
Pope at audience: “discarding the old is a grave sin”

“Honour is a good word to frame this aspect of returning love that concerns old age”, the Pope said in his catechesis at the Wednesday general audience in St. Peter’s Square, enriched with numerous off-text remarks. Francis highlighted the tenets of the fourth commandment - “Honour father and mother” - summarised with the following words: “We have received the love of parents, of grandparents, and now we return this love to them, to the elderly, to our grandparents.” “How many times have we heard or thought: ‘Old people are a nuisance’ – Francis denounced - “It is not just about one’s own father and mother. It is about their generation and the generations before, whose leave-taking can also be slow and prolonged, creating a time and space of long-lasting coexistence with the other ages of life. In other words, it is about the old age of life.” “Today we have rediscovered the term ‘dignity’, to indicate the value of respecting and caring for the age [life] of everyone”, the Pope pointed out: “Dignity is essentially equivalent to honour.”

“Honouring father and mother, honouring the elderly, and recognizing the dignity they possess”,

Francis said: “Let us think carefully about this beautiful expression of love which is honour. Even care for the sick, the support of those who are not self-sufficient, the guarantee of sustenance, can be lacking honour. Honour is lacking when an excess of confidence, instead of being expressed as delicacy and affection, tenderness and respect, is transformed into roughness and abuse. This occurs when weakness is reproached, and even punished, as if it were a fault, and when bewilderment and confusion become an opening for derision and aggression. It can happen even in the home, in nursing homes, as well as in offices or in the open spaces of the city.” *“Encouraging in young people, even indirectly, an attitude of condescension - and even contempt - for the elderly, for their weaknesses and their precariousness”, for Francis “produces horrible things.”* “The young people who set fire to a ‘bum’’s blanket – we’ve seen this, haven’t we? – because they see him as a human reject – is the example taken by Francis - are the tip of the iceberg, that is, of the contempt for a life that, far from the attractions and impulses of youth, already seems to be a life to be cast aside.” “To despise the elderly and cast them from life, to put them aside, to put them down. This contempt, which dishonours the elderly, actually dishonours all of us”, Francis said:

“If I dishonour the elderly, I dishonour myself.”

“There is a passage in the story of Noah that is very expressive in this regard – the Pope remarked: “The elderly Noah, the hero of the flood and still a hard worker, lies unconscious after having had a few too many drinks. His sons, in order not to wake him up and embarrass him, gently cover him, looking aside, with great respect. This text is very beautiful and says everything about the honour due to an old man.” *“Allow me to offer some advice to parents” – Francis said in his final appeal: “please, bring your children, young children, closer to the elderly, always bring them closer. Please don’t push the elderly away. And if there is no other option than to send them to a nursing home, please visit them and bring the children to see them: they are the honour of our civilisation, the old people who opened the doors. And many times, the children forget this.”* “I used to love visiting nursing homes in Buenos Aires. I went often”, Francis recalled: “I remember once I asked a lady: ‘And how many children do you have?’ – ‘I have four, all married, with grandchildren.’ ‘And do they come [to visit]?’ – ‘Yes, [she said,] ‘they always come!’ When I left the room, the nurse, who had heard, said to me: ‘Father, she told a lie to cover up for her children. Nobody has come for six months!’.” “This is discarding the old, it is thinking that the old are refuse”, Francis denounced. “Please: it is a grave sin! This is the first great commandment, and the only one that says the reward: ‘Honour your father and your mother, and you will have long life on earth.’” “This commandment to honour the elderly gives

us a blessing.” “Please cherish the elderly. And [even] if their mind goes, cherish the old. Because they are the presence of history, the presence of my family, and thanks to them I am here, we can all say: thanks to you, grandfather and grandmother, I am alive”, the Pope reiterated his second appeal to the faithful: “Please don't leave them alone!” *“It is not a question of cosmetics and plastic surgery, no”, Francis pointed out. “Rather, it is a question of honour, which must transform how we educate the young about life and its stages. Love for the human person that is common to us, including honouring a life lived, is not a matter for the old. Rather it is an ambition that will bring radiance to the youth who inherit its best qualities.”*

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