



**His Grace Most Reverend Francis Leo
Metropolitan Archbishop of Toronto
Message for World Day for Grandparents and the Elderly - July 28, 2024**

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

In 2021 Pope Francis established *World Day for Grandparents and the Elderly* to be celebrated on the Fourth Sunday in July. The theme chosen by the Holy Father this year is: “Do not cast me off in my old age” (cf. Ps. 71:9) and he wishes to underscore that “loneliness is the bitter lot in life of many elderly persons, so often the victims of the throw-away culture.”¹

Elsewhere as well, His Holiness has noted the devastating effects of a throw-away culture, observing: “Some parts of our human family... can be readily sacrificed for the sake of others considered worthy of a carefree existence... persons are no longer seen as a paramount value to be cared for and respected, especially when they are poor and disabled, ‘not yet useful’ – like the unborn, or ‘no longer needed’ – like the elderly.”²

Our grandparents and the elderly in our communities must be cherished and loved. We ought to celebrate their contributions both past and present in a way that both guides and inspires our future. False measures or standards of “utility” or “usefulness” need to be opposed and resisted because “by isolating the elderly and leaving them in the care of others without the closeness and concern of family members, we disfigure and impoverish the family itself.”³ At times our elderly require specialized care and attention, more than we can provide; it would be irresponsible to not recognize and respond to their needs. We know that they are oftentimes vulnerable and all alone. Nevertheless, familial bonds cannot be torn asunder. True, authentic love, the one which gushes forth from the Sacred Heart of Jesus, looks beyond utility and convenience and seeks a relationship with the other “just because.”

Sadly, there are several dangers facing our grandparents and elderly, and one of the most dangerous ones in recent years is euthanasia, commonly referred to as Medical Assistance in Dying (MAiD). When a society considers killing the elderly and the sick as the “right thing to do,” the “compassionate way forward,” or “the only logical course of action,” the value it places on life is radically diminished and we are headed down a dark and destructive path. We need to ask ourselves, “what is more valuable than life?” Can money, comfortable lifestyle, convenience, material wealth, popularity, power, expedient use of resources truly constitute the “be all and end all” of human existence, the *summum bonum* for which we must strive? The plea of an elderly person to not be “cast off” is often heard in a variety of different ways, but none more loudly than just before someone decides to engage in MAiD. Redemptive suffering is regrettably not being preached or taught as it should. Many see themselves as a burden to loved ones; others are overcome with loneliness. Sadly, these are the feelings that more often than not mark their last days adding to their pain and suffering immeasurably. Their request for death is often a desperate

¹ Dicastery for the Laity, Family and Life, *Press Release: Theme of the Fourth World Day for Grandparents and the Elderly*, 15 February 2024.

² Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, 18.

³ *Ibid.*, 19.



cry for love and help, an expression of helplessness and hopelessness, a futile attempt to help loved ones move on with their lives—to free them from “their burdensome existence.” What a tragedy indeed. What a sin against God’s love this is. As a Christ-centred community we are compelled to accompany and value our elderly and their families—our brothers and sisters—especially in their time of need.

The “prayer of the elderly person” in Psalm 71 recalls the life they have lived in God and seeks His continued protection and help knowing that He will come to their aid. During our 2024 *Year of Prayer* in preparation for the *Jubilee 2025*, let us be extra attentive to this Psalm’s supplication which provides for us new spiritual insights into their suffering, cares, concerns, and dreams. The Psalm ends with the elderly person seeking strength not for personal gain, but so that they might continue to praise God: “O God, from my youth you have taught me, and I still proclaim your wondrous deeds. So even to old age and gray hairs, O God, do not forsake me, until I proclaim your might to all the generations to come” (Ps. 71:17-18). Sincere, perseverant, trusting and humble prayer is a powerful means of forging and strengthening our relationship with God and it allows for all of our relationships to be *in God* and pleasing to Him. In this regard, Pope Benedict XVI wrote, “the prayer of the elderly can protect the world, helping it perhaps more effectively than the frenetic activity of many others.”⁴ There is no doubt that the prayer of our grandparents and the elderly is powerful and “a very precious resource: a deep breath that the Church and the world urgently need.”⁵

On the occasion of our celebration of the *World Day for Grandparents and the Elderly* I wish to bless the Grandparents and Elderly of the Archdiocese of Toronto and, invoking the powerful intercession of St. Anne and St. Joachim (grandparents of Jesus), challenge each of us to draw closer to our families, especially the elderly, and their caregivers as well. I also call upon the larger community to become acutely aware of the plight, the loneliness, the needs and the suffering of the elderly and go the extra mile to support them, love them and care for them as Jesus and Mary would. Let us go out of our way in the coming weeks and months to visit, spend time with and celebrate them with the love of Jesus and the support of the community of faith.

Finally, and most importantly, to all Grandparents and the Elderly: Know that you are loved and appreciated. You are a gift to us, you inspire us; we honour your sacrifices and value your wisdom. We are here for you – you are not alone. Thank you for everything you have done for us personally and as a society. Thank you for your witnessing in the community of believers and your guidance for the future; for your hard work and your generosity; for your tears and your love which are palpable and life-giving to us all. Please pray for the Archdiocese of Toronto and her mission in the world. We hold you in our hearts and we are abundantly blessed to have you as treasured members of our families.

Sincerely Yours in Jesus with Mary,

Most Rev. Francis Leo
Metropolitan Archbishop of Toronto

⁴ Pope Benedict XVI, *Visit to “Viva gli Anziani,”* 12 November 2012.

⁵ Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 262.