



17th Week in Ordinary Time/World Day of Grandparents and Elderly 28 July 2024 - Reflection by Mgr Daniel McHugh

“Bless the Lord O my soul, and never forget all his Blessings”

(Psalm 102, Communion Antiphon)

On Facebook there is an automatic post “Memories” which recalls pictures you have posted in earlier years. This week I received a ‘memory’ picture I posted 2 years ago of a visit on the occasion of my 80th Birthday to the Church of Baptism and Burial of my Grandparents; we had a Mass of Thanksgiving for Faith and Family on the World Day of Grandparents and Elderly. After Mass in the Church we had “eats” in the local Tavern and onto a Blessing of Graves at the Cemetery. It really was a ‘lovely day’ as one person posted: we met cousins we had not met for years and some younger ones we had never met. We were able to exchange stories and indeed to appreciate our Grandparents anew, and in particular to give thanks for the Faith they had passed on to us. In the Church Calendar this Annual Day is placed close to the Memorial of Saints Joachim and Anne, the parents of Our Lady, and maternal grandparents of Jesus. It is a Feast that comes to us from the Eastern Liturgy. The first reading in the Mass is from Ecclesiasticus 44 and has these words:

“Their name lives on for all generations. The peoples will proclaim their wisdom, the assembly will celebrate their praises.” One response to my sharing the post again this week was from a Facebook Friend, not a family member: *“what a wonderful privilege to get back to your roots.”* It was indeed a great occasion to draw together family and celebrate Faith.

We are very fortunate each year to have a message from the Pope on the occasion of this to reflect on many different dimensions of being Grandparents and being Elderly. This year Pope Francis has chosen the theme, taken from Psalm 71:9 *“Do not cast me off in my old age”* It is well worth reflecting on and begins *“God never abandons his children, never. Even when our age advances and our powers decline, when our hair grows white and our role in society lessens, when our lives become less productive and can risk appearing useless. God does not regard appearances (1 Sam 16:7); he does not disdain to choose those who, to many people, may seem irrelevant. God discards no stone; indeed, the “oldest” are the firm foundation on which “new” stones can rest, in order to join in erecting a spiritual edifice (1 Peter 2:5).* The Pope goes on to write about his time in Buenos Aires and visiting people in “rest” homes who received very few visits; the loneliness of the elderly whose family were forced to emigrate for employment; the loneliness that has

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come to those whose family have been forced to emigrate because of conflict/war; and women especially forced to emigrate to seek safety for their children, leaving the elderly alone. It is a powerful reflection with the Pope going on to tackle the matter of “*a widespread conviction that the elderly are burdening the young with the high cost of social services that they require, and in this way are diverting resources from the development of the community and thus from the young.*” Pope Francis writes: “*To set the young against the old is an unacceptable form of manipulation: what is important is the unity of the different ages of life, which is the real point of reference for understanding and valuing human life in its entirety.*” The Pope concludes: “On the Fourth World Day devoted to them, let us show our tender love for the grandparents and the elderly members of our families. Let us spend time with those who are disheartened and no longer hope in the possibility of a different future. In a place of self-centred attitude that leads to loneliness and abandonment, let us instead show the open heart and the joyful face of men & women who have the courage to say “*I will not abandon you*”, and sort out a different path.

The Miracle of the Loaves and Fish in today’s Gospel from St John points to Our Lord’s care for the hungry and those in need. As I came out of Archbishop’s House yesterday having visited Archbishop Bernard to brief him on my Ministry with the Ethnic Chaplaincies and saw the crowds queuing to get into St Chad’s Sanctuary a place of welcome for Asylum Seekers and Sanctuary in the Heart of Birmingham (the strapline reads on the website). The help given there includes food, and they are urgently seeking donations of many items plus clothing of all sorts. I was happy to see the Church continuing to give the love and care given by Jesus to the people in the Gospel Miracle.

But, when you read further in Chapter 6 of St John’s Gospel where the miracle is recounted you see Jesus came to give much more than the “daily bread” we enjoy. He came to give us ‘bread from heaven’. He says: “*I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never be hungry; he who believes in me will never thirst ...Yes, it is my Father’s will that whoever sees the Son and believes in Him shall have eternal life, and that I shall raise him up on the last day.*” We give thanks for the Faith in Jesus the Bread of Life passed on to us by Grandparents and Parents; we pray for the mission of the whole Church to pass on to all our love, our Faith in “*the food that leads to eternal life.*” (John 6:28)

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