

‘THE MISSION OF ELDERS’
4th Sunday Ordinary Time Year A ~ 2ND FEBRUARY 2020



Benjamin West c. 1796 | Simeon with the Infant Jesus – edited www.stjosephsbrackenridge.com

The Terminology we use, can say much about our way of thinking.
For example, **the aged** or **the ageing** or **Seniors** or **Senior Citizens** or **the elderly** or **the Elders**.

People who have made a new home in Australia can speak of the positive aspects of Australia including freedom, security, education, social security multiculturalism.

One of the major negatives and a cultural shock for many newly arrived Australians can be the attitude of some Australian people towards older members of families and community.

What is the Australian cultural view?

There are differing cultural views.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in their cultures have esteem for Elders.
So do many cultural groups within Australia.

There are some Australians people with little respect for Elders or elders or the elderly.
We have seen from the recent Royal Commission findings,
issues of disrespect and areas that need to be addressed.

What is the Church's teaching?

GOSPEL OF LUKE 2:22-40

Today's Gospel is about insights into Jesus and his mission.
And the role of Mary and Joseph in fulfilling their religious duties,
in following the Mosaic Law.

A homily could easily focus on these insights.
While acknowledging these joint foci,

let us reflect on the presentation by Luke of the **Elders** in this passage.

Let us read the opening section of today's Gospel and set the scene.

“When the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the law of the Lord, ‘Every firstborn male shall be designated as holy to the Lord’), and they offered a sacrifice according to what is stated in the law of the Lord, ‘a pair of turtle-doves or two young pigeons.’ “

LEARNING FROM SIMEON, AN ELDER

Into this story come two Elders, Simeon and Anna.

What do you think are the characteristics of Elders in our parish community?

We learn that Simeon is

- Righteous
- Devout
- Looking forward to God's plan
- The Holy Spirit rests on him
- Awareness and Trust in the Holy Spirit's promise to him
- Openness to follow where the Holy Spirit leads him
- Praise of God as the promise is revealed.
- Truthful
- The gift of Blessing
- Aware that the next part of his life can be with a gift of peace

Let us reflect on these qualities as we hear the next section to the Gospel.

“Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; this man was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him what was customary under the law, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying, Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.’

And the child's father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him. Then Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary, ‘This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed

*so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—
and a sword will pierce your own soul too.’ “*

LEARNING FROM ANNA, AN ELDER

Anna became a widow after seven years of marriage.
She is now 84 years old.

Let us learn of her qualities as an Elder.

- Awareness that God has gifted her as a prophet, being able to experience parts of God’s plan and speak about it.
- Worships God.
- Lives a ministry of prayerfulness, including fasting.
- Praises God
- Teaches people there about God’s plan

We read from the Gospel:

“There was also a prophet, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, having lived with her husband for seven years after her marriage, then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshipped there with fasting and prayer night and day.

At that moment she came, and began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.”

Both Simeon and Anna are witnesses.

They are both aware that **God has a purpose for them.**

They are prayerful and praise God.

They are not afraid to share with the young couple, Mary and Joseph.

They know that they have been blessed.

BLESSED

The young family of Mary, Joseph and Jesus depart on the next stage of life’s journey, having been blessed by encounters with both Elders.

The Elders can let them go.

The Gospel passage concludes:

“When they had finished everything required by the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favour of God was upon him.”

Let us reflect on insights from Pope Francis.

On Friday January 31st, he addressed the first International Congress on the pastoral care of the elderly.

The organizing body in the Holy See was the Dicastery for the Laity, Family and Life.

The theme was **“The Richness of Many Years of Life”**.

POPE FRANCIS

“The “richness of many years” is a richness of people, of each individual person who has many years of life, experience and history behind them. It is the precious treasure that takes form in the journey of life of each man and woman, whatever their origins, provenance, and economic or social conditions. Life is a gift, and when it is long it is a privilege, for oneself and for others. ”

“different seasons of life correspond to old age: for many, it is the age in which productive efforts cease, strength declines and the signs of illness, the need for help, and social isolation appear; but for many it is the beginning of a long period of psycho-physical well-being and freedom from work commitments. In both situations, how can these years be lived? What meaning can be given to this phase of life, which for many people can be long? Social disorientation and, in many respects, the indifference and rejection that our societies manifest towards the elderly demand not only of the Church, but of all of us, a serious reflection to learn to grasp and to appreciate the value of old age. “

“We need to change our pastoral habits in order to respond to the presence of so many older people in families and communities. In the Bible, longevity is a blessing. It confronts us with our fragility, with our mutual dependence, with our family and community ties, and above all with our divine sonship. Granting old age, God the Father gives us time to deepen our knowledge of Him, our intimacy with Him, to enter ever more into His heart and surrender ourselves to Him. This is the time to prepare to deliver our spirit into His hands, definitively, with childlike trust. But it is also a time of renewed fruitfulness. “They will still bear fruit in old age” says the psalmist (Ps 92:14). God’s plan of salvation, in fact, is also carried out in the poverty of weak, sterile and powerless bodies. “

“The elderly person, even when he is weak, can become an instrument of salvation history.”

‘Aware of this irreplaceable role of the elderly, the Church becomes a place where generations are called to share in God’s plan of love, in a relationship of mutual exchange of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. This intergenerational sharing obliges us to change our gaze towards older people, to learn to look to the future together with them.’

“There is not only the past, as if, for the elderly, there were only a life behind them and a mouldy archive. No.

*The Lord can and wants to write with them also
new pages, pages of holiness, of service, of prayer...
Today I would like to tell you that the elderly
are also the present and the future of the Church.
Yes, they are also the future of a Church that,
together with the young, prophesies and dreams!
This is why it is so important
that the elderly and the young speak to each other, it is so important.
The prophecy of the elderly is fulfilled
when the light of the Gospel enters fully into their lives;
when, like Simeon and Anne, they take Jesus in their arms
and announce the revolution of tenderness,
the Good News of He Who came into the world to bring the light of the Father.
That is why I ask you not to spare yourselves
in proclaiming the Gospel to grandparents and elders.
Go to them with a smile on your face and the Gospel in your hands.
Go out into the streets of your parishes and seek out the elderly who live alone.
Old age is not an illness, it is a privilege!
Loneliness can be an illness,
but with charity, closeness and spiritual comfort we can heal it.”*

About Grandparents, Pope Francis says:

*“God has a large population of grandparents throughout the world.
Nowadays, in secularized societies in many countries,
current generations of parents do not have, for the most part,
the Christian formation and living faith
that grandparents can pass on to their grandchildren.
They are the indispensable link in educating children and young people in the faith.
We must get used to including them in our pastoral horizons
and to considering them, in a non-episodic way,
as one of the vital components of our communities.
They are not only people whom we are called
to assist and protect to guard their lives,
but they can be actors in a pastoral evangelizing ministry,
privileged witnesses of God’s faithful love.”*

Inspired by the Elders, Simeon and Anna,
and by the insights of Pope Francis in his Address above,
let us now pray

- for our Elders and their mission to witness to God’s faithful love.
- for the interaction of Elders and young people in their mission to prophesy and dream.
- for the prophecy *“when the light of the Gospel enters fully into their lives”*.

Amen

Fr Gerry

[Readings: <https://universalis.com/Australia/20200202/mass.htm>]