



17<sup>th</sup> Week of Ordinary Time 24<sup>th</sup>/25<sup>th</sup> July  
World Day of Prayer for Grandparents and Elderly  
Reflection/Homily by Mgr Daniel McHugh

**“In old age they still bear fruit” (ps. 92:15)**

This weekend as part of my celebration of my 80<sup>th</sup> Birthday I am going to Ireland to my father’s part of Co. Roscommon; a rural village called Taughmaconnell. In St Ronan’s Church, where he was Baptised, I will celebrate a Mass of Thanksgiving for Family and Faith. Afterwards there will be photos with cousins, refreshments, and a visit for Blessing of Graves where our Grandparents are buried.

It happens to be on the Sunday of the World Day of Prayer for Grandparents and the Elderly which was introduced into the Church Calendar by Pope Francis last year. It will take place annually on the Sunday closest to the Feast of St Joachim and St Anne, the parents of Our Lady: she would have had her Faith passed on by them.

We are more conscious than ever in these days of the importance of Grandparents in handing on the Faith: so often as a Priest I have seen how key their role is in the Family decision to bring little ones to Baptism and then on to the Eucharist. They are no longer onlookers, but frequently actively engaged in bringing up Grandchildren in the Catholic Faith, as well as supporting working parents with child-care, travel to and from school and so on.

The Holy Father’s focus on Grandparents and the Elderly is a special Blessing for all of us because in busy lives with many priorities to juggle it is possible that Grandparents (and elderly in general) can be needed and at the same time marginalized. I noted the prayers produced for this Sunday by the Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life at the Vatican:

*I give thanks to you, Lord,  
For the blessing of a long life.  
For, to those who take refuge in You,  
Grant always to bear fruit.*

*Forgive, O Lord,  
Resignation and disillusionment,  
But forsake me not  
When my strength declines.*

*Teach me to look with hope  
To the future you give me,  
To the mission you entrust to me  
And to sing your praises without end.*

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*Make me a tender craftsman  
Of your revolution,  
To guard with love my grandchildren  
And all the little ones who seek shelter in You.*

*Protect, O Lord, Pope Francis  
And grant Thy Church  
To deliver the world from loneliness.  
Direct our steps in the way of peace.*

*Amen.*

What a wonderful prayer to put into the hands of Grandparents and the Elderly. It encourages them to look at their journey of Faith in a positive way. But, from the point of view of our Catholic Parishes and our families, how are we to take forward the words chosen by Pope Francis for this year's World Day of Prayer: "In old age they will still bear fruit". Some parishes are already holding a special celebratory lunch or tea with a time of prayer on this day. I've heard of families who have planted a tree in memory of a loved one/s. I will be recalling the strong regular prayer life and visits to Knock Shrine into which we were drawn as children on holiday at our Grandparents' home. While giving thanks for the Faith they passed on we will be thinking of our practice today, and how we can express our love and appreciation in our parishes and homes now: while it is good to remember loved ones when they are deceased, it is also good to draw them into our life now in a structured way, as part of the pattern of things in our parishes and in our homes. In a Synodal Church – where it is recognized all are on the Journey of Faith together and each has something to share - it is not just occasional "charity" we should seek to achieve but a genuine ongoing valuing of the voice of the elderly in our community.

It is a big challenge to our way of life. On this 17<sup>th</sup> Week of the Year the Sunday Gospel reading is a wonderful place to make our first response. Jesus impressed His Disciples when he went apart to pray and they asked Him "how to pray". He taught them the "Our Father". So much can be said about this prayer, but I would simply say it is "*the prayer that draws us all together*" whatever our situation in life, old or young, lonely or sick. Our Father God is the one who brings us together, the one who bridges all that divides, who gives the Holy Spirit to inspire us as we seek to go forward in Faith: united with those who have departed and those who are with us now in "the Communion of Faith". I would also say of the Our Father, it is "*the prayer of forgiveness*" in the Father who always forgives. We can begin again on this day as we pray: "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us."

Perhaps we can take these lines from last year's prayer for this World Day and make them our own, whatever our age: "I thank you for the moments of joy and difficulty, for

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the dreams that have already come true in my life and for those that are still ahead of me. I thank you for the time of renewed fruitfulness to which you call me.”

St Joachim and St Anne pray for us.

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