

# I AM WITH YOU ALWAYS

# WORLD DAY FOR GRANDPARENTS AND THE ELDERLY

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# FIRST WORLD DAY FOR GRANDPARENTS AND THE ELDERLY

## WORDS FROM POPE FRANCIS

It's brutal to see how the elderly are thrown away, it is a brutal thing, it is a sin! No one dares to say it openly, but it's done! There is something vile in this *adherence to the throw-away culture*.

*General Audience, 4 March 2015*

The future - and this is not an exaggeration - will be in the dialogue between young and old. If grandparents do not dialogue with grandchildren, there will be no future.

*To the members of the Italian National Association of Senior Workers,  
16 December 2019*

I had the great blessing of growing up in a family in which faith was lived in a simple, practical way. However it was my paternal grandmother in particular who influenced my journey of faith. She was a woman who explained to us, who talked to us about Jesus, who taught us the Catechism. I always remember that on the evening of Good Friday she would take us to the candle-light procession, and at the end of this procession “the dead Christ” would arrive and our grandmother would make us — the children — kneel down and she would say to us: “Look, he is dead, but tomorrow he will rise”. This was how I received my first Christian proclamation, from this very woman, from my grandmother! This is really beautiful! The first proclamation at home, in the family! And this makes me think of the love of so many mothers and grandmothers in the transmission of faith. They are the ones who pass on the faith.

This used to happen in the early Church too, for Saint Paul said to Timothy: “I am reminded of the faith of your mother and of your grandmother” (cf. 2 Tim 1, 5). All the mothers and all the grandmothers who are here should think about this: passing on the faith! Because God sets beside us people who help us on our journey of faith. We do not find our faith in the abstract, no! It is always a person preaching who tells us who Jesus is, who communicates faith to us and gives us the first proclamation. And this is how I received my first experience of faith.

*(cfr. Vigil of Pentecost, 18 May 2013)*

Speaking about family life, I would like to say one thing: today, as Brazil and the Church around the world celebrate this feast of Saints Joachim and Anne, Grandparents Day is also being celebrated. How important grandparents are for family life, for passing on the human and religious heritage which is so essential for each and every society! How important it is to have intergenerational exchanges and dialogue, especially within the context of the family. The Aparecida Document says, “Children and the elderly build the future of peoples: children because they lead history forward, the elderly because they transmit the experience and wisdom of their lives” (No. 447). This relationship and this dialogue between generations is a treasure to be preserved and strengthened! In this World Youth Day, young people wish to acknowledge and honour their grandparents. They salute them with great affection. Grandparents. Let us salute grandparents. Young people salute their grandparents with great affection and they thank them for the ongoing witness of their wisdom.

*(Cfr. Angelus, Rio de Janeiro, 26 July 2013)*

Hope and a future presuppose memory. The memory of our elderly people sustains us as we journey on. The future of society, and precisely of Italian society, is rooted in the elderly and in the young: the latter, because they have the strength and are of the age to carry history ahead; the former, because they are a living

memory. A people that does not take care of its elderly, its children and its youth has no future, because it abuses both memory and promise.

*(Cfr. Message to Participants in the 47th Social Week of Italian Catholics, 11 September 2013)*

But let me ask you: Do you listen to your grandparents? Do you open your hearts to the memories that your grandparents pass on? Grandparents are like the wisdom of the family, they are the wisdom of a people. And a people that does listen to grandparents is one that dies! Listen to your grandparents. Mary and Joseph are the family, sanctified by the presence of Jesus who is the fulfilment of all God's promises. Like the Holy Family of Nazareth, every family is part of the history of a people; it cannot exist without the generations who have gone before it. Therefore, today we have grandparents and children. The children learn from their grandparents, from the previous generation.

*(Cfr. Address to the Participants in the Pilgrimage of Families during the Year of Faith, 26 October 2013)*

The remembrance of our ancestors leads us to imitate their faith. It is true that old age is at times unpleasant, because of the illnesses it brings. But the wisdom of our grandparents is the inheritance we ought to receive. A people that does not care for its grandparents, that does not respect its grandparents, has no future since it has lost its memory. Faced with martyrdom, Eleazar was aware of his responsibility to the young. He thought about God, but he also thought about the young, saying: 'I must give the young a credible example to the very end'.

*(Cfr. Homily in the chapel of Domus Sanctae Marthae, Vatican 19 November 2013)*

"The elderly bring with them memory and the wisdom of experience, which warns us not to foolishly repeat our past mistakes. Young people call us to renewed and expansive hope, for they represent new directions for humanity and open us up

to the future, lest we cling to a nostalgia for structures and customs which are no longer life-giving in today's world".

*(Cfr. Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Gaudium 108, 24 November 2013)*

The witness of the family is crucial, before the whole of society, in reaffirming the importance of an elderly person as a member of a community, who has his or her own mission to accomplish and who only seemingly receives with nothing to offer. "Whenever we attempt to read the signs of the times it is helpful to listen to young people and the elderly. Both represent a source of hope for every people. The elderly bring with them memory and the wisdom of experience, which warns us not to foolishly repeat our past mistakes".

A society truly welcomes life when it recognizes that it is also precious in old age, in disability, in serious illness and even when it is fading; when it teaches that the call to human fulfillment does not exclude suffering; indeed, when it teaches its members to see in the sick and suffering a gift for the entire community, a presence that summons them to solidarity and responsibility. This is the Gospel of life which, through your scientific and professional competence, and sustained by grace, you are called to spread.

*(Cfr. Message to participants in the General Assembly of the Pontifical Academy for Life, Vatican 19 February 2014)*

Young people coming together with their grandparents is key. Several bishops from countries in a state of crisis, where the unemployment rate among young people is high, were telling me part of the solution for young people lies in the fact that their grandparents are supporting them. They re-encounter their grandparents, who have a pension, and so leave their retirement homes and return to the family; what is more, they bring back with them their memory, that encounter.

*(Cfr. Address to members of the Pontifical Commission for Latin America, 28 February 2014)*

In a special way, old age is a time of grace, in which the Lord renews his call to us: he calls us to safeguard and transmit the faith, he calls us to pray, especially to intercede; he calls us to be close to those in need.... The elderly, grandparents have the ability to understand the most difficult of situations: a great ability! And when they pray for these situations, their prayer is strong; it is powerful!

*(Cfr. Meeting with the Elderly, Vatican 28 September 2014)*

There must not be institutions where the elderly live forgotten, hidden and neglected. I feel close to the many elderly who live in these institutions, and I think with gratitude of those who go to visit and care for them.

*(Cfr. Meeting with the Elderly, Vatican 28 September 2014)*

In the tradition of the Church there is a *wealth of wisdom* that has always supported a culture of *closeness to the elderly*, a disposition of warm and supportive companionship in this final phase of life. This tradition is rooted in Sacred Scripture, as these passages from the Book of Sirach attest: “Do not disregard the discourse of the aged, for they themselves learned from their fathers; because from them you will gain understanding and learn how to give an answer in time of need” (Sir 8:9).

The Church cannot and does not want to conform to a mentality of impatience, and much less of indifference and contempt, towards old age. We must reawaken the *collective sense of gratitude*, of appreciation, of hospitality, which makes the elder feel like a living part of his community.

Our elders are men and women, fathers and mothers, who came before us on our own road, in our own house, in our daily battle for a worthy life. They are men and women from whom we have received so much. The elder is not an alien. We are that elder: in the near or far future, but inevitably, even if we don't think it. And if we don't learn how to treat the elder better, that is how we will be treated.

We old people are all a little fragile. Some, however, are *particularly weak*, many are alone, and stricken by illness. Some depend on the indispensable care and attention of others. Are we going to take a step back? Abandon them to their fate? A

society without *proximity*, where *gratuity* and affection *without compensation*—between strangers as well — is disappearing, is a perverse society. The Church, faithful to the Word of God, cannot tolerate such degeneration. A Christian community in which proximity and gratuity are no longer considered indispensable is a society which would lose her soul. Where there is no honour for the elderly, there is no future for the young.

*(Cfr. General Audience, Vatican 4 March 2015)*

The Lord never discards us. He calls us to follow Him in every age of life, and *old age has a grace and a mission* too, a true vocation from the Lord. Old age is a vocation. It is not yet time to “pull in the oars”. This period of life is different from those before, there is no doubt; we even have to somewhat “invent it ourselves”, because our societies are not ready, spiritually and morally, to appreciate the true value of this stage of life. Indeed, it once was not so normal to have time available; it is much more so today. Christian spirituality has also been caught somewhat by surprise, with regard to outlining a kind of spirituality of the elderly. But thanks be to God there is no shortage of the testimony of elderly saints, both men and women!

*(Cfr. General Audience, Vatican 11 March 2015)*

Dear grandparents, dear elderly, let us follow in the footsteps of these extraordinary elders! Let us too become like poets of prayer: let us develop a taste for finding our own words, let us once again grasp those which teach us the Word of God. *The prayer of grandparents and of the elderly is a great gift for the Church!* The prayer of grandparents and of the elderly is a great gift for the Church, it is a treasure! A great injection of wisdom for the whole of human society: above all for one which is too busy, too taken, too distracted. Someone should also sing, for them too, sing of the signs of God, proclaim the signs of God, pray for them! Let us look to Benedict XVI, who chose to spend the final span of his life in prayer and listening to God! This is beautiful! A great believer of the last century, of the Orthodox tradition, Olivier Clément, said: “A civilization which has no place for prayer is a civilization in which

old age has lost all meaning. And this is terrifying. For, above all, we need old people who pray; prayer is the purpose of old age”. We need old people who pray because this is the very purpose of old age. The prayer of the elderly is a beautiful thing.

*(Cfr. General Audience, Vatican 11 March 2015)*

The grandparents are the great forgotten ones of this time. Now a bit less, here in Italy, because since there is no work and they have a pension, you see, grandparents are remembered! But the grandparents are the great forgotten ones. Grandparents are the memory of a family, the memory of a country, the memory of the faith, because it is they who give it to us. Grandparents. I ask you this question: Do you speak with your grandparents? [They answer: “Yes!”] Do you ask you grandparents: “Grandpa, grandma, what was this like? How do you do this? What did you used to do?”. Ask them, ask them! Because grandparents are a font of wisdom, because they have the memory of life, the memory of the faith, the memory of tensions, they remember conflicts.... And the grandparents are good! I really like talking with grandparents. I’ll tell you an anecdote. The other day, in the Square, during a Wednesday Audience, I was going round in the popemobile, and I saw an elderly grandma there: you could see she was elderly! But her eyes were shining with joy. I had them stop the popemobile and I got down, and I went to greet her. And she was smiling. “Tell me, grandma: how old are you?” — “92!” — “Ah, well done, good! Joyful! But tell me the recipe to reach 92 like this”. And she said to me: “You know, I eat ravioli!”. And then she added: “And I make them myself!”. This is an anecdote to tell you that meeting grandparents is always a surprise. Grandparents always surprise us: they know how to listen to us, they have great patience!... We are talking about three generations, at least three. Also when grandparents live at home, they help so much to resolve the usual tensions in a family. Do not forget your grandparents. Understood?

*(Cfr. Address to the Eucharistic Youth Movement (MEG), 7 August 2015)*

191. “Do not cast me off in the time of old age; forsake me not when my strength is spent” (Ps 71,9). This is the plea of the elderly, who fear being forgotten and rejected. Just as God asks us to be his means of hearing the cry of the poor, so too he wants us to hear the cry of the elderly. This represents a challenge to families and communities, since “the Church cannot and does not want to conform to a mentality of impatience, and much less of indifference and contempt, towards old age. We must reawaken the collective sense of gratitude, of appreciation, of hospitality, which makes the elderly feel like a living part of the community. Our elderly are men and women, fathers and mothers, who came before us on our own road, in our own house, in our daily battle for a worthy life”. Indeed, “how I would like a Church that challenges the throw-away culture by the overflowing joy of a new embrace between young and old!”

192. Saint John Paul II asked us to be attentive to the role of the elderly in our families, because there are cultures which, “especially in the wake of disordered industrial and urban development, have both in the past and in the present set the elderly aside in unacceptable ways”. The elderly help us to appreciate “the continuity of the generations”, by their “charism of bridging the gap”. Very often it is grandparents who ensure that the most important values are passed down to their grandchildren, and “many people can testify that they owe their initiation into the Christian life to their grandparents”. Their words, their affection or simply their presence help children to realize that history did not begin with them, that they are now part of an ageold pilgrimage and that they need to respect all that came before them. Those who would break all ties with the past will surely find it difficult to build stable relationships and to realize that reality is bigger than they are. “Attention to the elderly makes the difference in a society. Does a society show concern for the elderly? Does it make room for the elderly? Such a society will move forward if it respects the wisdom of the elderly”.

193. The lack of historical memory is a serious shortcoming in our society. A mentality that can only say, “Then was then, now is now”, is ultimately immature. Knowing and judging past events is the only way to build a meaningful future. Memory

is necessary for growth: “Recall the former days” (Heb 10,32). Listening to the elderly tell their stories is good for children and young people; it makes them feel connected to the living history of their families, their neighborhoods and their country. A family that fails to respect and cherish its grandparents, who are its living memory, is already in decline, whereas a family that remembers has a future. “A society that has no room for the elderly or discards them because they create problems, has a deadly virus”; “it is torn from its roots”. Our contemporary experience of being orphans as a result of cultural discontinuity, uprootedness and the collapse of the certainties that shape our lives, challenges us to make our families places where children can sink roots in the rich soil of a collective history.

*(Cfr. Apostolic exhortation Amoris Laetitia 191-193, 19 March 2016)*

Do you want to be the hope for the future or not?

Two conditions that cost nothing. The first is condition is to remember. Trying to understand where I come from: the memory of my people, my family, my whole history. The witness talk of the second volunteer was full of memories.

Memory of the path I have taken, memory of everything I have received from those who have gone before me. A young person who cannot remember is no hope for the future. Is that clear?

So, Father, how do I go about remembering? First, talk to your grandparents. Because if you want to be hope for the future, you have to receive the torch from your grandfather and your grandmother.

Will you promise me that in preparing for Panama, you will talk more with your grandparents?

If your grandparents are already in heaven, will you talk to with the elderly?

Are you going to ask them questions?

Ask them. They are the wisdom of a people.

*(Cfr. Meeting with the WYD volunteers, Kraków 31 July 2016)*

¿Quieren ser esperanza para el futuro o no? [«Sí»].

Grandparents can also be friends. I know children who are more able to talk to their grandparents than to their parents. Because they feel more friends, more understood, by their grandparents.... But I have heard someone say: "Talking to grandparents is boring! Grandparents are a thing of the past, they're not useful." Is that true? Is that true? No! I'll give you a piece of advice: talk to your grandparents, ask your grandparents questions. Grandparents are the memory of life, they are the wisdom of life. Talk to your grandparents.

*(Cfr. Meeting with young people at the Roman Parish "Santa Maria a Setteville", 15 January 2017)*

We have seen that the Magnificat wells up in Mary's heart at the moment when she meets her elderly cousin Elizabeth. With her faith, her keen gaze and her words, Elizabeth helps the Virgin to understand more fully the greatness of what God is accomplishing in her and the mission that he has entrusted to her. But what about you? Do you realize how extraordinarily enriching the encounter between the young and the elderly can be? How much attention do you pay to the elderly, to your grandparents? With good reason you want to "soar", your heart is full of great dreams, but you need the wisdom and the vision of the elderly. Spread your wings and fly, but also realize that you need to rediscover your roots and to take up the torch from those who have gone before. To build a meaningful future, you need to know and appreciate the past (cf. *AL* 190, 193). Young people have strength, while the elderly have memory and wisdom. As Mary did with Elizabeth, look to the elderly, to your grandparents. They will speak to you of things that can thrill your minds and fill your hearts.

*(Cfr. Message for the thirty-second world youth day, Vatican 27 February 2017)*

Life holds out a mission to young people today; the Church holds out a mission, and I would like to entrust you with this mission. It is to go back and talk to your grandparents. Today more than ever we need this bridge, this dialogue,

between grandparents and grandchildren, between the young and the elderly. The prophet Joel makes this prophecy: “Your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions” (2.28). In other words, the young will make things happen because of their vision. So this is the task I am giving you in the name of the Church. *Talk to older people.* You may say: “But it’s boring... They are always talking about the same things...” No! Listen to older people, talk to them, ask them questions. Make them dream, and from those dreams take what you need to move forward, so that you can have a vision and make that vision concrete. This is your mission today. This is the mission the Church gives you today.

*(Cfr. Address prayer vigil in preparation of world youth day XXXII, Rome 8 April 2017)*

We are not Gerontes: we are grandfathers; we are grandfathers. And if we do not feel this way, we must ask for the grace to feel it. Grandfathers to whom our grandchildren look. Grandfathers must give life meaning for them from our experience. Grandfathers not withdrawn in our melancholic history, but open to transmit this. And for us, this “rise, look, hope” is called “dreaming”. We are grandfathers called to dream and to give our dream to today’s young people: they need it. Because they will draw from our dreams the power to prophecy and carry out their task.

That passage from the Gospel of Luke (2, 21-38) comes to mind. Simeon and Anna: two grandparents, but what a capacity to dream these two had! And they recounted this entire dream to Saint Joseph, to Our Lady, to the people.... And Anna went about chatting here and there, saying: “It is he! It is he!”, and she recounted the dream of her life. And this is what the Lord asks of us today: to be grandfathers. To transmit this vitality to young people, because young people are expecting it from us; not to withdraw, to give of our best: they are waiting for our experience, for our positive dreams so as to carry out the prophecy and the work.

I ask the Lord for all of us, that He grant us this grace. Also for those who have not yet become grandfathers: we see that the President [of the Bishops] of Brazil is

a young man, ... but he will get there! The grace to be grandfathers, the grace to dream, and to pass on this dream to our young people: they need it.

*(Cfr. Homily, Holy Mass on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the episcopal ordination of the Holy Father, Rome 27 June 2017)*

This interior sense of having received a legacy that needs to be enriched and passed on: this is the apostolic spirit of a presbyterate. Young people need to know that the world did not begin with them, that they have to find their roots, their historical and religious roots... and to let those roots grow and bear fruit. Teach the young not to be rootless; teach them to talk with the elderly. When I came here today, the minor seminarians were here to greet me. I should have asked them two quick questions, but I only asked one, the first and most natural one: “Do you play soccer?” Everyone said, “Yes!”. But the second would have been: “Do you go and visit your “grandparents”, your elderly priests? To listen to the story of their lives and their apostolate?”. Seminary formators should train young seminarians to listen to elderly priests: that is where their roots are; that is where the wisdom of the Church is found.

*(Cfr. Address the bishops Bangladesh, Dhaka 1 December 2017)*

You are the embers, the embers of the world under the ashes: under the difficulties, under the wars are these embers, embers of faith, embers of hope, embers of hidden joy. Please, keep the embers, the ones you have in your heart, with your testimony. With the problems that are there, with the problems that will come, but be aware that I have a mission, in the world and in the Church: to carry forward this hidden fire, the fire of a life. Because your life has not been useless: it has been fire, fire, it has given warmth, it has done many things. But the fire eventually goes out and the embers remain. Do not forget: you are the embers of the world, the embers of the Church to keep the fire burning.

*(Cfr. Meeting with the elderly and sick, Rome, February 25, 2018)*

A society – listen carefully to this! – a society that does not value grandparents is a society that has no future. A Church that is not mindful of the covenant between generations will end up lacking the thing that really matters, which is love. Our grandparents teach us the meaning of conjugal and parental love. They themselves grew up in a family and experienced the love of sons and daughters, brothers and sisters. So they are a treasury of experience, a treasury of wisdom for the new generation. It is a big mistake not to ask the elderly about their experience, or to think that talking to them is a waste of time.

*(Cfr. Address on the occasion feast of families in the IX World Meeting of Families, Dublin 25 August 2018)*

Speak with the elderly, talk to grandparents: they are the roots, the roots of your concreteness, the roots of your growing, blossoming and bearing fruit. Remember: if the tree is by itself, it will not bear fruit. All that blossoms on the tree comes from what is underground. This expression is from a poet, it is not mine. But it is the truth. Stick to the roots, but do not remain there. Take the roots and bring them forth to bear fruit, and you too will become roots for others. Do not forget about the photograph, the one with grandfather. Talk to your grandparents; talk to the elderly and this will make you happy.

*(Cfr. Address at the occasion of the meeting with young people and synod fathers, Vatican October 6 2018)*

Let me tell you something. On my first day here I saw a woman with a bonnet, an elderly lady, a grandmother, at the barrier where we were driving by, and she had a sign saying: “We grandmothers also know how to make a mess” with the words added below, “with wisdom”. Join the grandparents to make a mess, it will be a real mess, a really clever mess, don’t be frightened of it, go out and speak. I thought the lady was quite elderly and so I asked her age: she was 14 years younger than me, what an embarrassment!

*(Cfr. Meeting with the WYD 2019 volunteers, Panama 27 January 2019)*

If we call to mind our original meeting with the Lord, we become aware that it did not arise as something private between us and God. No, it blossomed in the context of a believing people, alongside many brothers and sisters, at precise times and places. The Gospel tells us this, showing how *the encounter takes place within the people of God*, in its concrete history, in its living traditions: in the temple, according to the law, in the context of prophecy, in young and old together (cf *Lk 2, 25-28, 34*). It is like this too in the consecrated life: it blossoms and flourishes in the Church; if it is isolated, it withers. It matures when the young and elderly walk together, when the young rediscover their roots and the elderly welcome those fruits. When we walk alone, however, when we remain fixated on the past or jump ahead in trying to survive, then the consecrated life stagnates.

*(Cfr. Homily, 23rd World day for Consecrated Life Roma, 2 February 2019)*

Elderly people, on a social level, should not be considered as a burden, but for what they really are, that is, a resource and a wealth. They are the memory of a people! This is demonstrated by their contribution to voluntary activities, precious opportunities to live the dimension of gratuitousness. Healthy elderly people can offer a few hours of their time to care for people in need, thus enriching themselves. (...)

And so we come to the second aspect: old age as the season of *dialogue*. The future of a people necessarily presupposes a dialogue and an encounter between the elderly and the young for the construction of a society that is more just, more beautiful, more supportive, more Christian. Young people are the strength of a people's journey and the elderly strengthen this further with their memory and wisdom. Old age is a time of grace, in which the Lord renews His call to us: He calls us to preserve and pass on our faith, He calls us to pray, especially to intercede; He calls us to be close to those in need. The elderly and grandparents have a unique and special ability to grasp the most problematic situations. And when they pray for these situations, their prayer is strong, it is powerful! Grandparents, who have been

blessed to see their children's children (cf. *Ps* 128, 6), are entrusted with a great task: to transmit the experience of life, the history of a family, a community, a people.

*(Cfr. Address to the Membres of the Italian National Association of Senior Workers, Rome 16 December 2019)*

[16] Nonetheless, young people are also urged “to accept the authority of those who are older” (*1 Pet* 5:5). The Bible never ceases to insist that profound respect be shown to the elderly, since they have a wealth of experience; they have known success and failure, life's joys and afflictions, its dreams and disappointments. In the silence of their heart, they have a store of experiences that can teach us not to make mistakes or be taken in by false promises. An ancient sage asks us to respect certain limits and to master our impulses: “Urge the younger men to be self-controlled” (*Tit* 2.6). It is unhelpful to buy into the cult of youth or foolishly to dismiss others simply because they are older or from another generation. Jesus tells us that the wise are able to bring forth from their store things both new and old (cf. *Mt* 13:52). A wise young person is open to the future, yet still capable of learning something from the experience of others.

[187] At the Synod, we heard that “the young are focused on the future and they face life with energy and dynamism. But they are also tempted... to give little attention to the memory of the past from which they come, in particular the many gifts transmitted to them by their parents, their grandparents and the cultural experience of the society in which they live. Helping the young to discover the living richness of the past, to treasure its memory and to make use of it for their choices and opportunities, is a genuine act of love towards them, for the sake of their growth and the decisions they are called to make”.

[188] The word of God encourages us to remain close to the elderly, so that we can benefit from their experience: “Stand in the assembly of the elders. Who is wise? Cling to him... If you see an intelligent man, visit him; let your foot wear out his doorstep” (*Sir* 6:34.36). In every case, the long years they lived and all they have

experienced in life should make us look to them with respect: “You shall rise up before the hoary head” (*Lev 19:32*). For “the glory of young men is their strength, but the beauty of old men is their grey hair” (*Prov 20:29*).

[192] The prophecy of Joel contains a verse that expresses this nicely: “I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams” (3:1; cf. *Acts 2:17*). When young and old alike are open to the Holy Spirit, they make a wonderful combination. The old dream dreams, and the young see visions. How do the two complement one another?

[193] The elderly have dreams built up of memories and images that bear the mark of their long experience. If young people sink roots in those dreams, they can peer into the future; they can have visions that broaden their horizons and show them new paths. But if the elderly do not dream, young people lose clear sight of the horizon.

[194] Perhaps our parents have preserved a memory that can help us imagine the dream our grandparents dreamed for us. All of us, even before our birth, received, as a blessing from our grandparents, a dream filled with love and hope, the dream of a better life. Even if not our grandparents, surely some of our great-grandparents had that happy dream as they contemplated their children and then grandchildren in the cradle. The very first dream of all is the creative dream of God our Father, which precedes and accompanies the lives of all his children. The memory of this blessing that extends from generation to generation is a precious legacy that we should keep alive so that we too can pass it on.

[195] That is why it is a good thing to let older people tell their long stories, which sometimes seem legendary or fanciful – they are the dreams of old people – yet are often full of rich experiences, of eloquent symbols, of hidden messages. These stories take time to tell, and we should be prepared to listen patiently and let them sink in, even though they are much longer than what we are used to in social media. We have to realize that the wisdom needed for life bursts the confines of our present-day media resources.

[197] What can we elderly persons give to the young? “We can remind today’s young people, who have their own blend of heroic ambitions and insecurities, that a life without love is an arid life”. What can we tell them? “We can tell fearful young people that anxiety about the future can be overcome”. What can we teach them? “We can teach those young people, sometimes so focused on themselves, that there is more joy in giving than in receiving, and that love is not only shown in words, but also in actions”.

[199] If we journey together, young and old, we can be firmly rooted in the present, and from here, revisit the past and look to the future. To revisit the past in order to learn from history and heal old wounds that at times still trouble us. To look to the future in order to nourish our enthusiasm, cause dreams to emerge, awaken prophecies and enable hope to blossom. Together, we can learn from one another, warm hearts, inspire minds with the light of the Gospel, and lend new strength to our hands.

[201] During the Synod, one of the young auditors from the Samoan Islands spoke of the Church as a canoe, in which the elderly help to keep on course by judging the position of the stars, while the young keep rowing, imagining what waits for them ahead. Let us steer clear of young people who think that adults represent a meaningless past, and those adults who always think they know how young people should act. Instead, let us all climb aboard the same canoe and together seek a better world, with the constantly renewed momentum of the Holy Spirit.

*(Cfr. Post-synodal apostolic Exhortation Christus vivit, 25 March 2019)*

It is nice to think how grandparents can set an example for young people, by showing them how to take the path of prayer. The wisdom of the elderly, their experience and *capacity to ‘reason’ with the heart*. Someone might say: “But Father, we reason with the head!”. No, it is not true: we reason with the head and with the heart; it is an ability that we must develop. The capacity to reason with the heart. And these experiences of the elderly are a precious lesson in order to learn a fruitful methodology in the prayer of intercession.

*(Cfr. Address to International Meeting of the Pope's Worldwide Prayer Network, Vatican 28 June 2019)*

*Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

I cordially welcome you, participants in the first International Congress on the Pastoral Care of the Elderly, entitled, “The richness of many years”, organized by the Dicastery for the Laity, Family and Life, and I thank Cardinal Farrell for his kind words.

The “richness of many years” is a richness of people, of each individual person who has many years of life, experience and history behind them. It is the precious treasure that takes form in the life journey of each man and woman, whatever their origin, provenance, and economic or social condition. Life is a gift, and when it is long it is a privilege, for each one and for others. Always, it is always so.

In the 21st century, old age has become one of the distinctive features of humanity. Over a span of just a few decades, the demographic pyramid which was once based on a large number of children and young people and had at the top just a few elderly people — has been reversed. If once the elderly could have populated a small state, nowadays they could populate an entire continent. In this regard, the enormous number of elderly people constitutes a novelty for every social and geographic environment worldwide. In addition, the different seasons of life culminate in old age: for many, it is the stage in which productive effort ceases, strength declines and the signs of illness, the need for help, and social withdrawal appear; but for many it is the beginning of a long period of psycho-physical well-being and freedom from work commitments.

In both situations, how should these years be lived? What meaning can be given to this phase of life, which for many people may be long? Social disorientation and, in many respects, the indifference and rejection that our societies manifest towards the elderly demand not only of the Church, but of all of us, a serious reflection to learn to grasp and to appreciate the value of old age. Indeed, while on the one hand States are called to confront the new demographic situation at the economic

level, on the other, civil society needs values and meaning for the third and fourth senior stages. And here, above all, is where the ecclesial community can contribute.

That is why I welcomed with interest the initiative of this conference, which focused its attention on pastoral care for the elderly and initiated a reflection on the implications of a substantial presence of grandparents in our parishes and societies. I ask that this does not remain an isolated initiative, but that it instead mark the beginning of a journey of pastoral exploration and discernment. We need to change our pastoral habits in order to respond to the presence of so many older people in families and communities.

In the Bible, longevity is a blessing. It confronts us with our fragility, with our mutual dependence, with our family and community ties, and above all with our divine sonship. In granting old age, God the Father gives us time to deepen our knowledge of him, our intimacy with him, to enter ever more into his heart and to surrender ourselves to him. This is the time to prepare ourselves to deliver our spirit into his hands, definitively, with childlike trust. But it is also a time of renewed fruitfulness. “They still bring forth fruit in old age” says the psalmist (Ps 92[91]:14). God’s plan of salvation, in fact, is also carried out in the poverty of weak, sterile and powerless bodies. From the barren womb of Sarah and the centenarian body of Abraham the Chosen People was born (cf. Rom 4:18-20). From Elizabeth and the aged Zechariah, John the Baptist was born. The elderly person, even when weak, can become an instrument of the history of salvation.

Aware of this irreplaceable role of the elderly, the Church becomes a place where generations are called to share in God’s plan of love, in a relationship of the mutual exchange of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. This intergenerational sharing obliges us to consider older people differently, to learn to look to the future together with them.

When we think of the elderly and talk about them, especially in the pastoral dimension, we must learn to alter the tenses of verbs a little. There is not only the past, as if, for the elderly, there were only a life behind them and a mouldy archive. No. The Lord can and wants to write with them also new pages, pages of holiness,

of service, of prayer.... Today I wish to tell you that the elderly *are also the present and the future* of the Church. Yes, they are also the future of a Church that, together with the young, prophesies and dreams! This is why it is so important that those advanced in years and the young speak to each other, it is so important.

The prophecy of the elderly takes place when the light of the Gospel enters fully into their lives; when, like Simeon and Anne, they take Jesus in their arms and announce the *revolution of tenderness*, the Good News of the One who came into the world to bring the light of the Father. That is why I ask you not to spare yourselves in proclaiming the Gospel to grandparents and the elders. Go to them with a smile on your lips and the Gospel in your hands. Go out into the streets of your parishes and seek out the elderly who live alone. Old age is not an illness, it is a privilege! Loneliness can be an illness, but with charity, closeness and spiritual comfort we can heal it.

God has a large population of grandparents throughout the world. Nowadays, in secularized societies in many countries, parents do not have, for the most part, the Christian formation and living faith that the grandparents have which they can pass on to their grandchildren. They are the indispensable link in educating children and young people in the faith. We must get used to including them in our pastoral horizons and to considering them, in a non-episodic way, as one of the vital components of our communities. They are not only people whom we are called to safeguard. They can be the protagonists of a pastoral evangelizing ministry, privileged witnesses of God's faithful love.

For this I thank all of you who dedicate your pastoral energy to grandparents and the elderly. I know well that your commitment and your reflection are born of real friendship with many elderly people. I hope that what is today the sensitivity of the few will become the patrimony of every ecclesial community. Do not be afraid, take initiatives, help your bishops and your dioceses to promote the pastoral service to and with older people. Do not be discouraged, keep going! The Dicastery for the Laity, Family and Life will continue to be at your side in this task.

I too accompany you with my prayer and my blessing. And please, do not forget to pray for me. Thank you!

*(Address of his Holiness Pope Francis to participants in the International Congress "The Richness of Many Years of Life", Rome 31 January 2020)*

Today I would like us to pray for the elderly who are suffering in a particular way at this moment: with great inner solitude, many times with a lot of fear. Let us pray to the Lord that He might be near our grandparents and all the elderly, that He might give strength to those who have given us wisdom, life, our story. May we also be near them with our prayer.

*(Cfr Mass in the Domus Sanctae Marthae, 17 March 2020)*

Dear brothers and sisters, on the memorial of Saints Joachim and Anne, Jesus' 'grandparents', I would like to invite the young to perform a gesture of tenderness towards the elderly, especially the loneliest, in their homes and in residences, those who have not seen their loved ones for many months. Dear young people, each one of these elderly people is your grandparent! Do not leave them by themselves. Use the inventiveness of love, make telephone calls, video calls, send messages, listen to them and, where possible, in compliance with healthcare regulations, go to visit them too. Send them a hug. They are your roots. An uprooted tree cannot grow; it does not blossom or bear fruit. This is why the bond and connection with your roots is important. 'The blossom of a tree comes from what it has underground', says a poet from my homeland. Therefore I invite you to give a big round of applause for our grandparents, everyone!

*(Cfr. Angelus, 26 July 2020)*

Dear brothers and sisters, the day after tomorrow, 2 February, we will celebrate the feast of the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple, when Simeon and Anna, both elderly, enlightened by the Holy Spirit, recognized Jesus as the Messiah. The Holy Spirit still stirs up thoughts and words of wisdom in the elderly today: their voice is

precious because it sings the praises of God and safeguards the roots of peoples. They remind us that old age is a gift and that grandparents are the link between generations, passing on the experience of life and faith to the young. Grandparents are often forgotten and we forget this wealth of preserving roots and passing on.

This is why, I have decided to establish *World Day for Grandparents and the Elderly*, which will be held throughout the Church every year on the fourth Sunday of July, close to the feast of Saints Joachim and Anne, Jesus' "grandparents". It is important for grandparents to meet their grandchildren and for grandchildren to meet their grandparents, because — as the prophet Joel says — grandparents, before their grandchildren, will dream, and have illusions [great desires], and young people, taking strength from their grandparents, will go forward and prophesy. And 2 February is indeed the feast of the encounter between grandparents and their grandchildren.

*(Cfr. Angelus, 31 January 2021)*