



The Holy See

VISIT TO THE COMMUNITY OF SANT'EGIDIO'S
HOME FOR THE ELDERLY "VIVA GLI ANZIANI"

WORDS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

Rome

Monday 12 November 2012

Dear Brothers and Dear Sisters,

I am really glad to be with you in this “casa-famiglia” of the Sant’Egidio Community for the elderly. I thank Prof. Marco Impagliazzo, your President, for his friendly words. With him, I greet Prof. Andrea Riccardi, Founder of the community. I thank you for coming, Bishop Matteo Zuppi, Auxiliary for the Historical Centre, and Archbishop Bishop Vincenzo Paglia, President of the [Pontifical Council for the Family](#) and all the friends of the Sant’Egidio Community.

I come to you as Bishop of Rome, but also as an old man visiting his peers. It would be superfluous to say that I am well acquainted with the difficulties, problems and limitations of this age and I know that for many these difficulties are more acute due to the economic crisis. At times, at a certain age, one may look back nostalgically at the time of our youth when we were fresh and planning for the future. Thus at times our gaze is veiled by sadness, seeing this phase of life as the time of sunset. This morning, addressing all the elderly in spirit, although I am aware of the difficulties that our age entails I would like to tell you with deep conviction: it is beautiful to be old! At every phase of life it is necessary to be able to discover the presence and blessing of the Lord and the riches they bring. We must never let ourselves be imprisoned by sorrow! We have received the gift of longevity. Living is beautiful even at our age, despite some “aches and pains” and a few limitations. In our faces may there always be the joy of feeling loved by God and not sadness.

In the Bible longevity is considered a blessing of God; today this blessing is widespread and must be seen as a gift to appreciate and to make the most of. And yet frequently society dominated by the logic of efficiency and gain does not accept it as such: on the contrary it frequently rejects it, viewing the elderly as non-productive or useless. All too often we hear about the suffering of those who are marginalized, who live far from home or in loneliness. I think there should be greater commitment, starting with families and public institutions, to ensure that the elderly be able to stay in their own homes. The wisdom of life, of which we are bearers, is a great wealth. The quality of a society, I mean of a civilization, is also judged by how it treats elderly people and by the place it gives them in community life. Those who make room for the elderly make room for life! Those who welcome the elderly welcome life!

From the outset the Community of Sant'Egidio has supported so many elderly people on their way, helping them to stay in their own living milieus and opening various "casa-famiglia" in Rome and throughout the world. Through solidarity between the young and the old it has helped people to understand that the Church is effectively a family made up of all the generations, where each person must feel "at home" and where it is not the logic of profit and of possession that prevails but that of giving freely and of love. When life becomes frail, in the years of old age, it never loses its value and its dignity: each one of us, at any stage of life, is wanted and loved by God, each one is important and necessary (cf. *Homily for the beginning of the Petrine Ministry, 24 April 2005*).

Today's visit fits into the European Year of Active Aging and of Solidarity between the Generations. And in this very context I would like to reaffirm that the elderly are a value for society, especially for the young. There can be no true human growth and education without fruitful contact with the elderly, because their life itself is like an open book in which the young generations may find precious indications for their journey through life.

Dear friends, at our age we often experience the need of the help of others; and this also happens to the Pope. In the Gospel we read that Jesus told the Apostle Peter: "when you were young, you girded yourself and walked where you would; but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry you where you do not wish to go" (Jn 21:18). The Lord was referring to the way in which the Apostle was to witness to his faith to the point of martyrdom, but this sentence makes us think about that fact that the need for help is a condition of the elderly. I would like to ask you to seek in this too a gift of the Lord, because being sustained and accompanied, feeling the affection of others is a grace! This is important in every stage of life: no one can live alone and without help; the human being is relational. And in this case I see, with pleasure, that all those who help and all those who are helped form one family, whose lifeblood is love.

Dear elderly brothers and sisters, the days sometimes seem long and empty, with difficulties, few engagements and few meetings; never feel down at heart: you are a wealth for society, even in suffering and sickness. And this phase of life is also a gift for deepening the relationship with God.

The example of Blessed Pope John Paul II was and still is illuminating for everyone. Do not forget that one of the valuable resources you possess is the essential one of prayer: become interceders with God, praying with faith and with constancy. Pray for the Church, and pray for me, for the needs of the world, for the poor, so that there may be no more violence in the world. The prayers of the elderly can protect the world, helping it, perhaps more effectively than collective anxiety. Today I would like to entrust to your prayers the good of the Church and peace in the world. The Pope loves you and relies on all of you! May you feel beloved by God and know how to bring a ray of God's love to this society of ours, often so individualistic and so efficiency-oriented. And God will always be with you and with all those who support you with their affection and their help.

I entrust you all to the motherly intercession of the Virgin Mary, who always accompanies us on our journey with her motherly love and I willingly impart my blessing to each one of you. I thank you all!