

Grandparents Day

This year, Pope Francis established the World Day for Grandparents and the Elderly, to be celebrated on the fourth Sunday in July, close to the feast day of Jesus' maternal grandparents, Saints Joachim and Anne. (The U.S. has celebrated Grandparents Day on the Sunday after Labor Day since 1979.)

In his message for this World Day, Pope Francis said that the vocation of older persons is *"to preserve our roots, to pass on the faith to the young and to care for the little ones. ... There is no retirement age from the work of proclaiming the Gospel and handing down traditions to your grandchildren."*

As we work our way through the pandemic – and the elderly as a group have had the greatest struggle to survive it – we may emerge with a renewed sense of community, of our need for one another, of a commitment to build a better tomorrow, a renewed society. The elderly, better than any others, can help with three pillars of that society: *dreams, memory and prayer.*

Francis recalled the promise of the prophet Joel: "Your old men shall dream dreams and your young men will have visions" (3:1). He describes this as a covenant between young and old – *"Who, if not the young, can take the dreams of the elderly and make them come true? Yet for this to happen, it is necessary that we continue to dream. Our dreams of justice, of peace, of solidarity can make it possible for our young people to have new visions; in this way, together, we can build the future."*

We who are older have the life experience of getting through hardships and emerging stronger. We must share that with the younger generations so that they do not give up on dreams, but continue to pursue their visions of a better society.

Francis noted that dreams are intertwined with memory. The painful memory of war raises the value of peace; the memory of poverty underscores the value of economic security. By sharing our memories and the values we derived from them, the painful lessons we learned are not wasted. Rather, they can help form others' visions of a more humane and welcoming society. One cannot build without a foundation, and the foundation of life is memory, Francis stated.

Finally, there is prayer, a service to the community that might easily be overlooked, and for which the elderly may have ample time. A few months before announcing his own retirement, one in which he has spent much time praying, Pope Benedict XVI said, *"The prayer of the elderly can protect the world, helping it perhaps more effectively than the frenetic activity of many others."* Prayer is a precious resource, Francis noted, one that the Church and the world urgently need. By their example, grandparents can encourage their families to pray for the community, so that, together, we may become more aware of our need for God's loving help and more earnest in asking for it.