



Handing on to future generations

Reflection for the 17th Week of the Year – 27 July 2025

Mgr Daniel McHugh

"On the day I called you answered"

There is much debate these days about the Internet and the danger it poses to young people in particular. However, there is another side to the coin: some of the posts can be quite inspiring. One I watched early today, Tuesday 22 July, was of Michael Caine: he was speaking about his acting career and feeling it was all over at the age of 60 and then he started to get offers for older parts. At 85 he was still going strong! He mentioned Cider House Rules where he received an Academy Award in 1999 as a Supporting Actor. I had seen him in Educating Rita in 1983 which earned him a BAFTA and Golden Globe Award. He is now 92 and didn't finally retire from acting until October 2023 at the age of 90.

I mention this true story because the weekend of the 17th Sunday is the World Day for Grandparents and the Elderly. It was noticeable that Pope Leo visited the Care Home in Castel Gandolfo before he returned to Rome after his break away from the heat of the Eternal City. He met personally many of the residents (aged 18-100 years old). He said to them: *"You are signs of hope; you have given much to life"* and *"you continue to be that testimony of faith and prayer"*, a family that offers the Lord what they have.

Earlier on 10 July, Pope Leo issued a message expanding on the theme of this year's World Day of Prayer for Grandparents and the Elderly: *"Blessed are those who have not lost hope"*. 2025 marks the fifth anniversary of this Day which was instituted by Pope Francis on the 4th Sunday of July, close to the Liturgical Memorial of Sts Joachim and Anne, the grandparents of Jesus. In his message for this year's celebration, Pope Leo said the Jubilee Year, which is a time of liberation from injustice and inequality, is an appropriate time for all the faithful to help older people *"experience liberation, especially from loneliness and abandonment"*.

To help everyone participate in the Holy Year, especially those who are unable to go on Pilgrimage, the Dicastery (the Vatican Department) for Laity, Family and Life created a pastoral resource with suggestions for holding a Jubilee Celebration in places where the elderly live. *"Our societies, everywhere in the world, are growing all too accustomed to letting this significant and enriching part of their life be marginalised and forgotten"*, Pope Leo wrote, speaking of the elderly. *"If it is true that the weakness of the elderly needs the strength of the young it is equally true that the inexperience of the young needs the witness of the elderly in order to build the future with wisdom"*, his message said. Grandparents offer examples of *"faith and devotion, civic witness and social commitment, memory and perseverance amid trials"*, he wrote....

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"The precious legacy that they have handed down to us with hope and love will always be a source of gratitude and a summons to perseverance."

Speaking as an older person, Pope Leo, who will turn 70 in September, wrote, *"We possess a freedom that no difficulties can rob us of: it is the freedom to love and to pray",* and to be there for one another in faith as *"shining signs of hope"*. I noted his parting words to those in the Santa Marta Care Home in Castel Gandolfo. The Gospel of Martha and Mary from last Sunday was obviously in his mind. He emphasised that in each of us there is something of Martha and something of Mary, and invited them to use this stage of life to live more like Mary: listening to Jesus' words and praying. He thanked them for their prayers *"so important, much more than we imagine"*, and he added: *"Age doesn't matter; it is Jesus who wants to come closer to us, become our guest, invites us to be witnesses, young or not so much."*

But, how should we pray is a question that many ask, and it is answered by Jesus himself in the Gospel from St Luke on the 17th Sunday of the Year (C). Loyola Press Commentary, Sunday Connection, in its background to the Gospel points out that *"Luke gives more attention to Jesus teaching on prayer than any other Gospel writer. He also mentions Jesus at prayer more than the others"*. In the Gospel for the 17th Sunday, in response to the disciples request that He teaches them to pray, He teaches them the prayer we call the Our Father, and in a Parable about the persistent neighbour, assures them that God hears our prayers. The Commentary says *"Matthew's version (of the Our Father) shows signs of being shaped by public prayer. Luke's version is probably closer to the original form that Jesus taught. Stripped of much of the language that we are used to, Luke's version seems simple and direct. We pray that God's name will be recognised as holy and that his rule over all established. This is followed by petitions for our needs for bread, for forgiveness, and for deliverance. Luke uses the more Theological language of "sins" rather than "debts" which is used in Matthews version. Then Jesus tells the Parable of the neighbour who asks his neighbour for bread at midnight and is so persistent that he gets up from bed and gives him what he wants. If a neighbour is willing to help us if we are persistent enough, how could God not respond to our requests! Indeed He will give us the most important gift, the Holy Spirit who is central in the growth of the early Church at Pentecost"*. The Commentary concludes: *"The Parable and the concluding teaching in this section should not lead us to think of prayer as a series of requests (though they have their place) presented to God. Rather as Jesus teaches in his model prayer, prayer consists in recognising God's holiness and his rule over all things."*

What important gifts Grandparents and the elderly have to pass on to future generations. Pope Francis, in his last hospitalization, said: *"our bodies are weak, but even so, nothing can prevent us from loving, praying, giving ourselves, being there for one another, in faith, as shining signs of hope."*

For our part in families and parishes Pope Leo emphasised we are called to be *"protagonists"* in a *"revolution of gratitude and care"* and that this must be done

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“by regular visits to the elderly, the creation of networks to support and pray for them and with them, and the forging of relationships that can restore hope and dignity to those who feel forgotten”.

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