

ENCOURAGEMENT ENCOURAGEMENT

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'Ageism'... Getting old

From the day that we are born we get older. Each day is another revelation of who we are and who we are meant to be. Getting older is hardly the perception of life to anyone as a baby, child or young person. Indeed, it does not always filter into our minds till at least fifty and then often no more than a thought, a passing thought indeed. With people living longer in our times, again even sixty does not really bring that reality home unless personal circumstances change or there is illness. For some people even the 'three score years and ten' {70} of scripture does not feel like old!... (Psalm 90:10) 'Our days may come to seventy years, or eighty, if our strength endures; yet the best of them are but trouble and sorrow, for they quickly pass, and we fly away'.

In this day of 'ism's'.....and how many are there, we seem to label so much that can limit debate and free thought, making it difficult to discuss some important issues of our time. Such realities as 'getting old', which is a natural event, have to be treated with 'kid gloves' in order as to not offend anyone. Yet with life expectancy getting extended it is an important issue which can lead to differing opinions on almost any related subject such as resources for wellbeing, health and ultimately euthanasia. It can also divide age groups and put them at odds with each other.

Old age is both defined differently by people but also experienced differently by all. Individual circumstances make this inevitable. Physical and mental health is a key issue as is strength, family support and determination in how we look upon old age and those who are close to us. This can also vary from culture to culture.

If we look at the Old Testament we can be surprised at the ages of some of the people mentioned and Prophets of old. Though we may count those years

differently there is no doubt that many lived to a ripe old age. Abram and Sara, later renamed as Abraham and Sarah, are good examples of a couple who still had a vision for the future, hoping for a family, and were seemingly in advanced years for such an event. Anna, a prophetess, was also there in the Temple during Jesus' Presentation there 'She was the daughter of Phanuel from the tribe of Asher, and she was very old.' We all know of famous people who contributed much to others while in their very ripe old age even in their ninetieth year or sometimes even later.

'Ageism' when defined correctly implies that we should not discriminate between people because of their age. The state defines the age of retirement from paid employment, as a way of saying that someone cannot exert that much effort or that the task is beyond their ability. Yet this to an extent, limits able people from employment. Equally people near this age are often rejected for work.

More crucially are the effects on people who feel rejected and useless because of this. Sometime this is not even because of work issues but even restricting their views and their attitudes to various things. It is not uncommon for older people to feel marginalised and of little importance. Although we do not know the age of St. Peter at the time of the 'Call' to be an Apostle, it is accepted that he was older than the rest, and clearly Jesus did not hold that against him and made him the leader of the others.

In some cultures, age is esteemed, and older people have a rôle as a sage or full of wisdom. There are many ways of limiting the rôle of older members of any society and this is something that should be abhorrent to any Christian, as each person has their life to fulfil and are to be respected at any stage of their life.

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'Moreover faith opens us to a "hope that does not disappoint", placing us before the perspective of the final resurrection'. St John Paul II

Psalm 92:14 stated. 'They shall still bring forth fruit in old age; they shall be full of sap and green: or another translation... that still bear fruit in old age and are always green and strong'.

We do not have to look very far in our churches today to realise how true this statement is. How many people spend their later years serving in some capacity in the church as they are no longer in paid employment and how grateful we should be for this and them. We also have many priests, minister and preachers who equally soldier on well past retirement. How many people continue in an advisory capacity well after retirement age? How many writers, poets and musicians have produced their best work in later life. How many fantastic grandparents are the core of their families and help in nurturing. Yes, they *are* full of life, still green. Their strength may not lie in muscle power or even endurance but what they contribute is invaluable to those whom they serve. Many of our Charities would simply not survive or grow without an army of older volunteers.

We must also remember that we are destined for eternal life where age is of no importance whatsoever. We have just had the feast of Easter, the Resurrection, with its promises of rising from the dead and everlasting life. Clearly age does not have any limits in heaven!!!!!!

Yet there is on note of caution... As older people we must also be aware that we are not the only people who can fulfil a special task or any job. We must also reflect on the necessity of allowing younger people to both learn from us but also to take over from us without discriminating between either. A good leader is always looking for a successor or replacement. Some great people have stood back and were rewarded by another opening equally as fulfilling. Age should bestow graciousness and courage, a feature of this time of life, or should be...

Being 'merciful' is so essential to any stage of life. We have a feast of Divine Mercy on the first Sunday after Easter, and it is a vital part of our commitment to all people. If age brings unwelcomed 'events', then supporting older people in their infirmity is a blessing to both.

We must respect people regardless of age and not be led by our preconceived ideas. Old age is also a time for increased time for prayer. Maybe we should reflect on this... and pray...

Halina Holman©

Pope Francis



'The elderly who have the faith are like trees that continue to bear fruit'.

(Pope Francis, Meeting With 'The Elderly', Address, 2014)

Prayer

*I pray to God to give me strength
To do what must be done,
To trust that in the future
This battle will be won.*

Alora M Knight



Feast Days in April

1st Easter Monday

7th Second Sunday of Easter, 'Divine Mercy Sunday'

8th The Annunciation of the Lord

11th St. Stanislaus

13th Pope St. Martin I

14th Third Sunday of Easter

16th St. Bernadette Soubirous

20th St. Beuno

21st Fourth Sunday of Easter

23rd St. George, Patron of England, St. Adalbert

25th St. Mark, Evangelist

28th 5th Sunday of Easter

29th St. Catherine of Siena, Patron of Europe

30th Pope St. Pius V

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