

Speech of Vittorio Scelzo

Good morning everyone.

Today, in addition to the Holy Father's message, we are also presenting you the logo for the *World Day for Grandparents and the Elderly*. The need to create a logo stems from the experience of the first edition of the *Day* that - alongside the Roman celebration - was experienced, in a way that was unexpected for us, in many diocesan, parish and associative realities. After me, Maria Francis from Bangalore will tell what was done in India. This is what we would like to see happen again this year. Such a multifaceted experience needed a unifying element - a symbol - to help lead the multiplicity of gestures made back to a single shared vision.

Pope Francis, in the Angelus in which he announced the call for the *Day*, described it as a "feast of encounter" and, for this reason, we chose an embrace as the event's logo. In it we can read the bond, on which the Holy Father insists so much, between grandparents and their grandchildren, but the embrace could also be two spouses aged in years, but grown in mutual love; or two elderly women who, given the decline in strength and limited resources, choose to live together to support each other; or even a young man who goes to meet an elderly man alone to celebrate World Day for Grandparents and the Elderly. The logo also hides the nostalgia of when we could embrace each other with freedom and expresses the desire that we can soon resume doing so even in places where it is still inexplicably forbidden.

Old age is the season of life in which the value of bonds is most evident and in which we understand how loneliness is always an evil - "It is not good for man to be alone," says Scripture - and often, as we saw during the pandemic, kills. For this reason, the embrace of the Church, also through the celebration of *World Day for Grandparents and the Elderly*, wants to be stronger than any loneliness and the hope we formulate is that every community finds a way to reach out to everyone. "I ask you," says the Pope, to seek out those elderly persons who feel most alone, at home or in residences where they live. Let us make sure that no one feels alone on this day. Expecting a visit can transform those days when we think we have nothing to look forward to; from an initial encounter, a new friendship can emerge. Visiting the elderly who live alone is a work of mercy in our time!"

The visitation - alongside the celebration of a Mass dedicated to the elderly on July 24 - is the heart of the *Day's* celebration. It is a clear sign of the outgoing Church and the desire to celebrate with everyone. Accepting the Holy Father's suggestion, we propose that in every parish an effort be made to visit all the elderly in the area, especially those who are most alone. The embrace is also the alternative to the throwaway culture

There is, then, a social dimension of the embrace to which His Eminence, Card. Farrell has already mentioned: it is what the Pope calls the *revolution of tenderness*. This is a profound change in our societies that the Holy Father has been hoping for some time and which, at this juncture marked by the war in Ukraine, takes on added value. Faced with a world in which words are becoming increasingly harsh and walls between people continue to rise, the proposal of meekness as a way of being emerges. The message speaks of the need to "demilitarize hearts" as if to purify an air polluted by the rhetoric of the enemy and by opposing attitudes. In this regard, the message contains an urgent invitation to the elderly to pray for peace, which is accompanied by the request made after last Sunday's Angelus to recite the Rosary every day in May for reconciliation in Ukraine.

The frailty of the elderly - and also their surrender to the need for someone to take care of them - shows that self-sufficiency is always a dangerous illusion. The embrace, in this case, can be that of someone who supports their uncertain gait and keeps them from falling. "We are not saved alone," writes the Holy Father, "happiness is a bread that we break together. Let us bear witness to this before those who wrongly think that they can find personal fulfilment and success in conflict. Everyone, even the weakest among us, can do this. The very fact that we allow ourselves to be cared for – often by people who come from other countries – is itself a way of saying that living together in peace is not only possible, but necessary". And what is true for individuals is also true for nations.

The *World Day for Grandparents and Elderly*, in this 2022 marked by war, wants to be a time to live the Church outgoing and to indicate quietly a way: to become - elderly and not - "artisans of the revolution of tenderness, so that together we can set the world free from the spectre of loneliness and the demon of war."