



CARE FOR THE ELDERLY

Speech given at St Peter's Residence,
Vauxhall, Saturday 18 September 2010



About this resource

In his speeches and homilies Pope Benedict XVI left the Church in England and Wales a legacy of reading material for ongoing reflection and prayer. During the next twelve months one sheet will be offered monthly to assist deepening our shared appreciation and understanding of what he said and of the teaching of the Church.

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“As advances in medicine and other factors lead to increased longevity, it is important to recognise the presence of growing numbers of older people as a blessing for society. Every generation can learn from the experience and wisdom of the generation that preceded it. Indeed the provision of care for the elderly should be considered not so much an act of generosity as the repayment of a debt of gratitude.

For her part, the Church has always had great respect for the elderly. The Fourth Commandment, ‘Honour your father and your mother as the Lord your God commanded you’ (Deut 5:16), is linked to the promise, ‘that your days may be prolonged, and that it may go well with you, in the land which the Lord your

God gives you’ (Deut 5:16). This work of the Church for the aging and infirm not only provides love and care for them, but is also rewarded by God with the blessings he promises on the land where this commandment is observed. God wills a proper respect for the dignity and worth, the health and well-being of the elderly and, through her charitable institutions in Britain and beyond, the Church seeks to fulfil the Lord’s command to respect life, regardless of age or circumstances.”

Full text: <http://www.thepapalvisit.org.uk/Replay-the-Visit/Speeches/Speeches-18-September/Pope-Benedict-s-Speech-to-St-Peter-s-Residents-and-Staff>

FOR REFLECTION

News stories concerning neglect and poor care of the elderly are sadly not uncommon. Media outlets recently focussed on the poor quality of care given to elderly patients in some hospitals and care facilities. What the Pope said during his visit to St Peter’s residence speaks powerfully to this reality.

The Catholic Church teaches clearly that life is sacred from natural

conception to death. Catholics believe that life should be protected and respected irrespective of how some might perceive another’s value or worth. But do we witness to that in the way that we care for and speak about the elderly in our families and communities? Do we uphold the elderly as sources of wisdom for life? When was the last time that you gave an hour of your time to an elderly relative, neighbour or friend?





CHARISMS OF OLD AGE



“The presence of so many older persons in the modern world needs to be recognised as a gift, a new human and spiritual potential for enrichment... The contribution that older people, by their experience, can make to the process of making our society and culture more human is particularly valuable. It needs to be encouraged by fostering what might be termed the charisms proper to old age, namely:

Disinterestedness. The prevailing culture of our time measures the value of our actions according to criteria of efficiency and material success, which ignore the dimension of disinterestedness: of giving something, or giving ourselves, without any thought of a return. Older people, who have time on their hands, may recall the attention of an over-busy society to the need to break down the barriers of an indifference that debases, discourages and stifles altruistic impulses.

Memory. The younger generations are losing a sense of history and consequently the sense of their own identity. A society that minimises the sense of history fails in its responsibility to educate young people. A society that ignores the past more easily runs the risk of repeating its errors. The loss of an historical sense is also attributable to a system of life that has marginalized and isolated older people, and that hampers dialogue between the generations.

Experience. Today we live in a world in which the responses of science and technology seem to have supplanted the value of the experience accumulated by older people in the course of their whole lives. This kind of cultural barrier should not discourage people of the third and fourth ages, since they still have a lot to say to the young generations and to share with them.

Interdependence. No man is an island. But growing individualism and self-seeking are obscuring this truth. Older people, in their search for companionship, challenge a society in which the weaker are often abandoned; they draw attention to the social nature of man and to the need to repair the fabric of interpersonal and social relationships.

A more complete vision of life... The third age is also the age of simplicity and contemplation. The affective, moral and religious values embodied by older people are an indispensable resource for fostering the harmony of society, of the family and of the individual... Older people understand the superiority of of ‘being’ over ‘having’.”

Pause to re-read this extract and to reflect. Talk to Jesus about what and who comes to mind. This kind of interior conversation is a form of prayer.

Text source:

The Dignity of Older People and their Mission in the Church and in the World, Pontifical Council for the Laity. Full text: http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/laity/documents/rc_pc_laity_doc_05021999_older_people_en.html

What is a charism?

“Whether extraordinary or simple and humble, charisms are graces of the Holy Spirit which directly or indirectly benefit the Church, ordered as they are to her building up, to the good of men, and to the needs of the world.”

Catechism of the Catholic Church 799

“Charisms are to be accepted with gratitude by the person who receives them and by all members of the Church as well. They are a wonderfully rich grace for the apostolic vitality and for the holiness of the entire Body of Christ, provided they really are genuine gifts of the Holy Spirit and are used in full conformity with authentic promptings of this same Spirit, that is, in keeping with charity, the true measure of all charisms.”

Catechism of the Catholic Church 799

Source: http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENGOOI5/_INDEX.HTM

Jeanne Jugan



CR Photo/Owen Sweeney III

Foundress of the Little Sisters of the Poor.

Read about the community's charism and work: <http://www.littlesistersofthepoorenglishprovince.org.uk/>

Caritas Social Action Network



...the umbrella organisation of charities with a Catholic ethos, providing social care within the UK. See: <http://www.caritas-socialaction.org.uk/>