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# **BOLLETTINO**

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## **Press Conference to present the Holy Father Francis' Message for the Second World Day of Grandparents and the Elderly (24 July 2022)**

At 11.30 this morning, in the Holy See Press Office, a press conference was held to present the Holy Father Francis' Message for the Second World Day of Grandparents and the Elderly.

The Day will be celebrated on the fourth Sunday of July – this year, on 24 July – on the theme: “In old age they will still bear fruit” (Psalm 92:15).

The speakers were His Eminence Cardinal Kevin Farrell, prefect of the Dicastery for the Laity, Family and Life; Dr. Vittorio Scelzo, responsible for the pastoral care of the elderly of the Dicastery for the Laity, Family and Life; Ms. Maria Francis, *Communio – Conference of Catholic Bishops of India*, Bangalore, India; and Ms. Giancarla Panizza, *Auser Association for Active Aging*, Sartirana (PV), Italy.

The following are their interventions:

### **Intervention of His Eminence Cardinal Kevin Farrell**

Good morning to you all,

The celebration of World Day of Grandparents and the Elderly is a sign of how important the elderly are in the teaching of Pope Francis. At the beginning of his ministry, on countless occasions he reminded us that it is necessary to counter the throwaway culture, to foster dialogue between generations, to preserve the roots of peoples and to conserve their memory. Then, for some weeks now, the Wednesday General Audience has been dedicated to the theme of old age and, during these, he has offered an original reflection on a stage in life that concerns us and – as we find in the Message we present today – no-one has prepared us to face.

The Holy Father invites us to be aware of the relevance of the elderly in the life of societies and of our

communities, and to do so in a way that is not episodic, but structural. It is not, therefore, a matter of reacting to an emergency, but rather of laying down the foundations for long-term pastoral work that will involve us for the decades to come. Therefore, he wished to institute a World Day destined to be celebrated every year, and to mark the liturgical time from now on. For the same reason, in the Apostolic Constitution *Praedicate Evangelium*, for the first time, the pastoral care of the elderly is indicated as one of the main competences – alongside youth pastoral care – of a Dicastery of the Roman Curia (cf. § 128). Like it or not, the theme of the elderly will affect our future.

Besides, in some countries in the world – especially in Europe and North America – they represent 20 per cent or more of the population. Within our communities this therefore demands a change of outlook, setting apart those ways of thinking that make the elderly seem to be distant and extraneous, to be taken care of. Looking at the pews in our churches, more often than not they are populated mainly by people of advanced age. To speak, therefore, only “*of the elderly*” makes little sense, if in church it is mainly they who listen to us. The time has come for us to learn to speak “*to the elderly*”.

This is why the Holy Father insists on the need to delineate an ordinary pastoral care for this season of life, and the message we are presenting today is a clear example of this concern. Besides reiterating the importance of countering the throwaway culture, the Pope seems to want to offer points of reference to those who are experiencing the bewilderment of discovering themselves aged. The pandemic has contributed to increasing the fears of many, and we must ask ourselves how to bring back to Church those who have stopped attending out of fear of contagion. The world is changing at a speed that it is difficult to keep up with, and many are gradually starting to feel they are not useful, ending up by internalizing the idea that they can no longer bear fruit.

It is precisely in order to respond to these concerns – with a fatherly heart and with the direct experience of one who is living this stage of life – Pope Francis indicates some treasures that are proper to this season: the pillars on which a genuine spirituality of old age may be built.

The first is that of **tenderness**. In particular, in this historical moment, while the world looks on in astonishment at a senseless war, the Pope invites us to “*disarm hearts*” and to entrust to grandparents “*a great responsibility: to teach the women and men of our time to regard others with the same understanding and loving gaze with which we regard our own grandchildren*”. Tenderness, as he has said on other occasions, is a genuine revolution and it is particularly suited to grandparents and the elderly. In this battle, cultural and spiritual, they do not take the rear, but rather they are in the front line, those called upon to set an example. “*We ourselves have grown in humanity by caring for others*”, writes the Pope, “*and now we can be teachers of a way of life that is peaceful and attentive to those in greatest need*”. Tenderness cannot be reduced to consolation for the weak, but it is what the world truly needs now: a real alternative to the logic of violence and war. We are getting used to a bellicose language and attitude. Let us learn from our grandparents the way of tenderness!

The second foundational element of a spirituality of old age is **guardianship**. It is a mission that the Pope entrusts in a special way to the elderly and that, although it primarily concerns the family sphere, it is not confined to it. “*One fruit that we are called to bring forth is protecting the world*”, he says. “*Our grandparents held us in their arms and carried us on their knees; now is the time for us to carry on our own knees, with practical assistance or with prayer alone – not only our own grandchildren but also the many frightened grandchildren who we have not yet met and who may be fleeing from war or suffering its effects. Let us hold in our hearts – like Saint Joseph, who was a loving and attentive father – the little ones of Ukraine, of Afghanistan, of South Sudan...*”. In these words there is the dream that the bond between grandfather and grandson can become the paradigm of relationships between people, and there is the idea that this generation has a specific task – that of guarding and protecting.

The third pillar of the spirituality of old age of which the Pope speaks is **prayer**. In the message it is defined as the “*instrument... most suited to our age*”, and it is the only one that even those experiencing extreme frailty cannot be deprived of. But praying – especially for the generation that today is living the time of old age and grew up in years marked by secularization – is an art that must be learned and can no longer be taken for granted. It is necessary to nurture it with the Word of God and participation in the life of the Church.

The Pope's message for the upcoming World Day of Grandparents and the Elderly is the alternative to the culture of rejection: it helps all of us, and the elderly themselves, to understand that – far from being material to be thrown away – they have precise vocation within our communities. In this time that yearns for peace, the Church has a great need for elders, who have the "gift" of tenderness, who are able to protect and intercede.

### Intervention of Dr. Vittorio Scelzo

Good morning everyone.

Today, in addition to the Holy Father's message, we are also presenting you the logo for the *World Day for Grandparents and the Elderly*. The need to create a logo stems from the experience of the first edition of the *Day* that - alongside the Roman celebration - was experienced, in a way that was unexpected for us, in many diocesan, parish and associative realities. After me, Maria Francis from Bangalore will tell what was done in India. This is what we would like to see happen again this year. Such a multifaceted experience needed a unifying element - a symbol - to help lead the multiplicity of gestures made back to a single shared vision.

Pope Francis, in the Angelus in which he announced the call for the *Day*, described it as a "feast of encounter" and, for this reason, we chose an embrace as the event's logo. In it we can read the bond, on which the Holy Father insists so much, between grandparents and their grandchildren, but the embrace could also be two spouses aged in years, but grown in mutual love; or two elderly women who, given the decline in strength and limited resources, choose to live together to support each other; or even a young man who goes to meet an elderly man alone to celebrate World Day for Grandparents and the Elderly. The logo also hides the nostalgia of when we could embrace each other with freedom and expresses the desire that we can soon resume doing so even in places where it is still inexplicably forbidden.

Old age is the season of life in which the value of bonds is most evident and in which we understand how loneliness is always an evil - "It is not good for man to be alone," says Scripture - and often, as we saw during the pandemic, kills. For this reason, the embrace of the Church, also through the celebration of *World Day for Grandparents and the Elderly*, wants to be stronger than any loneliness and the hope we formulate is that every community finds a way to reach out to everyone. "I ask you," says the Pope, to seek out those elderly persons who feel most alone, at home or in residences where they live. Let us make sure that no one feels alone on this day. Expecting a visit can transform those days when we think we have nothing to look forward to; from an initial encounter, a new friendship can emerge. Visiting the elderly who live alone is a work of mercy in our time!"

The visitation - alongside the celebration of a Mass dedicated to the elderly on July 24 - is the heart of the *Day's* celebration. It is a clear sign of the outgoing Church and the desire to celebrate with everyone. Accepting the Holy Father's suggestion, we propose that in every parish an effort be made to visit all the elderly in the area, especially those who are most alone. The embrace is also the alternative to the throwaway culture

There is, then, a social dimension of the embrace to which His Eminence, Card. Farrell has already mentioned: it is what the Pope calls the *revolution of tenderness*. This is a profound change in our societies that the Holy Father has been hoping for some time and which, at this juncture marked by the war in Ukraine, takes on added value. Faced with a world in which words are becoming increasingly harsh and walls between people continue to rise, the proposal of meekness as a way of being emerges. The message speaks of the need to "demilitarize hearts" as if to purify an air polluted by the rhetoric of the enemy and by opposing attitudes. In this regard, the message contains an urgent invitation to the elderly to pray for peace, which is accompanied by the request made after last Sunday's Angelus to recite the Rosary every day in May for reconciliation in Ukraine.

The frailty of the elderly - and also their surrender to the need for someone to take care of them - shows that self-sufficiency is always a dangerous illusion. The embrace, in this case, can be that of someone who supports their uncertain gait and keeps them from falling. "We are not saved alone," writes the Holy Father, "happiness is a bread that we break together. Let us bear witness to this before those who wrongly think that they can find

personal fulfilment and success in conflict. Everyone, even the weakest among us, can do this. The very fact that we allow ourselves to be cared for – often by people who come from other countries – is itself a way of saying that living together in peace is not only possible, but necessary". And what is true for individuals is also true for nations.

The *World Day for Grandparents and Elderly*, in this 2022 marked by war, wants to be a time to live the Church outgoing and to indicate quietly a way: to become - elderly and not - "artisans of the revolution of tenderness, so that together we can set the world free from the spectre of loneliness and the demon of war."

### Intervention of Ms. Maria Francis

My name is Maria Francis. I am from India. I am a Telecom Engineer by profession, but I am also a missionary working with the youth and a core team member of *Communio*, which is a ministry under the Indian church that helps the church in rural areas.

I had the privilege a few years ago to live with and to accompany my grandfather who was 93 years old through a very dark phase in his life. His wife (my grandmother) had just died, and he was getting used to life without his spouse of 60 years. There were some challenges for me like rewiring my biological clock to suit his mealtimes and schedule, being alert all the time to make sure he does not fall, to be present for his needs, and balancing my Engineering job by working remotely from home. It was just him and me in the house the whole day. The *Imitation of Christ* says, "The Holy Spirit is able to teach much without the noise of many words" and this was the experience I had in those days. The daily image I saw of him praying the rosary and patiently being resigned to God's will and not complaining filled my heart with so much light. I learnt to adapt to change from him and not to complain or blame God for things that happen outside of my control. My grandfather did not speak much but the Lord surfaced in me a need I did not know existed and then filled it with his own love through this elderly person. One experience I also had was living in fear thinking my grandfather would die any day like today or tomorrow or when I was away on business trips. When I was praying the rosary one day, I had a sudden realization like "My grandfather is a son of Mary, he will die only on a feast of Mary". Then I stopped worrying and my grandfather died on a Marian feast few months later. On the day of his death, God birthed in me a new desire to serve the church in a more concrete way and hence I became a missionary. My grandfather, who had finished living his active life changed the course of my destiny and gave me the most precious gift of propagating the faith and living out my vocation as a missionary in India.

This was the foundation on which we built our campaign for the month of the elderly for *Communio*. Our social media team made a series of educational videos based on the Holy Father's message for the first World Day for Grandparents and the elderly. I was happy to know that in this year message, the Pope says that: "Visiting the elderly is an act of mercy in our times" and that he proposes a revolution of tenderness. We added a series of activities for young people to perform when they watched the videos. The aim of this exercise was to uncover in young people "the hidden need" they have for the presence of an elderly person. Some of us have dead grandparents and so we included an activity to pray for them and to visit instead an elderly priest/schoolteacher/neighbor. Fun activities like taking a selfie and posting it on social media with the hashtag #grandcelebration was organized but we also tried our best to keep these fun encounters going forward in concrete ways like make 5 visits to your grandparents (we did not stop with one visit), adopt an elderly neighbor, buy groceries for someone living alone, visit a terminally ill elderly person, offer to help in a care home, or a simple deed like make a phone call every week to an elderly person. We also included retired priests and religious living in our areas and visited them. One of the dioceses in India made arrangements for the youth to drop and pickup elderly people to the vaccination centers to get them the Covid vaccine as elderly people had no transport or logistics to get there. They also had difficulties in booking the vaccine slot as all vaccine appointments would get filled and the elderly did not know to use the website or the app quickly. The youth would book an appointment, pick up the elderly person, get them vaccinated and drop them back home. The result of the campaign was well received by the young people and many of them felt very joyful and fulfilled. This year we plan to do the same in the month of July but at a larger level as Covid restrictions are lesser.

### Intervention of Ms. Giancarla Panizza

Good morning to everyone.

First of all, I would like to thank you for the opportunity of being here today to share my experience. Reading the Holy Father's message was very reassuring because I felt supported in the values in which, I, both personally and with Auser Sartirana Solidale, the association of which I am President, have always believed: brotherhood, acceptance, peace, social justice and inclusion. The basic principle behind Auser is that elderly people are a resource for society.

In the small association that I represent, in an area characterized by an aging rate of 420%, the senior volunteers with the most energy are at the service of the "older seniors", of fragile families, of people with disabilities, and they accompany children, who live far from the country and on farms, to school.

Our commitment is oriented towards ensuring that people can remain in their own living environment for as long as possible, trying to guarantee access to healthcare and to peaceful time together. We value everyone's skills. We built a photographic exhibition on the "Skillful Hands" that try to communicate just that: a collection of elderly hands as they sow, embroider, paint and manage our association's administration, in keeping with younger hands. We brought Pope Francis the photo of the hands of an elderly person sowing, in tune with the Gospel passage "they will still bear fruit".

Now we're finalizing a project where older people will talk about the history of water - ours is a land of water and rice fields - and they will teach children and teens how water is precious to life, and how wasting it is an insult to life.

My experience in Auser started by chance, many years ago. Until then, I had always dealt with minors, and I thought I was not suited for working with middle old and very old people. Now, instead, I receive much more from these elderly people or people with disabilities than I give to them.

I really liked Pope Francis' definition of "projects of existence" rather than assistance. So, that's what we're going to try to do, projects of existence, and if the Pope allows us to, we're going to borrow that as the title for the project for grandparents and children.

And today we are going to speak precisely about a little girl, baby Airis, Caterina's granddaughter, a refugee even before she came to be, who was born prematurely in Italy, a symbol of rebirth, of overcoming death caused by war, of life that conquers. The name her parents chose for her means Rainbow in Ukrainian. The arch of light and color that comes after the flood, the flood of bombs that we all wish would end immediately. Airis' mother, Anna, arrived in Sartirana as a guest of the family where her own mother had assisted a non-self-sufficient person in the past. Caterina is very well liked in the village for her helpfulness, and my fellow citizens came together to welcome and help her relatives arriving from the tormented Ukraine. Among them was Airis's paternal grandmother, a painter who in a short time made paintings of every corner of our village.

A cradle, a crib, clothes and food were collected for the baby. However, Caterina is a person of great dignity. She often sends any aid back to Auser, so that it can arrive in Ukraine, where it is most needed.

The volunteers accompanied Anna to prenatal visits and now they accompany the grandmother to visit the little one, who is in an incubator at the Policlinico in Pavia.

Then one day Caterina showed up at Auser and said she wanted to become a member, our first Ukrainian member. Auser's 88-year-old Vice President volunteered to become Airis' "Italian grandfather."

We would like that Airis and all the children and young people who flee from all wars could have the same rights as Italian children, but today unfortunately this is not yet the case.

Even for this reason, for all people who suffer or are alone, without distinction of ethnic origin, we would like to contribute to the *revolution of tenderness*, the unarmed revolution of which Pope Francis speaks.

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