
Pope Francis: “The life of our communities must know how to benefit from the talents of elderly people”

Following the publication of the Message for the World Day for Grandparents and the Elderly on Tuesday, in today's general audience in St Peter's Square **Pope Francis** continued **the cycle of catechesis dedicated to old age**. He sent out an appeal: "The life of our communities must know how to benefit from the talents and charisms of so many elderly people who are already retired, but who are a wealth to be treasured." Speaking in Italian, the Holy Father centred his reflection on "Judith, an admirable youth, a generous old age", who had defended Israel against its enemies. "After her great adventure, Judith returned to live in her town, Bethulia, where she lived beautifully her old age, until she was one hundred and five", the Pope said. "But it is not uncommon today to live many years after retirement. How do we interpret, how do we make the most of this time we have?", Francis asked. **The prospect of retirement.** In his catechesis, the Pope dwelt on the "prospect of retirement", which "coincides for many people with that of a deserved and long-awaited rest from demanding and wearisome activities." "But it also happens that the end of work can be a source for worry, and is accompanied with some trepidation", he remarked. Francis then mentioned a passage from the message for the World Day for Grandparents and the Elderly. The reference is to the question of what to do "now that my life will be emptied of what filled it for so long?". The Pope's words enshrine the awareness that "daily work also means a set of relationships, the satisfaction of earning a living, the experience of having a role, well-deserved recognition, a full-time job that goes beyond working hours alone." "Certainly, there is the task, joyful and tiring, of looking after grandchildren, and today grandparents have a very important role in the family in helping to raise grandchildren; but we know that ever fewer children are born nowadays, and parents are often farther away, more subject to displacement, with unfavourable work and housing conditions." *"At times they are also more reluctant to leave space to grandparents for education, granting only what is strictly linked to the need for assistance. There are new demands, also within the area of educational and family relations, that require us to reshape the traditional connection between the generations."*

Heroism in the family. The Pope highlighted the story of Judith and drew a parallel with the lives of many elderly people: "Heroism does not consist only of the great events that fall under the spotlight, such as that of Judith, who killed the dictator; it is often found, this heroism, in the tenacity of love poured out in a difficult family and on behalf of a threatened community." Francis thus highlighted an important part of grandparents' vocation, namely, "to support their sons and daughters in the upbringing of their children." "The little ones learn the power of tenderness and respect for frailty: irreplaceable lessons that, are easier to impart and receive with grandparents." According to Francis, there are mutual lessons to be learned: "For their part, grandparents learn that tenderness and frailty are not solely signs of decline: for young people, they are conditions that humanize the future." **A legacy of goodness and not only of goods.** The Pope recalled that Judith "was soon widowed and had no children, but, as an old woman, she was able to live a season of fullness and serenity, in the knowledge that she had lived to the fullest the mission the Lord had entrusted to her." "It was time for her to leave the good legacy of wisdom, tenderness, and gifts for her family and her community: a legacy of goodness and not only of goods." *"When we think of a legacy, at times we think of goods, and not of the goodness that is done in old age, and that has been sown, that goodness that is the best legacy we can leave", the Pope added off text.* The Pope's words evidence a further positive aspect of old age: "When we are old, we lose some of our sight, but our inner gaze becomes more penetrating – one sees with the heart. We become capable of seeing things that previously escaped us. It is true: the Lord does not entrust his talents only to the young and the strong. He has talents for everyone, made to fit each person." Achieving this objective – Francis pointed out – "requires a creative attention, a new attention, a generous availability." Francis thus returned to highlight the true legacy of the elderly: "not money, but the legacy of wisdom, sown in their grandchildren." Finally, in

his greetings to Italian-speaking pilgrims, Francis sent an appeal for a peaceful attitude and respect for human rights and civil liberties in Sri Lanka.

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