

Holy See Press Office

Presentation of the first *World Day of Grandparents and the Elderly*, and the *Message* prepared by the Holy Father for the occasion

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Address of Cardinal Kevin Farrell

Prefect of the Dicastery for the Laity, Family and Life

The *World Day for Grandparents and the Elderly* is a celebration. We really needed it: after such a difficult year we truly need to celebrate, grandparents and grandchildren, young and old. "We should celebrate and rejoice" says the Father in the parable. A new page opens after dramatic months of difficulty. Pope Francis invites us to take a step further, he speaks to us of tenderness. Tenderness towards the elderly is needed because, as the Holy Father recalls in the message we present to you today, the Virus "has been much harsher with them". For this reason, the Pope hopes that an angel will visit, and will come down to console them in their solitude, and he imagines that this angel looks like a young person who visits an elderly person.

On the other hand, the *Day* also speaks to us of the tenderness that grandparents show towards their grandchildren, of the solid guide that the elderly can be for many disoriented children, especially in a time like the one we are living in, in which personal interaction has become rare.

Tenderness is not just a private feeling, one that soothes wounds, but a way of relating to others, which should also be experienced in public. We have become accustomed to living alone, to not hugging each other, to considering the other as a threat to our health. Our societies, the Pope tells us in *Fratelli Tutti (All Brothers)*, are now fragmented.

Tenderness can become a way of life, which stems from the heart, from the gaze of compassion, and is converted into thoughts and actions imbued with authentic charity. "I am with you always" - the theme of the Day that we are about to celebrate - is the promise that each one of us has received from the Lord and that each one of us is called to repeat to his brothers and sisters.

Tenderness has a social value, affirmed in the Celebration of this Day. It is a remedy we all need and our elderly are those who can provide it. In a frayed and hardened society emerging from the pandemic, not only is there a need for vaccines and economic recovery (albeit fundamental), but also for relearning the art of relationships. In this, grandparents and the elderly can be our teachers. This is also why they are so important.

The message we present today is both loving and demanding towards grandparents and the elderly. The Holy Father addresses them with affectionate words, but also announces to them the call to "a renewed vocation in a crucial time in history". There are three elements that characterize this call: "dreams, memory and prayer". The Lord's closeness - says the Pope - will give the strength even to the most fragile among us to embark upon a new path, along the paths of dreams, memory and prayer". However, what appears to be most relevant is not so much how this vocation is declined, rather the fact that they are considered the recipients of a specific call.

In the Church, grandparents and the elderly have a place of honor, and the *Day* we celebrate intends to reaffirm this. In pastoral care, each of our communities is invited to not consider the elderly as customers of our social services, rather to consider them as the protagonists of our programs and to enhance their spirituality. Putting grandparents and the elderly at the center, grasping the value of their presence is also the only true alternative to a throwaway culture. The opposite of waste is not only the works of charity (albeit necessary), but

pastoral attention, in the awareness of the value they represent for families, the Church and society.

Now I would like to focus on a theme dear to the Holy Father: the wisdom of the elderly. Insisting on wisdom does not stem from the idea that elderly people are endowed with greater wisdom than others, rather they have an experiential wisdom – the wisdom of many years of life.

The elderly are a great resource for getting out of a crisis, better and not worse. This is above all to help us understand that what we are experiencing is not the first crisis, nor will it be the last, and that the story of mankind is placed in a history that transcends them. In the message, the Pope tells every elderly person that "it is necessary that you too bear witness that it is possible to come out renewed from a trial experience" and he cites, as an example, the experience of war, through which so many have lived.

Not disdaining the older generation means not being overwhelmed by the present. The obstacles we experience today and that seem insurmountable acquire the right proportions when viewed in the long-term perspective. It is in this sense that the experience of the elderly can help young people: help them to understand their own life in a more detached and realistic manner, with the carefulness necessary for making good choices. How many times has a grandparent helped a grandchild understand that a seemingly great disappointment is just a new path that the Lord is pointing to.

Similarly, shouldn't knowing that the Church was born from the experience of generations of Christians, who preceded and nourished us with their faith, lead us to understand that the crises we experience are only steps along the journey of a people throughout history? Pope Francis dedicated some important passages of "*Fratelli Tutti*" precisely to the need to not lose historical awareness, valuing grandparents, who are the voice and presence of this awareness.

I hope that the *World Day for Grandparents and the Elderly* helps us to grow in our love for the elderly and to discover them as teachers of tenderness, guardians over our roots and dispensers of wisdom. For our part, the whole Church repeats to every grandparent and to every elder: “we will be with you always”, until the end of time.