



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAЕ

Grandpa's table

Tuesday, 19 November 2013

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In his homily at Holy Mass, Pope Francis exalted the precious role of the elderly in the Church and in society.

The Pope commented on the first Reading of the day taken from the Book of Maccabees (6:18-31), which recounts the story of Eleazar, the wise scribe “advanced in age and of noble presence”, who “welcomed death with honour” rather than partaking in unlawful sacrifice and succumbing to eating what was forbidden by Jewish law. When urged to save his life by pretending to eat unlawful food he refused, preferring to suffer and die rather than to give a bad example to others, especially to the young. Eleazar “was credible and consistent to the very end”, Pope Francis said. “In his exemplary behaviour we see the role of the elderly in the Church and in the world”.

“This man was unshaken when he was faced with a choice between apostasy and fidelity”, the Pope said. He had many friends, but they wanted him to compromise: “‘Pretend so that you may stay alive’, they said. It is this attitude of pretending, of false piety, of feigned religiosity, that Jesus forcefully condemns with a strong word in Chapter 23 of St Matthew’s Gospel: hypocrisy. Yet this good man, at 90 years of age, who was good and highly esteemed by the people, does not think of himself. He thinks only of God, of not offending him through the sin of hypocrisy and apostasy.

Yet he also thinks of the heritage he would leave behind. He thinks of those who are young”.

Eleazar asked himself whether he was leaving behind a compromise, an act of hypocrisy, or the truth, the truth which he had sought to follow his entire life. Eleazar, Pope Francis said, was a man whose faith was consistent and credible and who placed great importance in leaving behind him a “noble and true inheritance”.

The Pontiff then reflected on the treatment of the elderly in the modern day. “We live in a time when the elderly don’t count”, he said. “It’s unpleasant to say it, but they are set aside because they are considered a nuisance”. And yet, he added, “the elderly pass on history, doctrine, faith and they leave them to us as an inheritance. They are like a fine vintage wine; that is, they have within themselves the power to give us this noble inheritance”.

Pope Francis then pointed to another man who was “advanced in age and of noble presence”, the aged Polycarp who was sentenced to the stake. “When the fire began to burn”, the Bishop of Rome recounted, “those around him could only smell the pleasant odour of fresh-baked bread. This is what the elderly are for us”, he continued, “Fine vintage wine and good bread”. “And yet”, he lamented “especially in this world they are considered a nuisance”.

The Pope then recalled a story he was told as a young child. “There was a father, mother and their many children, and a grandfather lived with them. He was quite old, and when he was at table eating soup, he would get everything dirty: his mouth, the serviette ... it was not a pretty sight! One day the father said that, given what was happening to the grandfather, from that day forward he would eat alone. And so he bought a little table, and placed it in the kitchen. And so the grandfather ate alone in the kitchen while the family ate in the dining room. After some days, the father returned home from work and found one of his children playing with wood. He asked him: ‘What are you doing?’ to which the child replied: ‘I am playing carpenter’. ‘And what are you building?’ the father asked. ‘A table for you, papa, for when you get old like grandpa’. This story has stayed with me for a lifetime and done me great good”, Pope Francis said. “Grandparents are a treasure”.

Returning to what the Scriptures teach us about the elderly, Pope Francis then cited the Letter to the Hebrews. “There we read: ‘Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God: consider the outcome of their life, and imitate their faith’ (13:7). The remembrance of our ancestors leads us to imitate their faith. It is true that old age is at times unpleasant, because of the illnesses it brings. But the wisdom of our grandparents is the inheritance we ought to receive. A people that does not care for its grandparents, that does not respect its grandparents, has no future since it has lost its memory. Faced with martyrdom, Eleazar was aware of his responsibility to the young. He thought about God, but he also thought about the young, saying: ‘I must give the young a credible example to the very end’”.

Pope Francis concluded: “We would do well to think about the many elderly men and women, about those who are in rest homes and also those — it is an unpleasant word but let us say it — who have been abandoned by their loved ones. Let us pray for them that they may be consistent to the very end. This is the role of the elderly, this is the treasure. Let us pray for our grandfathers and grandmothers who often played a heroic role in handing on the faith in times of persecution. Especially in times past, when fathers and mothers often were not at home or had strange ideas, confused as they were by the fashionable ideologies of the day, grandmothers were the ones who handed on the Faith”.