

# Encouragement Encouragement

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**'Ageing'**

THE HOST APOSTOLATE  
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The only real certainty about our lives is that death follows life. We are, so to speak, born to die. When that will be, none of us know. We may be given the grace to know that it is impending, sooner rather than later, because of illness or some major mishap, but we all face the reality that we must shed our mortal coil and end our lives on earth. For the believing Christian, of course, life on earth is only a transitional stage before we attain eternal life – but that transition is a crucial step we must make.

Just as real, however, is the fact that we grow older in preparation for that event, and that, of itself, is a reminder of our mortality. Yet we use the word **'ageing'** – getting older, to describe a period of our lives which denotes reaching a certain number of years and maybe debilitations!

The truth of the matter is that we are getting older from the moment we are born, and we are ageing – acquiring longevity – accruing days, months and years. No-one thinks of a baby as ageing, just growing up – getting older perhaps, but not usually ageing. This term therefore, carries links and connotations of something more than just added years to our lives.



It is natural to think of the different periods of our lives – stages, so to speak. We

pass from childhood to adulthood, we have periods of work, of career, of singleness or marriage, independency and dependence on others. But somehow the word **'ageing'** has come to single out a phrase which is less than complimentary, and loaded with terms which denote not just a phase but in general, an unpleasant one. "Well, he/she is getting older now, age comes to all of us, what can you expect at our age, - you should not be doing that at your age"... all implying restriction and loss of ability of some kind. There are exceptions – we say of '21' that it is 'coming of age' as a compliment. There is a certain attainment in getting to 60, 70 and 80 – exceeded only by 90... and for the very blessed a hundred or more, when

suddenly it seems to be a kind of merit to have got thus far, only to be forgotten for another decade.

However, if we look at the Old Testament, we see quite a different perception. Abraham and Sarah had Isaac at an age beyond normal childbirth. Moses escorts the Israelites to freedom in his advancing years. The Prophets prophesied into serious old age. Old people 'seem to have dreams to dream and the young visions'. (Acts 2.14-21, Peter quoting the Prophet Joel). There does not seem to be a barrier to respond to a 'call' based on age in **any** sense of the word.

A peep at the New Testament will tell us that it was not only young men that Jesus called as Apostle, or that He cured only the young as they 'still had years to live'.

This term therefore needs to be looked at carefully for what it signifies, and ask 'do we, as Christian people, make the same errors of judgment as the 'culture' we live in?'. In the East the elderly are valued and respected still, and much is made of the wisdom of years. We have in the West, somehow attributed to the elderly an attitude of being considered less than useful, a drain on resources, a burden to the rest of society, and to be tolerated rather than valued, ignored rather than respected as 'Children of God'. I have not found any reference to when that 'childhood' ends, curious indeed??

When illness strikes the young, quite understandably, we offer support and kindness and say "What a shame" – but if the same happens to someone slightly longer on the planet the response is "Well, it has to be expected". This is always a regrettable attitude because suffering is the treated as acceptable and predictable, i.e. to be expected... Christian love and sympathy is not given in the main.

Yet many of the world leaders are over 70 years old... Many heroic people like St. John Paul II, Pope Francis, St. (Mother) Teresa of Calcutta, Albert Einstein, David Attenborough, Dorothy Day... Queen Elizabeth II, etc... and many other older citizens are still contributing to the society in which they live. You only have to look at many of the supermarkets (and churches) to clearly see that each person has a different journey to make:

**"In the evening of our lives we shall be examined in love." St John of the Cross**

But is age the determining factor to service – clearly not so...

Because of these prevailing attitudes we face an increasing pressure to exclude the older citizens on the one hand, but try to rectify this by rejecting ‘ageism.’ But by rejecting those whose older years are marked by illness, mental or physical, not to mention dementia, are we improving anything for anyone. I wonder sometimes if it is the society that is demented? With the improvement in social conditions we now have the opportunity of living longer than some previous generations. About 16% of the population is over 65 years of age and an even greater number if you take 60 as a benchmark. Many people are working longer past retirement whereas for others illness takes its toll.

This causes perceived problems of care, both in hospitals care homes and people’s own homes. Instead of looking at the needs of individuals and upholding the dignity of each person as a priority we put people in a situation which requires them to make choices which do not necessarily help them but solve a problem. The person is seen as a problem not as an asset. Choices should be marked by a loving respectful attitude to the person and those around them.

Thus we then speak of Euthanasia or so called ‘mercy killing’ which is anything but, dismissing the person’s right to live with dignity, and as pain free as possible, ‘til natural death.

Anyone who has looked after an elderly relative or friend will realise the gift the person is to them. There is grace and learning to be had in this situation for both. A society that does not thank and be grateful for what that person has done for them in their lives is poorer for it and sooner or late devalues not only their own worth but the importance of all service and becomes egotistical.

A Charity ‘Across’ that takes people to Lourdes by Jumbulance, who could not otherwise make that journey any other way, often elderly, has a very important way of referring to their special charges as V.I. P.’s ( very important people.) A pity that we do not adopt this term to refer to all who reach that golden age. As the *Special Pastor* said, “*Loving others calls for patience, tolerance and benevolence, three big virtues. To be patient – benevolent with people requires a kind of love which sees in every human person God’s own image. Jesus is present in every person, but so often we fail to notice Him*”. ☸

How we look at age reflects who we are as Christians. Do we look at all ages as God given? Halina Holman

## Pope Francis (78!)

“Seeing the elderly only as a burden is ugly. It's a sin. The aged are the ‘reserve of the wisdom of our people’, they have experienced and survived the struggles to raise a family and provide them with a dignified life. Tossing them aside means tossing aside their experience and the way that experience can contribute to making life better today. A society that cannot show gratitude and affection to the elderly is a perverse society. The church, faithful to the word of God, cannot tolerate such degeneration. Where the elderly are not honoured, there is NO future for the young.”

March 4-2015 Rome



“There is a wicked inclination in most people to suppose an old man decayed in his intellect. If a young man or middle aged man when leaving a company, does not recollect where he laid his hat, it is nothing; but if the same inattention is discovered in an old man, people will shrug up their shoulders, and say:” His memory is going” Samuel Johnson

*A Grandparent is a little bit parent, a little bit teacher and a little bit friend.* Anon

### Feast Days in September

**1<sup>st</sup> 22<sup>nd</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time**

3<sup>rd</sup> St Gregory the Great, Pope

5<sup>th</sup> St (Mother) Teresa of Calcutta

**8<sup>th</sup> 23<sup>rd</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time**

**(Birthday of Our Lady)**

9<sup>th</sup> St Peter Claver

13<sup>th</sup> St John Chrysostom

**14<sup>th</sup> Exaltation of the Holy Cross**

**15<sup>th</sup> 24<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time**

17<sup>th</sup> St Robert Bellarmine

20<sup>th</sup> St Andrew Kim & the Korean Martyrs

**21<sup>st</sup> St Matthew, Apostle**

**22<sup>nd</sup> 25<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time**

23<sup>rd</sup> St Padre Pio of Pietrelcina

**24<sup>th</sup> Our Lady of Ransom**

26<sup>th</sup> Ss Cosmas and Damian

27<sup>th</sup> St Vincent de Paul

**29<sup>th</sup> 26<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time**

30<sup>th</sup> St Jerome