

17th SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME – YEAR B

(2 Kgs 4:42-44; Ephesians 4:1-6; John 6:1-15)

World Day of Grandparents - Excerpt from <http://www.laityfamilylife.va/>

by Father Charles Fillion

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Brothers and sisters, I'm sure you are asking yourselves, why has Pope Francis decided to institute a Church-wide celebration of a World Day for Grandparents and the Elderly? Because it is part of the *Amoris Laetitia* Family Year, the 5th anniversary of the Apostolic Exhortation on Love in the Family. It is also the Year of Saint Joseph. The World Day for Grandparents and the Elderly will be held every year on the fourth Sunday of July, close to July 26, the liturgical memorial of Saints Joachim and Anne, the grandparents of Jesus. Yes, that's tomorrow. Today, I would like to share a sample of the Holy Father's message for this day on the theme "I am with you always" (Mt 28:20).

This is the promise the Lord made to his disciples before he ascended into heaven. They are the words that he repeats to us today.

In his message, Pope Francis speaks personally to the elderly, as he is also an elderly person.

The whole Church is close to you – to us – and cares about you, loves you and does not want to leave you alone! I am well aware that this Message comes to you at a difficult time: the pandemic swept down on us like an unexpected and furious storm; it has been a time of trial for everyone, but especially for us elderly persons. Many of us fell ill, others died or experienced the death of spouses or loved ones, while others found themselves isolated and alone for long periods.

The Lord is aware of all that we have been through in this time. He is close to those who felt isolated and alone, feelings that became more acute during the pandemic. Tradition has it that Saint Joachim, the grandfather of Jesus, felt estranged from those around him because he had no children; his life, like that of his wife Anne, was considered useless. So, the Lord sent an angel to console him. While he mused sadly outside the city gates, a messenger from the Lord appeared to him and said, "Joachim, Joachim! The Lord has heard your insistent prayer".

Even at the darkest moments, as in these months of pandemic, the Lord continues to send angels to console our loneliness and to remind us: "I am with you always". He says this to you, and he says it to me. That is the meaning of this Day, which I wanted to celebrate for the first time in this particular year, as a long period of isolation ends and social life slowly resumes. May every grandfather, every grandmother, every older person, especially those among us who are most alone, receive the visit of an angel!

At times those angels will have the face of our grandchildren, at others, the face of family members, lifelong friends or those we have come to know during these trying times. (...) The Lord, however, also sends us messengers through his words, which are always at hand. We will be comforted by the Lord's faithfulness. The Scriptures will also help us to understand what the Lord is asking of our lives today. (...) The Lord is always (...) close to us. He is close to us with new possibilities, new ideas, new consolations. (...) Think about it: what is our vocation today, at our age? 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. (...) No one is saved alone. (...) Given this, I want to tell you that you are needed in order to help build, in fraternity and social friendship, the world of tomorrow: the world in which we, (...) will live once the storm has subsided. All of us must "take an active part in renewing and supporting our troubled societies". (...) The Lord's closeness will grant to all, even the weakest among us, the strength needed to embark on a new journey. (...)

The future of the world depends on this covenant between young and old. Yet for this to happen, it is necessary that we continue to dream. Our dreams of justice, of peace, of solidarity. (...) You need to show that it is possible to emerge renewed from an experience of hardship. I am sure that you have had more than one such experience: in your life you have faced any number of troubles and yet were able to pull through. Use those experiences to learn how to pull through now.

Dreams are therefore intertwined with memory. I think of the painful memory of war, and its importance for helping the young to learn the value of peace. (...) Keeping memory alive is a true mission for every elderly person: keeping memory alive and sharing it with others. (...) These kinds of memory can help to build a more humane and welcoming world. Without memory, however, we will never be able to build; without a foundation, we can never build a house. (...)

As my predecessor, Pope Benedict, himself a saintly elderly person who continues to pray and work for the Church, once said: "the prayer of the elderly can protect the world, helping it perhaps more effectively than the frenetic activity of many others." (...) Your prayer is a very precious resource: a deep breath that the Church and the world urgently need (...). Your intercession for the world and for the Church has great value: it inspires in everyone the serene trust that we will soon come to shore.

May each of us learn to repeat to all, and especially to the young, the words of consolation we have heard spoken to us today: "I am with you always"! Keep moving forward! May the Lord grant you his blessing.