
Pope Francis: grandparents, “living trees” for global wisdom

“For some time now, I have been carrying a thought in my heart. I feel that this is what the Lord wants me to say: that there should be an alliance between young and old people. This is the time when grandparents can dream so that the young can have visions”, the Pope writes, echoing the beloved prophecy of Joel, in the opening lines of the preface to the volume *Sharing the Wisdom of Time*, edited by Fr Antonio Spadaro. The Pope’s invitation to the elderly – creating a dedicated neologism – is to be “memory keepers” (*memoriosi della storia*). Francis calls on youths “to look up at the stars, to dream of a better world and let that dream inspire and energize them.” Francis’ role model is grandmother Rosa: “She was stripped many times of her affections, but she kept her gaze upward. She said few things of simple wisdom. She seldom offered advice, but one could see how often and how deeply she gathered in thought and prayer.”

“Grandparents have the ability to understand the most difficult of situations”,

the Pope told the elderly gathered in St. Peter’s Square with their children and grandchildren on [September 28, 2014](#). They transmit their life experience, their family history, the history of a community, of a people because they are like “trees that continue to bear fruit”, despite their old age, which does not relieve the burden of the years. For the Pope, they are the **“lungs of humanity”** in a town, a neighbourhood or a parish. Indispensable compasses in everyday difficulties but also reinforced concrete pillars, when it comes to steadfastly preserving the flame of faith in the face of persecution and discrimination. For Francis, *“One of the most beautiful aspects of family life, of our human life as a family, is caressing a baby and being caressed by a grandfather and a grandmother”*, In this way we will remain as **“living trees”**: it is on grandparents that grandchildren must “gauge their pace.” To extend our Best Wishes to grandparents, on the Day dedicated to them, let us draw on some of the words Pope Francis has dedicated to them. **A treasury of living memory.**

“Grandparents are wisdom, they are the memory of the people, the memory of families! And grandparents must pass on this memory to the grandchildren. Young people and children must talk to their grandparents in order to continue history.” ([Address to Families on the occasion of the World Meeting in Dublin, August 25 2018](#)) **We are not Gerontes.** “We are not Gerontes: we are grandfathers to whom our grandchildren look. Grandfathers must give life meaning for them from our experience. Grandfathers not withdrawn in our melancholic history, but open to transmit this. We are grandfathers called to dream and to give our dream to today’s young people: they need it. Because they will draw from our dreams the power to prophecy.” ([Homily on the occasion of the 25th Anniversary of the Episcopal Ordination of the Holy Father, June 27 2017](#)) **Guardians of life.**

“Precisely as people of so-called senior age you, or rather we - because I myself am among them - are called to contribute to the development of the culture of life, bearing witness that every season of human existence is a gift from God and has its own beauty and importance, even though marked by fragility.” ([Audience to the National Association of Senior Workers, October 15, 2016](#)) **To talk with grandparents.** “Will you promise me that in preparing for Panama, you will talk more with your grandparents? If your grandparents are already in heaven, will you talk to with the elderly?” (Meeting with the WYD volunteers, Krakow, July 31 2016) **Poets of prayer.** “Dear grandparents, dear elderly, let us follow in the footsteps of these extraordinary elders! [Simeon and Anna] Let us too become like poets of prayer: let us develop a taste for finding our own words, let us once again grasp those which teach us the Word of God. The prayer of grandparents and of the elderly is a great gift for the Church, it is a treasure!”. ([General audience, March 11 2015](#)) **Heroes in times of persecution.** “Let us pray for our grandfathers and grandmothers who often played a heroic role in handing on the faith in times of persecution. Especially in times past, when fathers and mothers often were not at home or had strange ideas, confused as they were by the fashionable ideologies of the day, grandmothers were the ones who handed on the Faith”. ([Meditation in the Chapel of Domus Sanctae Marthae](#),

[November 19 2013](#)) **Witness of wisdom.** “In this World Youth Day, young people wish to acknowledge and honour their grandparents. They salute them with great affection. Young people salute their grandparents with great affection and they thank them for the ongoing witness of their wisdom.” ([Angelus prayer at the WYD in Rio de Janeiro, July 26 2013](#))

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