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Holy Mass on the occasion of the Third World Day for Grandparents and the Elderly

At 10.00 this morning, 16th Sunday of Ordinary Time, the Holy Father Francis presided over the Eucharistic celebration in the Vatican Basilica on the occasion of the third World Day for Grandparents and the Elderly.

The following is the homily delivered by the Pope during the Holy Mass:

Homily of the Holy Father

Jesus uses parables to teach us about the kingdom of God. He recounts simple stories that touch the hearts of his listeners. Such language, full of imagery, resembles the language that grandparents often use with their grandchildren, perhaps while holding them on their laps. In this way they pass on a wisdom important for life. Thinking of our grandparents and the elderly, whose roots young people need in order to grow into adulthood, I would like to reread the three stories contained in today's Gospel, beginning with an aspect they have in common: *growing together*.

In the first parable, the wheat and the weeds grow together, in the same field (cf. *Mt* 13:24-30). This image helps us to see things realistically: in human history, as in each of our lives, there is a mixture of light and shadows, love and selfishness. Good and evil are even intertwined to the point of seeming inseparable. This realistic approach helps us to view history without ideologies, without sterile optimism or poisonous pessimism. Christians, motivated by the hope of God, are not pessimists; nor do they naïvely live in a fairy tale, pretending not to see evil and saying that "all is well". No, Christians are realists: they know that there are wheat and weeds in the world. Looking at their own lives, they recognize that evil does not only come from "outside", that it is not always the fault of others, that there is no need to "invent" enemies to fight against in order to avoid looking within themselves. They realize that evil comes from within, in the inner struggle that we all experience.

Yet, the parable poses a question: When we see "wheat" and "weeds" living side by side in the world, what should we do? How should we react? In the narrative, the servants would like immediately to pull up the weeds (cf. v. 28). This attitude comes from good intentions, but is impulsive and even aggressive. They delude

themselves into thinking that they can uproot evil by their own efforts in order to make things pure. Indeed, we frequently see the temptation of seeking to bring about a “pure society” or a “pure Church”, whereas in working to reach this purity, we risk being impatient, intransigent, even violent toward those who have fallen into error. In this way, together with the weeds we pull up the good wheat and block people from moving forward, from growing and changing. Let us listen instead to what Jesus says: “Let both of them *grow together* until the harvest” (*Mt 13:30*). How beautiful is this vision of God, his way of teaching us about mercy. This invites us to be patient with others, and – in our families, in the Church and in society – to welcome weakness, delay and limitations, not in order to let ourselves grow accustomed to them or excuse them, but to learn to act with respect, caring for the good wheat gently and patiently. We must also remember that the purification of the heart and the definitive victory over evil are essentially God’s work. And we, overcoming the temptation to divide the wheat from the weeds, are called to understand the best ways and times for action.

Here I think of our grandparents and the elderly, who have already travelled far along life’s journey. If they look back, they see so many beautiful things they have succeeded in doing. Yet they also see defeats, mistakes, things that – as they say – “if I went back I would not do again”. Yet today the Lord offers us a gentle word that invites us to accept the mystery of life with serenity and patience, to leave judgment to him, and not to live regretful and remorseful lives. It is as if Jesus wanted to say to us: “Look at the good wheat that has sprouted along the path of your life and let it keep growing, entrusting everything to me, for I always forgive: in the end, the good will be stronger than the evil”. Old age is indeed a blessed time, for it is the season to be reconciled, a time for looking tenderly at the light that has shone despite the shadows, confident in the hope that the good wheat sown by God will prevail over the weeds with which the devil has wanted to plague our hearts.

Let us now turn to the second parable. Jesus tells us that the kingdom of heaven is the work of God acting silently in the course of history, to the point of seeming small and invisible, like a tiny mustard seed. Yet, when this seed grows, “it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches” (*Mt 13:32*). Brothers and sisters, our lives are like this too, for we come into the world so small; we become adults, then grow old. At the beginning we are like a small seed; then we are nourished by hopes, and our plans and dreams come to fruition, the most beautiful of which become like the tree that does not live for itself but gives shade to all who desire it and offers space to those who wish to build a nest there. Thus those who *grow together* in this parable are ultimately the mature tree and the little birds.

Here I think of our grandparents: how beautiful are these thriving trees, in whose “branches” children and grandchildren build their own “nests”, learning the warmth of home and experiencing the tenderness of an embrace. This is about growing together: the verdant tree and the little ones who need a nest, grandparents with their children and grandchildren, the elderly with the youngest. Brothers and sisters, how much we need a new bond between young and old, so that the sap of those who have a long experience of life behind them will nourish the shoots of hope of those who are growing. In this fruitful exchange we can learn the beauty of life, build a fraternal society, and in the Church be enabled to encounter one another and dialogue between tradition and the newness of the Spirit.

Finally the third parable, where the yeast and the flour *grow together* (cf. *Mt 13:33*). This mixing makes the whole dough rise. Jesus uses the verb “to mix”. This reminds us of the “art” or “mystique” of “living together, of mingling and encounter, of embracing and supporting one another... To go out of ourselves and to join others” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 87). This is the way to overcome individualism and selfishness, and to build a more human and more fraternal world. Indeed, today the word of God calls us to be vigilant so that we do not marginalize the elderly in our families or lives. Let us be careful, so that our crowded cities do not become “centres of loneliness”; that politics, called to provide for the needs of the most fragile, never forgets the elderly nor allows the market to banish them as “unprofitable waste”. May we not chase after the utopias of efficiency and performance at full-speed, lest we become incapable of slowing down to accompany those who struggle to keep up. Please, let us mingle and grow together.

Brothers and sisters, God’s word calls us not to separate ourselves, close in on ourselves or think we can do it alone, but to *grow together*. Let us listen to each other, talk together and support one another. Let us not forget our grandparents or the elderly, for so often we have been lifted up, gotten back on track, felt loved and been healed within, all by a caress of theirs. They have made sacrifices for us, and we cannot let them drop down the

list of our priorities. Let us grow together, let us go forward together. May the Lord bless our journey!
