

CULTURE OF ENCOUNTER, PART FOUR  
GRANDPARENTS & THE ELDERLY  
*Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time – 23 July 2023*



Culture of Encounter, Part 4  
Grandparents & the Elderly

**ALL GENERATIONS ARE CALLED BY GOD TO AUTHENTIC ENCOUNTER**

Today we read from the Gospel of Matthew 13:24-43.

As we reflect on the parable of wheat and darnel, we turn to the insights of Pope Francis, as it applies to the Elderly and the world.

Pope Francis encourages all generations to *encounter the culture* of *wisdom*, *vulnerability* and *insights of the Elderly*.

*Darnel* symbolises the denial of the giftedness of the Elderly in the world.

*Wheat* symbolises a genuine openness to relationship with the Elderly in a covenant of the generations.

All generations are called by God to *authentic encounter*.

**A) GOSPEL OF MATTHEW 13:24-43**

Throughout our lives, we try to discern between the wheat and the darnel.

We learn from prayer and spiritual skills how to discern what is the wheat within us.

As wheat and darnel look similar, discernment is key.

But it also applies to society as a whole. Darnel symbolises the times

- when society hides or ignores the Elderly in our midst.
- when we try to hide our vulnerabilities.
- when we don't respect each generation.
- when we allow ourselves to be trapped in the madness of rushing around.

Let us listen to the Gospel passage from Jesus:

***'The kingdom of heaven may be compared to someone who sowed good seed in his field; but while everybody was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and then went away. So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared as well. And the slaves of the householder came and said to him, "Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? Where, then, did these weeds come from?"***

*He answered, "An enemy has done this."*

*The slaves said to him, "Then do you want us to go and gather them?"*

*But he replied, "No; for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them.*

*Let both of them grow together until the harvest;*

*and at harvest time I will tell the reapers,*

*Collect the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn."*

## B) MESSAGE OF POPE FRANCIS FOR THE THIRD WORLD DAY FOR GRANDPARENTS & THE ELDERLY 23 JULY 2023

We read of the purpose of this Sunday.

*"To better appreciate God's way of acting, let us remember that our life is meant to be lived to the full, and that our greatest hopes and dreams are not achieved instantly but through a process of growth and maturation, in dialogue and in relationship with others.*

*Those who focus only on the here and now, on money and possessions, on "having it all now", are blind to the way God works.*

*His loving plan spans past, present and future; it embraces and connects the generations."*

*"From the elderly we received the gift of belonging to God's holy people.*

*The Church, as well as society, needs them, for they entrust to the present the past that is needed to build the future.*

*Let us honour them,*

*neither depriving ourselves of their company nor depriving them of ours.*

*May we never allow the elderly to be cast aside!*

*The World Day for Grandparents and the Elderly is meant to be a small but precious sign of hope for them and for the whole Church. I renew my invitation to everyone – dioceses, parishes, associations and communities – to celebrate this Day and to make it the occasion of a joyful and renewed encounter between young and old."*

## C) THE TEACHING OF THE CHURCH ON OLD AGE

Between February and June 2022, Pope Francis gave *fifteen sessions of catechesis on old age*. I have included twelve of the sessions below.

In our Christian understanding of covenant, we speak of a *covenant of love between God and humanity*. In catechesis, Pope Francis speaks of this *covenant of the generations*

Some quotes are now provided.

*I invite the Elderly* to ponder these insights from their experience of life and faith.

*I invite other generations* to ponder the giftedness, witness and vulnerabilities of the Elderly, and how they enrich our lives and faith.

I invite friends and families and generations to discuss the insights of the Church.

### 1. *Covenant of the generations*

*"The visible covenant of the generations which harmonizes paces and rhythms, restores to us the hope of not living life in vain. And it restores to each of us the love for our vulnerable lives, blocking the way to the obsession with haste, which simply consumes it."*

“The covenant of the generations is indispensable. A society in which the elderly do not speak with the young, the young do not speak with the elderly, adults do not speak with neither the elderly nor young people, is a sterile society, without a future, a society that does not look to the horizon but rather looks at itself. And it becomes lonely. May God help us find the right music for this harmonious relationship among the various ages: the little ones, the elderly, adults, everyone together: a beautiful symphony of dialogue.”

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## **2. Rhythms of old age**

“The rhythms of old age are an indispensable resource for grasping the meaning of life marked by time. The elderly have their rhythms, but they are rhythms that help us. Thanks to this mediation, the destination of life in the encounter with God becomes more credible”

## **3. The gift and blessing of lucidly passing on history by personal storytelling**

“There is a tone and style of communication to direct, person-to-person storytelling, that no other medium can replace. An older person, one who has lived a long time, and receives the gift of a lucid and passionate testimony of his or her history, is an irreplaceable blessing. Are we capable of recognising and honouring this gift of the elderly? Does the transmission of faith — and of the meaning of life — follow this path of listening to the elderly, today?”

## **4. Rhythms of the Elderly, restoring love for our vulnerability**

“The visible covenant of the generations which harmonizes paces and rhythms, restores to us the hope of not living life in vain. And it restores to each of us the love for our vulnerable lives, blocking the way to the obsession with haste, which simply consumes it.”

## **5. Special sensibility of the Elderly**

“Old age is in a good position to grasp the deception of this normalization of a life that is obsessed with enjoyment and empty of an inner reality:

life without thought, without sacrifice, without beauty, without truth,  
without justice, without love: this is all corruption.

The special sensibility of us old people, of old age, for the attention, thoughts and affections that make us human, should once again become the vocation of many. And it will be a choice of the elderly’s love for the new generations. We will be the ones to sound the alarm, the alert: “Be aware, this is corruption, it will bring you nothing”. There is a great need today for the wisdom of the elderly to counteract corruption.”

## **6. The gift of a lucid and passionate testimony by the Elderly**

“Moses sees history and passes on history; the elderly see history and pass on history. An old age that is granted this clarity is a precious gift for the generation that is to follow. Listening personally and directly to the story of lived faith, with all its highs and lows, is irreplaceable.”

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### **7. Dialogue in handing on the faith**

“The Gospels themselves tell the blessed story of Jesus honestly, without hiding the mistakes, misunderstandings, and even betrayals of the disciples. This is history, it is the truth, this is witness. This is the gift of memory that the “elders” of the Church pass on, right from the beginning, passing it on “from hand to hand” to the generation that follows... Faith is passed on in dialect, that is, in familiar speech, between grandparents and grandchildren, between parents and their children. The faith is always handed on in dialect, in that familiar dialect and experience learned through the years. This is the reason dialogue in a family is so important, the dialogue of children with their grandparents, who are the ones who have the wisdom of the faith”

### **8. The darning of spiritual insensitivity and numbness**

“Numbed senses, without understanding what is happening: when they are numb, the inner senses, the senses of the Spirit that enable us to understand the presence of God or the presence of evil, cannot distinguish between them. When you lose sensitivity of touch or of taste, you realize it immediately. Instead, that of the soul, sensitivity of the soul, you can ignore that for a long time, living without realizing that you have lost the sensitivity of the soul... It is interesting: insensitivity prevents you from understanding compassion, it stops you from understanding pity, it stops you from feeling shame or remorse for having done something bad.... It is like that. Numbed spiritual senses are confusing, and one no longer feels those things, spiritually. And old age becomes, so to speak, the first casualty, the first victim of this loss of sensitivity. In a society that exercises sensitivity primarily for enjoyment, there cannot but be a lack of attention to the frail, and the competition of the winners prevails. And this is how sensitivity is lost. Certainly, the rhetoric of inclusion is the ritual formula of every politically correct discourse. But it still does not bring about a real correction of the practices of normal co-existence: a culture of social tenderness struggles to grow . No, the spirit of human fraternity — which I felt it was necessary to relaunch forcefully — is like a discarded garment, to be admired, yes, but ... in a museum. One loses human sensitivity, one loses these movements of the Spirit that make us human”

### **9. Elderly who cultivate the sensitivity of the soul**

“Old age that has cultivated the sensitivity of the soul extinguishes all envy between generations, all resentment, all recrimination for an advent of God in the generation to come, which arrives together with the departure of one’s own. And this is what happens to an elderly person who is open to a young person who is open: he or she bids farewell to life while, so to speak, “handing over” life to the new generation... And nowadays we are in great need of this, of the sensibility of the spirit,

the maturity of the spirit; we need wise, elders, mature in spirit, who give hope for life!”

### **10. When society attempts to hide sickness and old age**

“How is it that modern civilization, so advanced and efficient, is so uncomfortable with sickness and old age? How is it that it hides illness, it hides old age? ”

### **11. Learning from old age**

“Jesus, in the Gospels, never rejects the prayer of those who are in need of help. The elderly, by virtue of their weakness, can teach those who are living in other ages of life that we all need to abandon ourselves to the Lord, to invoke his help. In this sense, we must all learn from old age: yes, there is a gift in being elderly, understood as abandoning oneself to the care of others, starting with God himself... Do not hide old age, do not hide the fragility of old age. This is a teaching for all of us.”

### **12. Protect the Elderly who are wisdom**

“Remember that you too will become elderly. Old age comes for everyone. And treat the elderly today as you would wish to be treated in your old age. They are the memory of the family, the memory of humanity, the memory of the country. Protect the elderly, who are wisdom..”

The wheat and darnel can grow side by side within us, and within our communities that we serve.

In prayer and stillness before God, we take time to reflect and review not only what we do, but also who we are before God.

## **D) COMMUNITY BLESSING OF GRANDPARENTS & ELDERS**

I believe there is a vocation of Elders.

The example of our Parish Seniors Group is one of the ways this vocation is shared. The relationship between Grandparents and our School Community is another way. I now invite Grandparents and Elderly to come forward for a blessing. I invite everyone else to raise a hand in prayer over them. We thank God for our Grandparents and Elders.

Let us pray.

Father Gerry

<https://bible.usccb.org/bible/readings/072323.cfm>

[Prayer for the Third World Day for Grandparents and the Elderly 2023](#)

[Message of His Holiness Pope Francis for the III World Day for Grandparents and the Elderly](#)