



The Holy See

MEETING OF THE POPE WITH THE ELDERLY

ADDRESS OF POPE FRANCIS

*Saint Peter's Square
Sunday, 28 September 2014*

Video

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning!

I thank you for coming in such great numbers! And thank you for this festive welcome: today is your celebration, our celebration! I thank Archbishop Paglia and all those who planned this. I thank especially Pope emeritus Benedict XVI for his presence. I have said many times that I am glad to have him live here in the Vatican, because it is like having a wise grandfather in the house. Thank you!

I heard the testimonies of several of you, who have presented experiences shared by so many elderly and grandparents! But one was different: that of the brothers from Qaraqosh, who escaped from violent persecution. To them let us all together say a special “thank you”! It is very beautiful that you came here today: it is a gift for the Church. And we offer you our closeness, our prayer and concrete help. Violence against the elderly is inhuman, just as that against children. But God does not abandon you; he is with you! With his help you are and you continue to be the memory for your people, as well as for us, for the great family of the Church. Thank you!

These brothers testify to us that even in the most difficult of trials, the elderly who have the faith are like trees that continue to bear fruit. This holds true in more ordinary situations too, where there can be, however, other temptations and other forms of discrimination. We have listened to several other testimonies.

In a special way, old age is a time of grace, in which the Lord renews his call to us: he calls us to

safeguard and transmit the faith, he calls us to pray, especially to intercede; he calls us to be close to those in need.... The elderly, grandparents have the ability to understand the most difficult of situations: a great ability! And when they pray for these situations, their prayer is strong; it is powerful!

Grandparents, who have received the blessing to see their children's children (cf. Ps 128: 6), are entrusted with a great responsibility: to transmit their life experience, their family history, the history of a community, of a people; to share wisdom with simplicity, and the faith itself — the most precious heritage! Happy is the family who have grandparents close by! A grandfather is a father twice over and a grandmother is a mother twice over. In those Countries where religious persecution has been cruel — I am thinking, for instance, of Albania, where I was last Sunday — in those Countries it was the grandparents who brought the children to be baptized in secret, to give them the faith. Well done! They were brave in persecution and they saved the faith in those Countries!

But not every older person, grandfather, grandmother, has a family who can take him or her in. And so homes for the elderly are welcome... may they be real homes and not prisons! And may they be for the elderly, and not for the interests of anyone else! They must not be institutions where the elderly live forgotten, hidden and neglected. I feel close to the many elderly who live in these institutions, and I think with gratitude of those who go to visit and care for them. Homes for the elderly should be the “lungs” of humanity in a town, a neighbourhood or a parish. They should be the “sanctuaries” of humanity where one who is old and weak is cared for and protected like a big brother or sister. It is so good to go visit an elderly person! Look at our children: sometimes we see them listless and sad; they go visit an elderly person and become joyful!

However, the reality is that elderly people are being abandoned: the elderly are so often discarded with an attitude of abandonment, which is actually real and hidden euthanasia! It is the result of a throw away culture which is so harmful to our world. Children are thrown away, young people are thrown away, because they have no work, and the elderly are thrown away with the pretence of maintaining a “balanced” economy, which has at its centre not the human person but money. We are all called to oppose this poisonous, throw away culture!

We Christians, together with all people of good will, are called to patiently build a more diverse, more welcoming, more humane, more inclusive society that does not need to discard those who are weak in body and mind. On the contrary we need a society which measures its success on how the weak are cared for.

As Christians and as citizens, we are called to envision, with imagination and wisdom, ways of facing this challenge. A people who does not take care of grandparents, who does not treat them well has no future! Why does it have no future? Because such a people loses its memory and is torn from its roots. But beware: it is your responsibility to keep these roots alive in yourselves with

prayer, by reading the Gospel and with works of mercy. In this way we will remain as living trees, that even in old age will not stop bearing fruit. One of the most beautiful aspects of family life, of our human life as a family, is caressing a baby and being caressed by a grandfather and a grandmother. Thank you!