

17th SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME – YEAR C

(Gn 18, 20-32; Col 2, 12-14; Lk 11, 1-13)

Excerpts of Pope Leo XIV – Message - 27 July 2025

by Father Charles Fillion

27 July 2025

Brothers and sisters, today is World Day for Grandparents and the Elderly. The Jubilee we are now celebrating helps us to realize that hope is a constant source of joy, whatever our age. Sacred Scripture offers us many examples of men and women whom the Lord called late in life to play a part in his saving plan. We can think of Abraham and Sarah, who, advanced in years, found it hard to believe when God promised them a child. Their childlessness seemed to prevent them from any hope for the future.

Old age, barrenness and physical decline blocked any hope for life and fertility in these men and women. Yet whenever we think that things cannot change, the Lord surprises us with an act of saving power.

In the Bible, God repeatedly demonstrates his providential care by turning to people in their later years. This was the case with Moses, who was called to set his people free when he was already eighty years old (cf. *Ex* 7:7). God therefore teaches us that, in his eyes, old age is a time of blessing and grace, and that the elderly are, for him, *the first witnesses of hope*. The increasing number of elderly people is a sign that we are called to discern, in order to interpret properly this moment of history.

The life of the Church and the world can only be understood in light of the passage of generations. The elderly helps us to understand that life is more than just the present moment. Life is constantly pointing us toward the future. If it is true that the weakness of the elderly needs the strength of the young, it is equally true that the inexperience of the young needs the witness of the elderly in order to build the future with wisdom. How often our grandparents have been for us examples of faith and devotion, civic virtue and social commitment, memory and perseverance amid trials! The precious legacy that they have handed down to us with hope and love will always be a source of gratitude and a call for perseverance.

From biblical times, the Jubilee has been understood as a time of liberation. Slaves were freed, debts were forgiven and land was returned to its original owners. The Jubilee was a time when the social order willed by God was restored, and inequalities and injustices accumulated over the years were remedied. Jesus evoked those moments of liberation when, in the synagogue of Nazareth, he proclaimed good news to the poor, sight to the blind and freedom for prisoners and the oppressed (cf. *Lk* 4:16-21).

Looking at the elderly in the spirit of this Jubilee, we are called to help them experience liberation, especially from loneliness and abandonment. This year is a fitting time to do so. God's fidelity to his promises teaches us that there is a blessedness in old age, an authentic evangelical joy inspiring us to break through the barriers of indifference in which the elderly often find themselves enclosed. Our societies, everywhere in the world, are letting this significant and enriching part of their life be marginalized and forgotten.

Given this situation, a change of pace is needed. We are all called to regular visits to the elderly, to pray for them and with them, and restore hope and dignity to those who feel forgotten. Christian hope always urges us to be more daring, to think big, to be dissatisfied with things the way they are. This should urge us to work for a change that can restore the esteem and affection to which the elderly are entitled.

Visiting an elderly person is a way of encountering Jesus, who frees us from indifference and loneliness. Perhaps, especially if our lives are long, we may be tempted to look not to the future but to the past. Yet, as Pope Francis wrote during his last hospitalization, "our bodies are weak, but even so, nothing can prevent us from loving, praying, giving ourselves, being there for one another, in faith, as shining signs of hope" (*Angelus*, 16 March 2025). We possess a freedom that no difficulty can rob us of: it is the freedom to love and to pray. Everyone, always, can love and pray.

Our affection for our loved ones – for the wife or husband with whom we have spent so much of our lives, for our children, for our grandchildren who brighten our days – does not fade when our strength declines. Indeed, their own affection often revives our energy and brings us hope and comfort.

These signs of living love, which have their roots in God himself, give us courage and remind us that "even if our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day" (2 *Cor* 4:16). Especially as we grow older, let us press forward with confidence in the Lord. May we be renewed each day by our encounter with him in prayer and in Holy Mass. Let us lovingly pass on the faith we have lived for so many years, in our families and in our daily encounter with others. May we always praise God for his goodness, cultivate unity with our loved ones, open our hearts to those who are far away and, in particular, to all those in need. In this way, we will be signs of hope, whatever our age. Let us be Pilgrims of hope.