

May 5, 2024

Dear Friends,



God's blessings as we celebrate the 6th Sunday of Easter and the new month of May! This weekend we rejoice with all our First Communion families! God bless everyone for this most important moment in the lives of our young parishioners and these wonderful families! May this be the start of many years of grace at the Table of the Lord!

So much to celebrate in May! Not only First Communion Day but Mother's Day, graduations, new moments of life for so many! Let's keep one another in prayer. We are getting close to the end of the Easter Season. We rejoice because we know that our Lord has promised to remain with us always. Jesus is with us in our waking and our sleeping, in our joys and our sufferings, in our homes and in our communities! And once again we are reminded to love one another. Why? John says because love is of God, as witnessed by the Father sending the Son to bring us new life and the Son dying for us on the cross to save us from sin. When we follow Jesus' command to love, he promises us that we will remain in his love and will receive whatever we truly need. God is love.

One way to love is to reach out to others. Love isn't easy; it can cause us to put someone else's life before our own. Love can leave us vulnerable. Love can lead to heartbreak and grief. But this is what Jesus himself did and what he calls us to do. Such self-sacrificing love is countercultural and, to many, an 'absurd' idea of putting someone else ahead of ourselves. But as John reminds us, God is love, and this, from the start of creation, is what God has done! Alleluia!



Here is a great way to show love: ATTENTION CURRENT AND FUTURE EXTRAORDINARY MINISTERS OF HOLY COMMUNION (EMHCs)! Please consider volunteering with the homebound Communion ministry to distribute Communion to individuals living in private homes, apartments, and other facilities such as O'Neill Healthcare, Rockport Senior Living, and Willowood Manor. This is a most rewarding and fulfilling experience for both the recipient and the EMHCs. If you are interested, please contact the parish office.



DON'T FORGET!!! RE Solemnity of the Ascension: For those who are wondering about what we used to call Ascension Thursday, please remember that in our diocese (along with many archdioceses and dioceses) the feast is transferred to Sunday, May 12th. So don't look for special Masses on May 9th. The Ascension for us is now on a Sunday, this year May 12th! We don't want you to worry! The reasons for this change over the years lie deep in the realms and mysteries of liturgical and canonical discernments. Suffice to say, 'that's the way it is for more contemporary celebrations of this important

aspect of the paschal mystery. I know you are excited to hear this! Now for some reflections on this 6th Sunday of Easter:



SIXTH SUNDAY OF EASTER—CYCLE B THE BREAKTHROUGH OF AN UNHINDERED GOSPEL – Texts: Acts 10:25-26, 34-35, 44-48

The Book of Acts in the New Testament is more than a mere objective history of the earliest years of the Church; it is also the second of the twin volumes written by Saint Luke, completing the story he began in the Gospel that bears his name. And like the gospel, Luke writes Acts, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, in such a way that the message of the story comes through as well as the details of the events he recounts. Acts has a message to tell, a sermon to preach, if you will, not just a documentary to unfold. And though there are many facets to this jewel of a volume, one of the clear messages Luke intends for us to hear is that the story of the Church is a continuation of the ministry of Jesus Christ, and especially in its continuation of the message and practice of radical inclusiveness. This message is rooted in the teaching and practice of Jesus, especially as told by Luke. It is Luke's story of Jesus, more than the other Gospel accounts, that emphasizes the mercy shown to Gentiles and women, Samaritans and sinners. And the Book of Acts shows how that same practice of wide inclusion framed the earliest days of the infant Church. As a New Testament scholar put it, the Book of Acts tells the story of how the early Church came to understand and practice God's plan for an unhindered gospel.

Our lesson today from the Book of Acts is an illustration of this theme. We pick up the story toward the end of Saint Peter's encounter with a Roman named Cornelius, who along with his household and friends, invited Peter to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ. Now Cornelius was a godly and generous man, but he was still a gentile, an officer in the Roman army that occupied Israel in the first century. In that day, hating Roman army personnel was a well-honed art by most fervent Israelites. And so Simon Peter, raised as he was in a good Jewish home, struggled to know whether to accept the invitation to the home of Cornelius, wondering if such contact with a gentile family would make him "unclean" to God. Old habits and instruction die hard, and Peter had been taught since his childhood that no good Jew mingles with the enemy or gentiles.



If you know the first part of this story, God had to twist Peter's arm through three successive visions in order to loosen him up enough to even accept the invitation by Cornelius. Parenthetical note here: we are not born racially biased or narrowly nationalistic. We have to be taught to distrust those who are different in appearance and custom to us. And Peter, like many of us, had been taught all too well. But finally Peter went to the house, and in the middle of his sermon, the Holy Spirit fell on the house just as on the Day of Pentecost. It was as if God was too impatient to allow Peter to finish his sermon before bestowing Divine favor. Well, Peter was stunned at this outpouring of God's approval and blessing, and he could clearly see that God had a wider view of Church than Peter did. One

wonders if this entire episode was as much the continuation of the conversion of Peter as it was a conversion of Cornelius.

It was another of those breakthrough moments in the plotline of the Book of Acts.

Marked by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, a divine exclamation mark that this spread of the gospel boundaries met with God's approval, the Church was forced to recognize that they had to unlearn some old ways of thinking if they were to keep current with the expanded vision and purpose of God. In similar fashion, the gospel spread to the Samaritans under the witness of Philip, and to the Gentiles in far-flung reaches of the Roman Empire under the preaching of the Apostle Paul. With every breakthrough, as walls fell of racial division, economic division, nationalistic division, gender division, geographical division, and sectarian division, the Church had to wrestle anew with just how wide was the reach of God's embrace. God made it clear that His Church would not be an exclusive clique of the elite, or a small religious club for the inner circle. No, God was drawing a wide circle, indeed! And He expected the early Church, as He expects the Church today, to keep up with Him.



Have you had breakthrough moments like that in your own life history?

Haven't we all had those times, those "aha moments," when we finally discovered that people who were different from us were not so different from us after all? Perhaps it was the first time we made a true friend across racial lines, and stepped over the segregation line within our social circle. Maybe it was the time we traveled overseas for vacation or education exchange, or we took a mission trip to an impoverished country, only to discover that we had more to learn and more need to receive from the richness of that other culture than we ever knew before. Sometimes it takes a lifetime, and maybe more than a single lifetime, for us to finally learn that we are all neighbors on this planet, with intertwined destinies, and similar passions and desires. When we see only differences between us and other people, and overlook the similarities, we are still stuck in a way of thinking that can only impoverish our life experience, and ultimately separate us from the direction God wants to take the world.

Simon Peter's "aha" caused him to say, on that breakthrough day in the home of Cornelius, "In truth, I see that God shows no partiality. Rather in every nation whoever fears him and acts uprightly is acceptable to him." Peter uses an interesting word picture here. The phrase in the Greek language translated here "to show partiality" is an idiom that if translated woodenly would mean, "to look upon the face." Interesting word picture, isn't it? When we look upon a face we usually see gender, color of skin, age, and a myriad of other impressions that distinguish us one from another. But with all of these differences flying into view we might forget that the face we gaze upon is still a human face, a face of someone more like me than unlike me, the face of another of God's beloved children. On that day of Second Pentecost in the house of a Roman soldier, Peter finally realized that God does not "look upon the face" of people. When God sees us He does not focus on our maleness or femaleness, the color of pigment in our epidermis, whether we are American or Chinese, whether we are adorned with shiny jewels or grimy with the dirt of toilsome labor.

God does not look for those features, for they are not important. God looks on the heart, not the face. And that makes all the difference.

What would the world be like if we could all learn this truth, and practice it in our business dealings, our personal relationships, and our international policy? The book of Acts make it clear, God's unhindered gospel will eventually break down every wall, every barrier, every caste system. And so here is how Luke's Book of Acts ends, with the Apostle Paul preaching in Rome, "boldly preaching the Kingdom of God to everyone unhindered" (Acts 28:31). Now that is a good ending for the story! And a good goal for all of us too. Now a few thoughts about love from Fr. Ron Rolheiser, OMI:

This is my commandment: love one another as I love you. (Jn 15:12)



Measuring Ourselves in Love *It's easy to consider ourselves as loving if we only look at one side of things.*

When I was younger, I was pretty confident that I knew what love meant. After all, we all experience love in some way, being in love, loving someone, being loved by someone. Virtually everyone has known the love of somebody, a friend, a family member, an acquaintance. But the older I get the more I wonder sometimes whether I, or most anyone else, has much sense of what that over-used word, love, really means? When we are honest, we sense our own distance from its full meaning. Why?

Because, the older we get, the more we also begin to know love's dark side. Too common are these experiences: We fall in love and think it will last forever, but then fall out of love, feel love go sour, feel love grow cold, see love betrayed, feel ourselves wounded by love, and wound others. Finally, even more upsetting, we all find that there are always people in our lives who are cold, bitter, and unforgiving towards us so that it is not always easy to feel love for them and be loving.

In the light of this reticence, I would like comment on Jesus' most important commandment: "Love one another as I have loved you!" We too easily read that simplistically, romantically, and in a one-sided, over-confident manner. But this command contains the most important challenge of the whole gospel and, like the deepest part of the gospel to which it is linked, the crucifixion, it is very, very difficult to imitate. Why?



It's easy to consider ourselves as loving if we only look at one side of things, namely, how we relate to those people who are loving, warm, respectful, and gracious towards us. If we rate ourselves on how we feel about ourselves in our best moments among like-minded friends, we can easily conclude both that we are loving persons and that we are measuring up to Jesus' command to love as he did.

But if we begin to look at the skeletons in our relational closets our naive confidence soon disappears: what about the people who hate us, whom we don't like? What about the people whom we avoid and who avoid us? What about those people towards whom we feel resentment? What about all those people with whom we are at odds, towards whom we feel suspicion, coldness, anger? What about those people whom we haven't been able to forgive? It's one thing to love someone who adores you, it's quite another to love someone who wants you dead! But that's the real test. Jesus' command to love contains a critical subordinate clause, "as I have loved you!" What was unique in the way he loved us?

Where Jesus stretches us beyond our natural instincts and beyond all self-delusion is in his command to love our enemies, to be warm to those who are cold to us, to be kind to those who are cruel to us, to do good to those who hate us, to forgive those who hurt us, to forgive those who won't forgive us, and ultimately to love and forgive those who are trying to kill us.

That command, love and forgive your enemies, more than any creedal formula or other moral issue, is the litmus-test for Christian discipleship. We can ardently believe in and defend every item in the creed and fight passionately for justice in all its dimensions, but the real test of whether or not we are followers of Jesus is the capacity or non-capacity to forgive an enemy, to remain warm and loving towards someone who is not warm and loving to us.



We shouldn't delude ourselves on this. It is easy to rationalize this away and, if we do, no doubt there will be more than enough false friends around who will furnish us with both theological and psychological arguments that will justify us in not loving our enemies. But the gospel is uncompromising: We are loving or non-loving not on the basis of how we respond to those who love us, but on the basis of how we respond to those who hate us, and are cold, hostile, and murderous toward us. That's the hard, non-negotiable truth underlying Jesus' command to love and, when we are honest, we have to admit that we are still a long ways from measuring up to that.

There's a sobering challenge in an old Stevie Nicks' song, "Gold-dust Woman": she suggests that it's good that, at a point in life, someone "shatters our illusion of love" because far too often, blind to its own true intentions, our love is manipulative and self-serving. Too often, the song points out, we are lousy lovers who unconsciously pick our prey. What shatters our illusion of love is the presence in our lives of people who hate us. They're the test. It's here where we have to measure up. If we can love them, we're real lovers; if we can't, we're still under a self-serving illusion. – *Fr. Ron Rolheiser, OMI*

As we move into this new month of May, here are some more thoughts re virtues from our Holy Father, Pope Francis, and some thoughts for young people:



Cycle of Catechesis. Vices and Virtues: The life of grace according to the Spirit

Dear brothers and sisters! In recent weeks we have reflected on the cardinal virtues: prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance. They are the four cardinal virtues. As we have emphasized several times, these four virtues belong to a very ancient wisdom that predates even Christianity. Even before Christ, honesty was preached as a civic duty, wisdom as the rule for actions, courage as the fundamental ingredient for a life that tends towards the good, and moderation as the necessary measure not to be overwhelmed by excesses. This patrimony that is so ancient, the patrimony of humanity has not been replaced by Christianity, but focused on, enhanced, purified, and integrated in the faith.

There is therefore in the heart of every man and woman the capacity to seek the good. The Holy Spirit is given so that those who receive it can clearly distinguish good from evil, have the strength to adhere to good by shunning evil, and, in so doing, achieve full self-realization.

But in the journey that we are all making towards the fullness of life, which belongs to the destiny of every person – the destiny of each person is fullness, to be full of life – the Christian enjoys special assistance from the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Jesus. It is implemented through the gift of three other, distinctly Christian virtues, which are often mentioned together in the New Testament writings. These fundamental attributes, which characterize the life of the Christian, are three virtues that we often speak of together: faith, hope and charity.



Let's say it together: faith, hope... I don't hear anything! Louder! Faith, hope, and charity! Good job! Christian writers soon called them "theological" virtues, insofar as they are received and lived out in relationship with God, to differentiate them from the other four, called "cardinal" insofar as they constitute the "hinge" [It., "*cardine*"] of a good life. These three are received in Baptism and come from the Holy Spirit. The one and the other, both the theological and the cardinal, put together in so many systematic reflections, have thus composed a wonderful septenary, which is often contrasted with the list of the seven deadly sins. This is how the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* defines the action of the theological virtues: "the theological virtues are the foundation of Christian moral activity; they animate it and give it its special character. They inform and give life to all the moral virtues. They are infused by God into the souls of the faithful to make them capable of acting as his children and of meriting eternal life. They are the pledge of the presence and action of the Holy Spirit in the faculties of the human being" (n. 1813).

While the risk of the cardinal virtues is of generating men and women who are heroic in doing good, but all alone, isolated, the great gift of the theological virtues is existence lived in the Holy Spirit. The Christian is never alone. He does good not because of a titanic effort of personal commitment, but because, as a humble disciple, he walks in the

footsteps of Jesus, the Master. He goes forward on the way. The Christian has the theological virtues, which are the great antidote to self-sufficiency. How often do certain morally irreproachable men and women run the risk of becoming conceited and arrogant in the eyes of those who know them! It is a danger that the Gospel rightly warns us against, when Jesus advises the disciples: "You too, when you have done all that you have been commanded, say, 'We are useless servants. We have done what we ought to have done'" (Lk 17:10). Pride is a poison, a powerful poison: a drop of it is enough to spoil a whole life marked by goodness. A person may have performed a mountain of good deeds, may have reaped accolades and praise, but if he has done all this only for himself, to exalt himself, can he still call himself a virtuous person? No!

Good is not only an end, but also a means. Goodness needs a lot of discretion, a lot of kindness. Above all, goodness needs to be stripped of that sometimes too cumbersome presence that is our ego. When our "I" is at the center of everything, everything is ruined. If we perform every action in life only for ourselves, is this motivation really so important? The poor "I" takes hold of everything and thus pride is born.



To correct all these situations, which sometimes become painful, the theological virtues are of great help. They are especially so in times of falling, because even those with good moral intentions sometimes fall. We all fall in life, because we are all sinners. Just as even those who practice virtue daily sometimes make mistakes; we all make mistakes in life: intelligence is not always clear, will is not always firm, passions are not always governed, courage does not always overcome fear. But if we open our hearts to the Holy Spirit – the Master of the interior life – He revives the theological virtues in us: then, if we have lost confidence, God reopens us to faith; with the strength of the Spirit, if we have lost confidence, God reopens us to faith; if we are discouraged, God awakens hope in us; and if our heart is hardened, God softens it with His love. Thank you.

Our Holy Father has a special place in his heart and ministry for young people.

Watch him when he's near them; he becomes energized. When he was recently in the city of Venice, he took a moment to address young folks in particular:



VISIT OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS TO VENICE – MEETING WITH YOUNG PEOPLE 28 April 2024

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning! Even the sun is smiling! It's wonderful to see you! Being together allows us to share the wonder that we are, even if just through a prayer, a look, and a smile. Indeed, we have all received a great gift, that of being God's beloved children, and we are called to fulfill the Lord's dream: to bear witness and live His joy. There is nothing more beautiful. Have you ever had an experience so beautiful that you couldn't keep it to yourself but felt compelled to share it with others? We all have this experience, an experience so beautiful that one feels the need to share it. That's why we are here today: to rediscover in the Lord the beauty that we are and to rejoice in the name

of Jesus, a youthful God who loves young people and always surprises us. Our God always surprises us. Have you understood this? It is very important to be prepared for God's surprises!

Friends, here in Venice, a beautiful city, we live together a beautiful moment of encounter. Tonight, when each of us will be at home, and then tomorrow and in the days to come, where do we start to welcome the beauty that we are and to embrace, where do we start to grasp this beauty? I suggest two verbs, to start again, two verbs that are both practical and maternal: two verbs indicating movement that animated the young heart of Mary, the Mother of God and our Mother. To spread the joy of the Lord and to help those in need, she "arose and went" (Lk 1:39). Arise and go. Do not forget these two verbs that Our Lady experienced before us.



First of all, arise. Get up from the ground, because we are made for Heaven.

Rise from sadness to lift our gaze upward. Rise to stand in front of life, not to sit on the couch. Have you thought, imagined, what is a young person who spends his or her life sitting on the couch? Have you imagined this? Imagine this; and there are several "couches" that take hold of us and do not let us get up again. Arise to say "here I am!" to the Lord, who believes in us. Stand up to welcome the gift that we are, to recognize, before anything else, that we are precious and irreplaceable. "But father, Pope, or Mr. Pope, no, it's not true, I am ugly...". No, no, no-one is ugly, every one of us is beautiful and has a treasure within, a beautiful treasure to share and give to others. Do you agree about this or not? And this, listen carefully, is not self-esteem, no, it is reality! Recognizing this is the first step we should take in the morning when we wake up: get out of bed and accept yourself as a gift.

You arise, and before diving into things to do, recognize who you are by thanking the Lord. You can say, "My God, thank you for life. My God, make me fall in love with my life". Acknowledge who you are and thank the Lord. You can say to Him, "My God, thank you for life. My God, make me fall in love with life, with my life. My God, You are my life. My God, help me today for this, for that... You know, my God, I am in love, I am in love, help me, help me to make this love grow and then end up as a beautiful couple". One can say so many beautiful things to the Lord. Then, pray the Our Father, where the first word is the key to joy. We say "Father" and recognize ourselves as a beloved son or beloved daughter. Remember that for God, you are not a digital profile, but a child, that you have a Father in heaven and therefore you are a child of heaven. "But, Father, this is too romantic!". No, it is reality, dear friend, but we must discover it in our life, not in books, in life, in our life.

Yet, often we find ourselves fighting against a negative gravitational force that pulls down, an oppressive inertia that wants us to see everything in a shade of gray. At times this happens. What should we do? In order to arise – let's not forget – first we must let ourselves be picked up. May we allow the Lord to take us by the hand, since He never disappoints those who trust in Him, but always lifts up and forgives. You might say, "But I am not up to it: I feel fragile, weak, a sinner, I often fall!" But when you feel this way, please, change your "mindset": do not look at yourself with your eyes, but think of how God looks upon you. When you make a mistake and fall, what does He do? He stands there,

right next to you and smiles, ready to take your hand and lift you up. This is something beautiful: He is always there to lift you up.



I will tell you something that this suggests to me. Is it nice to look down at someone from above? Is it good or not good? No, it is not good. But when can one look down at a person from above, when? In order to help them up. The only time we can look down at a person from above, with beauty, is when we help them to get up. And this is what Jesus does with us, when we fall. He looks down on us from above. This is beautiful. Do you not believe it? Open the Gospel and see what He did with Peter, with Mary Magdalene, with Zacchaeus, and with many others: He worked miracles with their fragilities. The Lord works miracles with our fragilities.

And, somewhat in passing: do you read the Gospel? I will give you a piece of advice. Do you have a pocket copy of the Gospel? Always carry it with you and, at any time, open it and read a small passage. Always carry the little pocket Gospel with you. Agreed? [They answer: "Yes!"]. Onwards and upwards!



God knows that, besides being beautiful, we are fragile, and the two things go together. It is a bit like Venice, which is splendid and delicate at the same time. It is beautiful and delicate; it has some fragilities that need to be cared for. God does not hold our mistakes against us: "You have done this, you have done that...". He does not hold this against us, but extends His hand. "But, Father, I have many, many things I am ashamed of". But do not look at yourself, look at the hand that God extends to lift you up! Do not forget this: if you feel the weight of your conscience, look at the Lord and let yourself be taken by His hand. When we are down, He sees children to lift up, not evildoers to punish. Please, trust in the Lord! This is becoming a bit long, are you getting bored? [They answer: "No!"]. You are polite, good!

Once we have arisen, it is up to us to stay on our feet. First, we get up, then we stay on our feet, "remain" when we feel like sitting down, letting go, or giving up. It is not easy, but this is the secret. Yes, the secret to great achievements is perseverance. It is true that at times there is this fragility that pulls you down, but perseverance is what carries you forward, it is the secret. Today we live on quick emotions, momentary sensations, instincts that last for mere moments. Yet, we do not advance far this way. Sporting champions, as well as artists and scientists, show that great achievements are not reached in an instant or all at once. If this is true for sports, art, and culture, it is even truer for what matters most in life.

What matters most in life? Love, faith. And to grow in faith and in love, we must persevere and keep going forward. Instead, here the risk is to leave everything to improvisation: I pray if I feel like it; I go to Mass when I feel like it; I do good if I feel up to it. This does not yield results: we need to persevere, day after day. We must do it together, because togetherness always helps us go forward. Together: "do-it-yourself" does not work

in big things. That's why I tell you: don't isolate yourself, but seek others, experience God together, find a group to walk with so you don't grow tired. You might say, "But around me, everyone is on their own with their cellphone, glued to social media and video games". Yet, you must fearlessly go against the current: take life into your hands, get involved; turn off the TV and open the Gospel – is this too much? Put the cellphone down, and meet people! The cell phone is very useful, to communicate, it is useful, but be careful when the cellphone prevents you from meeting people. You can use the cellphone, that's fine; but meet people. You know what an embrace, a kiss, a handshake is: people. Do not forget this: use the cellphone, but meet people.



I seem to hear your objection: "It's not easy, Father; it's like swimming against the current!" But you can't say this here in Venice, because Venice itself tells us that only by rowing consistently can we go far. If you are Venetian citizens, you learn to row consistently in order to go far! Of course, rowing requires regularity; but perseverance brings rewards, even if the path is difficult. So, boys and girls, this is what it means to arise: letting yourself be taken by the hand by God to walk together!

And after getting up, go. To go means making oneself a gift, giving oneself to others, the capacity to fall in love; and this is a beautiful thing: a young woman, a young man who does not feel the capacity to fall in love or to be loving towards others, is missing something. Go towards people, walk, go forward.

Dear brothers, dear sisters, I am coming to an end, don't worry! Think of our Father, who created everything for us, God, who gave us everything: and we, who are His children, for whom do we create something beautiful? We live immersed in man-made products, which make us lose our awe for the beauty that surrounds us. Yet, creation invites us to be creators of beauty ourselves. Please, do not forget this: being creators of beauty, to create something that did not exist before. This is beautiful! And when you are married and have a son, a daughter, you will have made something that did not exist previously! And this is the beauty of youth, when it becomes maternity or paternity: making something that did not exist before. This is beautiful. Think within yourselves of the children you will have, and this must drive us forward.



Do not be professionals of compulsive typing, but creators of new things! A prayer made with the heart, a page you write yourself, a dream you realize, a gesture of love for someone who cannot reciprocate. This is creating, imitating the style of God, who creates. It is the style of gratuitousness, which brings us out of the nihilistic logic of "I do to have" and "I work to earn". This must be done – doing to have and working to earn – but it must not be the center of your life. The center is gratuitousness: bring to life a symphony of gratuitousness in a world that seeks profit! Then you will be revolutionaries. Go, give yourself without fear!

A young person who wants to take your life in your hands, arise! Open your heart to God, thank Him, and embrace the beauty that you are; fall in love with your life. Then go! Arise, fall in love, and go! Go out, and walk together with others; look for those who are alone, color the world with your creativity, and paint the streets of life with the Gospel.

And now some thoughts about grandparents and grandchildren for our day and age from Pope Francis:



"THE CARESS AND THE SMILE" – MEETING OF POPE FRANCIS WITH GRANDPARENTS, THE ELDERLY AND GRANDCHILDREN

Dear grandparents and dear grandchildren, welcome! It is a beautiful experience to have a grandparent! I would like us to reflect a moment: on the fact that love makes us better, love makes us better, it makes us richer and it makes us wiser, at any age. Love makes us better.



Firstly: love makes us better. You too show this, that you make each other better by loving each other. And I say this too you as a "grandfather", with the desire to share the ever-youthful faith that unites all generations. I too received it from my grandmother, from whom I first learned about Jesus who loves us, who never leaves us alone, and who urges us too to be close to each other and never to exclude anyone. I still remember the first prayers my grandmother taught me.

Not only this, but we also become richer. How is this? Our society is full of people who are specialists in many things, rich in knowledge and useful means for everyone. However, if there is no sharing and each person thinks only of himself, all that wealth is lost; rather, it becomes an impoverishment of humanity. And this is a great risk for our time: the poverty of fragmentation and selfishness. The selfish person thinks he is more important if he puts himself in the foreground and has more things, if he has more things... But the selfish person is the poorest, because selfishness impoverishes. Let us think, for example, of some expressions we use: when we talk about the "world of youth", the "world of the elderly", this world or another... But there is just one world! And it is made up of many realities that are different precisely in order to help and complement each other: the generations, the peoples, and all the differences, if harmonized, can reveal, like the faces of a big diamond, the wondrous splendor of humanity and creation. This too is what your being together teaches us: not to let diversity create rifts between us! No, let there not be rifts... Not to pulverize the diamond of love, the most beautiful treasure God has given us: love.

At times we hear phrases such as "think of yourself!", that phrase "think of yourself", "don't need anyone!". They are false phrases, which mislead people into thinking that it is good not to depend on others, to do things by yourself, to live as islands, whereas these are attitudes that only create a great deal of loneliness. Such as, for example, when because of the culture of rejection, the elderly are left alone and have to

spend the last years of their life far from home and from their loved ones. What do you think about this? Is it good or is it not good? No! The elderly must not be left by themselves, they must live within the family, in the community, with the affection of everyone. And if they cannot live with their families, we must go to visit them and stay close to them. Let us think about it for a moment: do we like this? Isn't a world in which no one has to be afraid to end their days alone much better? This world is sad, clearly yes, it is sad. So let us build this world, together, not just by devising care programs, but by cultivating different projects of existence, in which the passing years are not considered a loss that diminishes someone, but an asset that grows and enriches everyone: and as such are appreciated and not feared.



And this brings us to the final aspect: love, the love that makes us wiser. It is curious: love makes us wiser. Dear grandchildren, your grandparents are the memory of a world without memory, and “when a community loses its memory, it’s over” (*Address to the Sant’Egidio Community, 15 June 2014*). A question: what happens to a society that loses its memory? (The young people answer) It’s over. We must not lose our memory. Listen to your grandparents, especially when they teach you, with their love and with their witness, to cultivate the most important affections, which are not obtained by force, which do not appear through success, but which fill life.

Visit your grandparents and do not marginalize them, for your own good: “The marginalization of the elderly – both conceptual and practical – corrupts all seasons of life, not just that of old age” (*Catechesis, 1 June 2022*). Please, go to see your grandparents, do not marginalize them: it is for your own good. Again, the marginalization of the elderly corrupts all the seasons of life, not just that of old age. I like to repeat this. Instead, you learn the wisdom of their strong love, and also of their frailty, which is a “magisterium” capable of teaching without the need for words, a true antidote to the hardening of the heart: it will help you not to remain stuck in the present, and to savor life as a relationship (*cf. Benedict XVI, 12 November 2012*). But not only that: when you, grandparents and grandchildren, old and young, are together, when you see and hear each other often, when you care for each other, your love is a breath of clean air that refreshes the world and society and makes us all stronger, beyond the bonds of kinship.



**Thank you, Holy Father! We pray for you each day and at each Eucharist!
Oremus pro invicem. Soli Deo Gloria.**

Fr. Michael J. Lanning