



## World Day for Grandparents and the Elderly

On one occasion, St. Teresa of Calcutta visited a well-run nursing home where good food, medical care and other facilities were offered to the elderly. As she moved among the elderly, she noticed that none of them smiled unless she touched them and smiled at them first. She also noticed that many of them kept glancing expectantly towards the door while listening to her. When she asked one of the nurses why this was so, she was told: “They are looking for a visit from someone related to them. But, except for an occasional visit, birthday gift or a get-well card, this never happens.”

The scripture readings on the first World Day for Grandparents and the Elderly, invite us to show concern, mercy and compassion for each other, invite us to become humble instruments in God’s hands by sharing our blessings with our needy brothers and sisters. St. Paul reminds the people of Ephesus, having been baptized in Christ, they have the same Father, and therefore they all are brothers and sisters, forming one family of God. He lays great stress on Christian unity which is the essence of the faith. If the people preserve this unity, they will prove themselves worthy of their Christian vocation, and fraternal love and peace will reign among them. So, he begs the people of Ephesus to live according to the Christian faith, live with the virtues of humility, patience and bearing with one another’s shortcomings.

We live in a world together with others before God. Relationships are an important part of being human. The pandemic has isolated the grandparents and the elderly from their families, from their loved ones. But for sure they are not isolated from Jesus, as His promise is “I am with you always” (Mt 28:20). A man brought to Elisha twenty loaves of barley and fresh ears of grain in his sack (2 Kings 4:42-44). And a boy gave to Jesus five loaves of bread and two fish (Jn 6:1-15). They shared their food with others. They did not worry about their own needs but were willing to give up whatever little they had for the good of others, knowing that was the best thing

to do. Like the man and the little boy, grandparents and the elderly offer everything they can for the good of their families and they do it out of love. Divine intervention and human cooperation resulted in a miracle; a crowd of people were fed to the full. They also teach us how to satisfy the deeper hunger of our life. More than the hunger for food, humanity today is also challenged to satisfy the deeper hunger in life, for love, mercy, forgiveness, companionship, peace, and fulfillment. Truly, it is in giving that we receive no doubt that they enjoy heavenly bliss. Hence, both incidents show us the great love and interest of God in His children. Miracles can happen in our life too. For Jesus to work miracles in our lives, we need to provide our share of bread and fish. It may be meager, but it does not matter. Only when we do what we can, Jesus will do what we can't. Pope Francis says, even the most impoverished and frail of us possesses those two fishes of love and prayer. To pray is a vocation accessible to all. The Pope quotes Benedict XVI when speaking of prayer as a specific mission of the elderly: "the prayer of the elderly can protect the world and help it perhaps more incisively than the toil of so many. Your prayer is a most precious resource: it is a lung of which the Church and the world cannot be deprived, especially at this time, your intercession for the world and for the Church is not in vain, but shows everyone the serene confidence of having a firm foothold". Pope Francis also emphasized that the vocation of the Third Age is to "guard the roots, transmit the faith to young people and take care of the little ones".

The grandparents of Jesus, Saints Joachim and Anne were prayerful, generous and grateful people. They were righteous in the eyes of God. Being childless they were insulted and laughed at by their neighbors. Their life was considered useless. They persevered in prayer and only after twenty years of marriage were blessed with a child. They were generous parents; they dedicated some portion of their wealth and resources to help the poor and the needy. They were grateful to God, and dedicated their child to His service. The Blessed Virgin Mary was a blessing not only to them but to the whole world. Grandparents and the elderly have these virtues which young ones need to appreciate. The young generation has the unique opportunity to learn from the lived experience of the grandparents and the elderly. It's said, it's good to give a bouquet of flowers when a person is alive, rather than when the person is dead and gone. Let us remember, "*Alone I can say but together we can talk. Alone I can enjoy but together we can celebrate. Alone I can smile but together we can laugh. That's the beauty of human Relations. We are nothing without each other.*"

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