

4th SUNDAY YEAR A HOMILY 2020 PRESENTATION OF THE LORD

GIVE THE 'WRINKLIES' A GO & RECOGNIZING THE LIGHT WHO HAS COME INTO THE WORLD

Lk 2.22-40 Mal 3.1-4 Heb 2.14-18

Who said this? ***“Old age is not a disease; it’s a privilege”***. A clue might be that this person has a vested interest in the issue, having just turned 83! Yes, Pope Francis again provides insight into those with us who have made such an immeasurable contribution to our lives, in so many ways. I still remember the wise words about life and faith of my maternal grandfather who lived with my family when I was young and he and grandma in their mid-80’s. Francis goes on to point out that seniors among us, in families and communities, are a great resource for sharing of stories, sources of wisdom and voices of experience, when we look to what is needed to develop and maintain relationships, and to build connections with the world around us.

Who of us here, fits the description of being physically fit and mentally sharp, with more freedom and time to do what you wish, without the earlier demands and responsibilities of careers and raising a family? This week, Francis, as a senior with credibility, commends and encourages us all, particularly the elders among us, to see our personal value and capacity to continue to contribute to society by our ongoing involvement in life at home, with family, friends and in the broader community.

We, as members of families, Church here and now, as People of God, have a responsibility to care for our aged, particularly those in need of support and extra care, at home and in institutions, and to engage them as members of our faith community. I reckon we do this pretty well here at St Therese’s, with Eucharistic ministers going out regularly to those who are ill or shut in, also with the regular activities of our Senior Friendship Group, organizing regular get togethers, social and spiritual, with Anointing Masses, outings and meals together. It’s often the simple things that count, don’t you think?

Francis encourages people of all ages: *“Spare no effort in proclaiming the Gospel to grandparents and the elderly. Go out to meet them with a smile on your face and the Gospel in your hands. Leave your parishes and go seek out the elderly who live alone... Solitude can be an illness... but with charity, closeness and spiritual comfort, we can cure it.”* Furthermore, he notes how grandparents can be most effective, as *“an indispensable link in educating little ones and young people in the faith.”*

Thus he reflects on the lovely dipole of very young and very old, appreciating, supporting and engaging with each other. From ***The Joy of the Gospel***, we hear: *“Children and the elderly represent the two poles of life and are also the most vulnerable and forgotten group. A society*

that abandons its children or marginalises its elderly members not only carries out an act of injustice, but also sanctions the failure of that society.”

And so, poor old Matthew hardly gets a go, and now we're back to Luke after John and Matthew the last few weeks. Now it's an intrusion but a significant one from Luke as we consider the meaning of the Presentation of the Lord in the Temple, the focal point of Jewish faith and worship. It is clear that he wants to emphasize the faithful observance of Jesus' parents to the requirements of Law, with Jesus coming as the fulfilment of the promise, not to do away with the old, but to renew and revitalize the spirit of that Law, based on fidelity to the Old Testament Covenant between the One God and his pilgrim people, wherever and whoever they are. Luke's ongoing themes are many and varied: *“Fulfilment and promise, temple, universalism, rejection, witness and women.”*

The Jerome Biblical Commentary then states: *“God's salvation in Jesus moves out and embraces God's people Israel and then encircles the others, the nations, (who) cannot be seen simply as rulers to be put down or as enemies to be vanquished; they (too) are heirs of God's promises.”*

In fact, it's perhaps a pity, in some ways, that the 4th Sunday Gospel is supplanted today, as it's the beginning of the Sermon on the Plain (*or the Mount, in Luke's version*), accepted even in the secular world, as one of the greatest speeches in history, up there with *I Have a Dream*. It reflects the spirit in which the faithful disciple of Jesus should live her or his life, with no detailed list of rules and regulations nor specific structures! As I often say, it took nearly 2,000 years for one coherent, but still limited, Code of Canon Law to be promulgated, in 1917, with an upgrade following Vatican II in 1983, and even that could be said to be in need of further updating, particularly since recent dark issues have arisen, and we realize that protecting the cleric is completely the wrong approach to dealing with abuse of all sorts, and that the reasonable and right laws of broader society must be upheld and observed, for the benefit of all, acting in good conscience.

So, today's a day for the oldies, or *wrinklies* (as a radio station once described itself as *“Where no wrinklies fly”!!*), as we hear of faithful Simeon (*meaning ‘God has heard’*) and Anna (*meaning ‘grace and favour’ - the name also a palindrome, like today 02022020!!*), turning up regularly at the Temple, patiently awaiting the day of the critical moment when the Saviour would appear, as they encounter the child Jesus, and his faithful parents too.

As Claude Mostowiz put it: *“Anna and Simeon's prophetic spirits are still with us, opening our ear and eyes to God's surprising epiphanies among us. They are the wise and courageous in our communities who have lived their lives that cut through the narrow, the mean, the selfish, the legalistic, and call ‘a spade a spade’. Like the very young, the elderly notice, though often unnoticed or overlooked themselves... How many elders are desperately lonely, attended to by*

strangers in institutions where they sit throughout the long day with... no-one to hear their stories? We all have a story, and it's important that it be heard. How can we do better here?

Simeon's lovely prayer is at the heart of Luke's theological reflection here; known as *Nunc dimittis* ('Now, Master, you can let your servant go in peace'), which is his farewell prayer towards the end of a long and presumably good life where he is at peace with himself and his assurance that his God, who has guided him through the vicissitudes, the ups and downs of life, remains with him to the end and beyond. Fulfilment and reward are assured. And so for us too, as the faithful oldies, AnnA and Simeon, and those present with us now, show us the way, as we continue the journey of life, living in his light and reflecting it in our lives!

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