
Pope Francis: “That love helped us grow into adulthood”

In the homily prepared by the Pope for the first World Day of Grandparents and the Elderly, which he called for as a widespread celebration, i.e. lived out and celebrated not only in Rome but in all the world's dioceses, the Holy Father called on all the faithful to reflect on three moments: Jesus sees the crowd's hunger; Jesus shares the bread; Jesus asks that the leftovers be collected - and three verbs: to see, to share, to preserve. The text was read out by Msgr. Rino Fisichella, president of the Pontifical Council for Promoting the New Evangelisation to a crowd of approximately 2,000 people gathered in St Peter's Basilica, mainly grandparents and their grandchildren, while Francis is in the process of recovering from colon surgery. At the opening of the Eucharistic celebration, Monsignor Fisichella announced that Pope Francis would greet the faithful at the Angelus prayer. The Holy Father appeared from his window overlooking the square and asked for a round of applause for all the grandparents: “Without dialogue between young people and their grandparents, history does not move forward, life does not move forward”, said the Pontiff: “I ask the Lord that this feast may help those of us who are older to respond to His call in this season of life, and show society the value of the presence of grandparents and the elderly, especially in this throwaway culture.” **“Jesus looked up and saw the crowds, who were hungry after having travelled so far to see him”**, Francis remarked citing the Gospel passage on the multiplication of the loaves and fish: “That is how the miracle begins: with the gaze of Jesus, who is neither indifferent nor too busy to sense the hunger felt by a weary humanity. Jesus cares about us; he is concerned for us; he wants to satisfy our hunger for life, love and happiness.” “In his eyes, we see God's own way of seeing things”, the Pope said:

“in God's eyes, there are no anonymous crowds, only individuals with their own hunger and thirst.”

“Jesus' gaze is contemplative. He looks into our lives; he sees and understands.” Francis recalled: “our grandparents and the elderly have looked at our lives with that same gaze. That is how they cared for us, ever since we were children. Despite lives of hard work and sacrifice, they were never too busy for us, or indifferent to us. They looked at us with care and tender love. When we were growing up and felt misunderstood or fearful about life's challenges, they kept an eye on us; they knew what we were feeling, our hidden tears and secret dreams.

They held us in their arms and sat us on their knees. That love helped us grow into adulthood,”

“And what about us? How do we see our grandparents and elderly persons? When was the last time we visited or telephoned an elderly person in order to show our closeness and to benefit from what they have to tell us?”, are the Pope's pressing questions for our examination of conscience. I worry when I see a society full of people in constant motion, too caught up in their own affairs to have time for a glance, a greeting or a hug.” *“I worry about a society where individuals are simply part of a nameless crowd, where we can no longer look up and recognize one another.”* “Our grandparents, who nourished our own lives, now hunger for our attention and our love; they long for our closeness”, the Pope's appeal: “Let us lift up our eyes and see them, even as Jesus sees us.” **“Today, we need a new covenant between young and old.** We need to share the treasure of life, to dream together, to overcome conflicts between generations and to prepare a future for everyone”, the Pope remarked. “Without such a covenantal sharing of life, dreams and future, we risk dying of hunger, as broken relationships, loneliness, selfishness and the forces of disintegration gradually increase,” Francis cautioned:

“In our societies, we have frequently surrendered to the notion of ‘every man for

himself'. But this is deadly!

The Gospel bids us share what we are and what we possess, for only in this way will we find fulfilment.” The Holy Father thus highlighted the topical relevance of the prophecy of Joel: “Young and old together. In society and in the Church, together.” *“Grandparents and the elderly are not leftovers from life, scraps to be discarded”, is Francis’ warning call. “They are precious pieces of bread left on the table of life that can still nourish us with a fragrance that we have lost, ‘the fragrance of mercy and of memory’.* Let us not lose the memory preserved by the elderly, for we are children of that history, and without roots, we will wither. They protected us as we grew, and now it is up to us to protect their lives, to alleviate their difficulties, to attend to their needs and to ensure that they are helped in daily life and not feel alone.” “Let us ask ourselves: ‘Have I visited my grandparents, my elderly relatives, the older people in my neighbourhood? Have I listened to them? Have I spent time with them?’ Let us protect them, so that nothing of their lives and dreams may be lost. May we never regret that we were insufficiently attentive to those who loved us and gave us life.”

“Grandparents and the elderly are bread that nourishes our life”,

Francis said in the concluding lines of the homily: “We are grateful to them for the watchful eyes that cared for us, the arms that held us and the knees on which we sat. For the hands that held our own and lifted us up, for the games they played with us and for the comfort of their caress. Please, let us not forget about them. Let us covenant with them. Let us learn to approach them, listen to them and never discard them. Let us cherish them and spend time with them. We will be the better for it.”

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