

## Pope Francis on first Grandparents' Day: Elderly are not 'leftovers from life'



On the first World Day for Grandparents and the Elderly, Pope Francis said he is worried about how an individualistic society treats its older members, and he urged young people to give them love and attention.

“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,” the pope said in a homily read by Archbishop Rino Fisichella July 25.

“Our grandparents, who nourished our own lives, now hunger for our attention and our love; they long for our closeness. Let us lift up our eyes and see them, even as Jesus sees us,” he stated.

Pope Francis’ homily was read during a Mass for around 2,500 elderly people and grandparents, together with their children and grandchildren, held in St. Peter’s Basilica.

The Mass, scheduled to be said by the pope, was instead celebrated by Fisichella, the president of the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization, while Pope Francis is convalescing at the Vatican after undergoing colon surgery on July 4.

During July, Francis typically takes a break from public audiences and other meetings, though he has continued to give his weekly Sunday Angelus address.

In the pope's homily, he reflected on the Gospel passage from St. John, which recounts the story of when Jesus fed multitudes through the miracle of the five loaves and two fishes.

Francis pointed to the last part of the passage, when Jesus directed his disciples to collect the leftover pieces of bread, so that "nothing may be lost."

"This reveals the heart of God," he said. "Not only does he give us more than we need, he is also concerned that nothing be lost, not even a fragment."

"A morsel of bread may seem a little thing, but in God's eyes, nothing is to be thrown away. Even more so, no person is ever to be discarded," he explained, adding that our grandparents and elderly "are not leftovers from life, scraps to be discarded."

In January, Pope Francis established the World Day for Grandparents and the Elderly, to take place annually on the fourth Sunday of July, close to the feast of the grandparents of Jesus, Saints Anne and Joachim.

The theme of this year's grandparents' day is "I am with you always," taken from Matthew.

In a message released ahead of this year's celebration, Pope Francis encouraged the elderly to continue to spread the Gospel even in their old age.

"There is something beautiful here. Your prayer is a very precious resource: a deep breath that the Church and the world urgently need," he stated.

In his homily July 25, Francis said the Church needs "a new covenant between young and old." When Jesus fed the hungry crowd, he did so using loaves and fishes shared by a young man, he pointed out. "How touching it is, that at the heart of this miracle, by which some five thousand adults were fed, we find a young person willing to share what he had."

"In our societies, we have frequently surrendered to the notion of 'every man for himself.' But this is deadly," he said. "The Gospel bids us share what we are and what we possess, for only in this way will we find fulfillment."

He urged young adults to visit their grandparents, their elderly relatives, and the older people in their neighborhood.

"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," he said.

Pope Francis noted that for many of us, our grandparents “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,” he continued. “They held us in their arms and sat us on their knees. That love helped us grow into adulthood.”

“May we never regret that we were insufficiently attentive to those who loved us and gave us life,” he stated.

As part of the first World Day for Grandparents and the Elderly, the Vatican has also granted a plenary indulgence to those who participate, either by attending a related spiritual event or by physically or virtually visiting the elderly, sick, or disabled on July 25. An indulgence is the remission of the temporal punishment due to sins that have already been forgiven.

The usual conditions for a plenary indulgence, which must be met, are that the individual be in the state of grace by the completion of the acts, have complete detachment from sin, and pray for the pope’s intentions.

The Dicastery for Laity, Family, and Life released a prayer for the World Day of Grandparents and the Elderly. The full text of the prayer is below:

*I thank You, Lord,  
for the comfort of Your presence:  
even in times of loneliness,  
You are my hope and my confidence,  
You have been my rock and my fortress since my youth!  
I thank You for having given me a family  
and for having blessed me with a long life.  
I thank You for moments of joy and difficulty,  
for the dreams that have already come true in my life and for those that are still ahead of me.  
I thank You for this time of renewed fruitfulness to which You call me.  
Increase, O Lord, my faith,  
make me a channel of your peace,  
teach me to embrace those who suffer more than me,  
to never stop dreaming  
and to tell of your wonders to new generations.  
Protect and guide Pope Francis and the Church,  
that the light of the Gospel might reach the ends of the earth.*

*Send Your Spirit, O Lord, to renew the world,  
that the storm of the pandemic might be calmed,  
the poor consoled and wars ended.*

*Sustain me in weakness  
and help me to live life to the full  
in each moment that You give me,  
in the certainty that you are with me every day,  
even until the end of the age.*

*Amen.*