

## World Day of Prayer for Grandparents and the Elderly

The stories in the First Reading and the Gospel for this Sunday bear a striking resemblance to each other. In each case, God shows His desire to feed His people in abundance.

A man brings twenty barley loaves and a sack of grain from his first fruits to Elisha. Instead of offering them to God according to the law, Elisha orders that the food be used to feed the people. His servant expresses doubt that there will be enough food to feed one hundred people but Elisha had faith in God's promise that the food would be more than enough. And indeed it was; one hundred people were fed, with food left over.

In the Gospel, we encounter the well-known story of the multiplication of the loaves and fishes to feed five thousand people. Jesus told His disciples to give the crowd of followers something to eat. After scratching their heads for a while, the disciples produced a boy who had five barley loaves and two fish. In spite of their doubts that the crowd could be fed with such a meagre amount of food, Jesus was able to feed the five thousand, with twelve baskets of scraps left over.

Both stories demonstrate that God wants to feed His people plentifully, using the limited resources that are offered. This gives us confidence that He can take the limited 'barley loaves and fish' that we have to offer and, in spite of our doubts, can use them to 'feed the hungry' of the world.

Our Holy Father has designated this Sunday as the first World Day of Prayer for Grandparents and the Elderly in recognition of the isolation and death visited upon this group of people during the pandemic. Also, it is a recognition of the important vocation entrusted to the elderly. In his message for this Sunday, the Holy father said this (including himself among the elderly):

*What is our vocation today, at our age? To preserve our roots, to pass on the faith to the young, and to care for the little ones. Never forget this. It makes no difference how old you are, whether you still work or not, whether you are alone or have a family, whether you became a grandmother or grandfather at a young age or later, whether you are still independent or need assistance, because there is no retirement age from the work of proclaiming the Gospel and handing down traditions to your grandchildren. You just need to set out and undertake something new.*

We might wonder how we can respond when we are getting older, losing energy, having health problems, and suffering from increased isolation as we retire from the main stream of the world. The Holy Father put forward three words: Dreams, Memory and Prayer. Pass on your dreams for a better world; dreams that the young may turn into reality. Pass on your memory of experiences that will help the young to build a better world. And prayer; Pope Francis quotes Pope Benedict: 'the prayer of the elderly can protect the world, helping it perhaps more effectively than the frenetic activity of many others.'

God has conferred on grandparents and the elderly a special vocation that only we can take up. Let us not allow our increasing limitations to raise doubts in our minds but let us have faith that God will take whatever we have to offer and use it to 'feed the world' abundantly. In the words of Pope Francis: 'Especially in these difficult times for our human family, as we continue to sail in the same boat across the stormy sea of the pandemic, our intercession for the world and for the Church has great value. It inspires in everyone the serene trust that we will soon come to shore.'