first sign of Jesus takes place at a wedding feast, and its effect is to safeguard the joy of a family. Salesian loving-kindness is exactly this: a love that makes itself felt, that creates an environment, that defends the feast of the young people's lives so that it may not be extinguished before its time.

At Cana an environment of involvement emerges: the discreet and authoritative presence of Mary generates trust, and trust generates protagonism. The servants are neither spectators nor mere executors: they are associated with the miracle. So too loving-kindness, in the style of Don Bosco, does not produce dependence but co-responsibility: it makes the young — and the laity — protagonists of the good, capable in their turn of drawing and of bringing the new wine to others.

This protagonism is often exercised in hiddenness. Many Salesian Cooperators live their mission in a simple and everyday way: in the family, in a school classroom, in an office, in a difficult neighbourhood, in a parish, in a youth centre. Like the servants of Cana, they may never appear in the news; yet their style, their presence, their capacity to listen and to accompany make the good grow in the lives of many young people — and they know where that wine comes from.

At the same time, loving-kindness has a communal breadth: it is an awareness of Association. We do not act only as generous individuals, but as a regional and worldwide body, with a history, a Rule of Life, a shared mission. Our concrete action is a fragment of a great mosaic, one tile of the journey that the Association makes as a whole. For this reason, to act also means to care for communion: among Salesian Cooperators and the other groups of the Salesian Family, with the Pastors of the local Churches, with all those realities that work for the young.

At Cana the new wine does not remain in the jars: it is drawn, carried, shared, and the feast continues. For us too the same evangelical law holds: the wine is meant to be distributed! If we look at the human with the eyes of faith like Mary, if we trust in the word of Jesus like the servants, if we safeguard environments of reason, religion and loving-kindness, then the Salesian charism will continue to ferment history and the wedding will not be left without wine.

CONCLUSION

You have kept the good wine until now (Jn 2:10)

At the end of the account of Cana, the head steward speaks a surprising word: You have kept the good wine until now. In the logic of the world, the best is served at the beginning and then the quality declines. In the logic of God it is the opposite: the best wine comes at the end. This is a word of hope that I would like to hand on to this Meeting and to the whole Association. To celebrate 150 years of history does not mean to keep a vintage wine with nostalgia: it means to believe that the Lord still has new wine to serve through us, and that the best of our vocation lies not behind us but before us.

The jars of Cana were empty and of stone, destined for ancient rites. Jesus does not discard them: he fills them and transforms them. So too he will do with us, if we let him. Our structures, our weariness, even our limits can become the place of the sign, on one condition alone: that we let Mary say to us, *Do whatever he tells you*, and that, like the servants, we fill the jars to the brim — without calculation, without reserve, with

that adult and free generosity which is the most beautiful trait of the Salesian laity.

Let us therefore take up the journey again with the three pillars that have accompanied us. With reason, to continue looking at the reality of the young with clear and concrete eyes, without fear and without nostalgia. With religion, to remain in listening to the Word, the sole foundation of our fruitfulness. With loving-kindness, to safeguard the feast of the young people's lives and to make them protagonists of the new wine. Reason, religion and loving-kindness contain the energy, the style with which Don Bosco dreamed of Christians capable of being leaven in the world — and with which today the Spirit continues to shape us.

I entrust this Meeting, and each one of you, to Mary Help of Christians, the attentive Mother of Cana, she who is the first to notice when the wine runs short and the first to point us to her Son. We ask her for the gaze, the trust and the courage of the servants. And we ask Don Bosco, father and teacher, to obtain for us the grace of being always and in every moment that humble and fruitful leaven which makes the dough rise, so that the feast of the young may never be left without wine, and so that the good wine, the true wine, may always be distributed.