

046: 17th Sunday of the Year A

World Day for Grandparents and the Elderly

Today, the 26th of July, is the feast day of Saints Joachim and Anne, the parents of Mary and the grandparents of Jesus. We don't actually celebrate the Mass for these saints as the Sunday liturgy takes precedence, but we still remember them. And we remember them in a special way because this day was designated by Pope Francis as the World Day for Grandparents and the Elderly.

I know we have quite a few grandparents and elderly people at this Mass today. We celebrate you. We thank you for the great contribution you have made in your life, for the love you have always had and continue to have. Today is your day, but also an important day for young people as well: As Pope Leo has written in his message for this day: 'May this day be an inspiration for everyone, especially the young, to revive the beautiful custom of visiting their grandparents, the elderly members of the family and even those who have no one to visit them. ... Ensure that the words of the prophet, "I will never forget you," take the form of a tender and affectionate meeting.'

Interestingly on this day which celebrates the elderly, today's first reading focuses on a very young man, Solomon who has just become king of Israel following the death of his father, David. God says to him, 'ask me whatever you like and I will give it to you'. In reply, Solomon does not ask for riches, or long life, or for the lives of his enemies. He asks for a discerning heart. He says to God, 'I am a young man, unskilled in leadership. Please give me a heart that is able to discern between good and evil, so that I can be a good leader of your people'.

So, the young King Solomon prays for the wisdom that often only comes with age and with life experience. He prays for the wisdom of the elderly.

And I believe that as we grow older, we need to pray the opposite prayer to King Solomon. We have wisdom, we have life experience. What we need to pray for is that the best qualities youth remain alive in us – the qualities of playfulness, of imagination, of creativity.

Imagination is one of the most important faculties we have. When faced with challenges we need to imagine, imagine, imagine. We need to try to see – to imagine – a better situation, a way forward out of difficulties. We should never get trapped in the prison of ‘what is’ but always seek to imagine what could be. Imagination has no boundaries. If we cannot imagine a better world, we will do nothing to work for it.

And we need to foster playfulness. We learn through play, we stay vital through play. We need to do things we enjoy – cultivate friendships, read, go to movies, do gardening, hiking, play video games, whatever. We need to keep the playful dimension alive. If we keep playing, we keep learning and we can learn until we die.

Of course, we don’t deny our age and we are grateful for the wisdom and life experience we have. Our goal is to combine the best qualities of youth and age.

So, dear elderly, and also young people, this week I invite you to do three things:

1. Imagine. Imagine a better world, a better Australia. What does it look like in your mind? Imagine one little thing you can do to help make it a reality.
2. Play. Do something playful, enjoyable. Develop a skill. Learn something new. Come to Mass next Sunday knowing one thing you don’t know today.
3. Be grateful. Be grateful for the wisdom and experience you have acquired in your life. Be grateful, in the words of the beautiful hymn *Amazing Grace*, that ‘grace has brought me safe thus far, and grace will lead me home’.

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