

World Day for Grandparents and the Elderly, celebrated across the **entire** Catholic world this weekend, invites us to give thanks for the grandparents and older members of our community whose lives, wisdom, and faith continue to point us towards Jesus. Can I invite every grandparent and elderly person in our midst to put their hand up so that the rest of us can know who to direct our gratitude to this evening/morning? **But don't worry... I'm not going to define what 'elderly' means. That's between you, your doctor, and your mirror.** Can we say thank you with a round of applause please? Just like these treasures in our midst, whose lives have been shaped over many years, faith also grows and deepens over time as we begin to recognise the quiet dialogue between **our** faithfulness and **God's** faithfulness.

The theme Pope Leo has chosen for today comes from Isaiah 49:15, *"I will never forget you."* First and foremost, these are God's words to us. They're a promise of enduring love; that whatever our age, frailty, or circumstances, God **never** forgets us. Throughout Scripture we meet a God who remembers - a God who remembers his covenant, remembers his people, and remains faithful generation after generation.

In a particular way, we see this in today's readings through God's initiative: "The Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream," as we heard in the first reading, and **spoke**. Have you ever experienced Jesus speaking to you? Not necessarily with an audible voice, but through Scripture... through prayer... through another person... through the quiet prompting of the Holy Spirit? Sadly, for many Catholics, the

answer is still *"I'm not sure"* or even, *"no."* Yet Jesus makes an astonishing promise: *"Everyone who seeks finds,"* not **'might find'**.

The Psalmist, for example, has clearly spent a lifetime walking with God. Listen to his language: *"Lord, I love your commands... your word... your love."* This is not the language of obligation but the language of someone who has discovered, through years of experience, that God's ways really do lead to life. Grandparents and seniors, you have a unique and irreplaceable role within the Body of Christ because your greatest gift to the Church is your witness - a witness formed by decades of discovering that God is faithful, and that Jesus can be known, trusted and loved in the **same way** that you love your own family. But while each one of us is called to become a true image of Jesus himself, we cannot do it without **you** because God has entrusted your wisdom and faith to **you** to be handed on to the next generation.

For the rest of us, this day also gently challenges. The words, *"I will never forget you"*, are also a question: do we remember to care for the elderly? We live in a culture that moves quickly, that prizes independence and productivity, and that sometimes leaves people feeling invisible or isolated. Pope Francis often spoke of a *"throw-away culture"* in which the elderly can be among those most affected. Today calls us to a different way of seeing and living - one shaped by today's Gospel, where every person is recognised, **valued**, and included - caught up in the dragnet – or funnel – of our parish.

This has very real and practical implications. It asks us to notice who is alone in our midst and do something about it. It asks us to take note of who is unable to join us, who is housebound, and who may be longing for connection. Here in our own parish, hundreds of elderly parishioners receive regular visits from our volunteers because they can no longer come to Mass. Whenever I get to visit them, I rarely leave thinking, *"I'm glad I encouraged them."* More often, I leave thinking, **"They've encouraged me!"** Others faithfully join us online every Sunday because illness or frailty keeps them at home; they are **all** part of our parish family. This day invites us to reach out in simple but meaningful ways: a visit, a conversation, a gesture of care. It also calls us, as a community, to ensure that older people are able to participate as fully as possible in the life of the Church, **especially** in Sunday Eucharist.

One day, if God grants us the gift of long life, each of us hopes to become one of those hands that was raised at the beginning of Mass. One day we, too, will hope that our Church remembers us, values us, listens to us, and walks with us. But until then, let's learn from those who are already here by listening to them, visiting them, praying with them, and receiving their wisdom. Because in doing so, we discover something joyful: that within **every** faithful grandparent and older person stands God... who has never forgotten them, not even for a single moment.