



The Holy See

WORLD DAY FOR GRANDPARENTS AND THE ELDERLY

HOLY MASS

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS

*St Peter's Basilica
Sunday, 25 July 2021*

[Multimedia]

Brothers and Sisters, I have the pleasure and honour of reading out the homily that Pope Francis prepared for this occasion.

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[H.E. Msgr. Rino Fisichella read the homily Pope Francis had prepared for the occasion]

As he sat down to teach, Jesus “looked up and saw a large crowd coming toward him. He said to Philip: ‘Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?’” (*Jn* 6:5). Jesus did not just teach the crowd; he was also alert to the hunger present in their lives. In response, he fed them with five barley loaves and two fish provided by a young man nearby. Afterwards, since there was bread left over, he told his disciples to gather up the fragments, “so that nothing may be lost” (v. 12).

On this Day devoted to grandparents and the elderly, let us reflect on those three moments: Jesus sees the crowd’s hunger; Jesus shares the bread; Jesus asks that the leftovers be collected. Three moments that can be summed up in three verbs: *to see, to share, to preserve*.

The first one: *to see*. At the start of his account, the evangelist John points out that Jesus looked up and saw the crowds, who were hungry after having traveled so far to see him. 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. His gaze is caring; he is sensitive to us and to the hopes we hold in our hearts. It recognizes our weariness and the hope that keeps us going. It understands the needs of each person. For 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.

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? 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. Let us lift up our eyes and see them, even as Jesus sees us.

The second verb: *to share*. Seeing the people's hunger, Jesus wants to feed them. Yet this only happens thanks to a young man who offers his five loaves of bread and two fish. 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.

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. 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. 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. I have often mentioned the words of the prophet Joel about young and old coming together (cf. *Joel 3:1*). Young people, as prophets of the future, who treasure their own history. The elderly, who continue to dream and share their experience with the young, without standing in their way. Young and old, the treasure of tradition and the freshness of the Spirit. Young and old together. In society and in the Church, together.

The third verb: *to preserve*. After the crowds had eaten, the Gospel relates that much bread was left over. So Jesus tells the disciples: “Gather up the fragments, that nothing may be lost” (Jn 6:12). This reveals the heart of God: 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 meant to be thrown away. Even more so, no person is ever to be discarded. We need to make this prophetic summons heard among ourselves and in our world: *gather, preserve with care, protect*. Grandparents and the elderly are not leftovers from life, scraps to be discarded. 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.

Brothers and sisters, grandparents and the elderly are bread that nourishes our life. 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. And, together, young and old alike, we will find fulfilment at table of sharing, blessed by God.