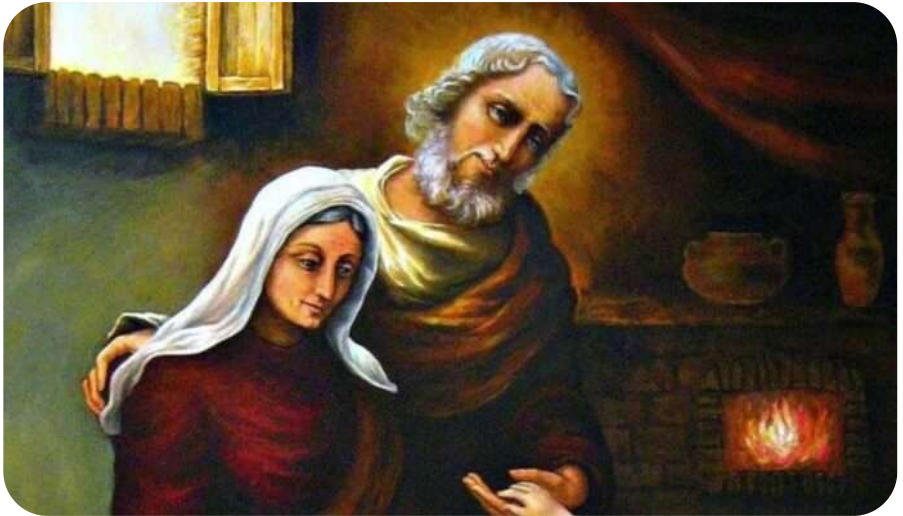


## MONTH OF JULY

Dedicated to St. Ann and St. Joachim  
the Grandparents of Jesus



*“O God, from my youth thou hast taught me,  
And I will proclaim thy wondrous deeds.*

*So even to old age and grey hairs,  
O God, do not forsake me,  
till I proclaim thy might  
to all generations to come”*

*(Ps 71:17-18)*

**Introduction:** We, the Sisters of St. Ann, gladly invite you to pray with us during the whole month of July, a month dedicated to our Patron Saints Ann and Joachim, the grandparents of Jesus, also because Pope Francis has decided to institute a celebration of a ***“World Day for Grandparents and the Elderly, starting this year, which will be held on the fourth Sunday of July, close to the liturgical memorial of Saints Joachim and Ann, the grandparents of Jesus”***.

We offer you for each day, some passages on the "Elderly" taken from the Magisterium of the Church, on which to reflect and pray.

#### **Outline**

- **Reflection proposed for each day**
- **Prayer:**
- *Lord Jesus, help all the Families, the Communities and the society to value the presence and role of the elderly and the grandparents. May they never be ignored or excluded, but always receive respect and love. Give them the grace to live peacefully and feel themselves accepted for rest of the years of life that you wish to grant them.*
- **St. Ann and St. Joachim**, pray for us and ... (add other names and intentions)

#### **MESSAGES FROM THE POPES TO THE ELDERLY**

1. Old age is a time of grace, in which the Lord renews his call to us: he calls us to safeguard and transmit the faith, he calls us to pray, especially to intercede; he calls us to be close to those in need....

The elderly, grandparents have the ability to understand the most difficult of situations: a great ability! And when they pray for these situations, their prayer is strong; it is powerful! Grandparents, who have received the blessing to see their children's children (cf. Ps 128: 6), are entrusted with a great responsibility: to transmit their life experience, their family history, the history of a community, of a people; to share wisdom with simplicity, and the faith itself — the most precious heritage! Happy is the family who have grandparents close by! (POPE FRANCIS, *Meeting with the Elderly*, 28 September 2014)

2. I come to you as Bishop of Rome, but also as an old man visiting his peers. It would be superfluous to say that I am well acquainted with the difficulties, problems and limitations of this age and I know that for many these difficulties are more acute due to the economic crisis. At times, at a certain age, one may look back nostalgically at the time of our youth when we were fresh and planning for the future. Thus at times our gaze is veiled by sadness, seeing this phase of life as the time of sunset. This morning, addressing all the elderly in spirit, although I am aware of the difficulties that our age entails I would like to tell you with deep conviction: it is beautiful to be old! At every phase of life it is necessary to be able to discover the presence and blessing of the Lord and the riches they bring. We must never let ourselves be imprisoned by sorrow! We have received the gift of longevity. Living is beautiful even at our age, despite some "aches and pains" and a few limitations. In our faces may there always be the joy of feeling loved by God and not sadness. (POPE BENEDICT XVI, *Visit to the Home for the Elderly "Viva gli anziani"* Rome, 12 November 2012).
3. My thoughts turn with affection to all of you, dear elderly people of all languages and cultures ... Dear brothers and sisters, at our age it is natural to revisit the past in order to attempt a sort of

assessment. This retrospective gaze makes possible a more serene and objective evaluation of persons and situations we have met along the way. The passage of time helps us to see our experiences in a clearer light and softens their painful side. Sadly, struggles and tribulations are very much a part of everyone's life. Sometimes it is a matter of problems and sufferings which can sorely test our mental and physical resistance, and perhaps even shake our faith. But experience teaches that daily difficulties, by God's grace, often contribute to people's growth and to the forging of their character.(SAINT JOHN PAUL II, *Letter to the Elderly*, 2)

4. Dear elderly brothers and sisters, the days sometimes seem long and empty, with difficulties, few engagements and few meetings; never feel down at heart: you are a wealth for society, even in suffering and sickness. And this phase of life is also a gift for deepening the relationship with God. The example of Blessed Pope John Paul II was and still is illuminating for everyone. Do not forget that one of the valuable resources you possess is the essential one of prayer: become interceders with God, praying with faith and with constancy. Pray for the Church, and pray for me, for the needs of the world, for the poor, so that there may be no more violence in the world. The prayers of the elderly can protect the world, helping it, perhaps more effectively than collective anxiety. Today I would like to entrust to your prayers the good of the Church and peace in the world. The Pope loves you and relies on all of you! May you feel beloved by God and know how to bring a ray of God's love to this society of ours, often so individualistic and so efficiency-oriented. And God will always be with you and with all those who support you with their affection and their help. (POPE BENEDICT XVI, *Visit to the Home for the Elderly "Viva gli anziani"* Rome, 12 November 2012).

5. What is old age? ... Childhood and youth are the times when the human person is being formed and is completely directed towards the future, and - in coming to appreciate his own abilities - makes plans for adulthood, old age is not without its own benefits. As Saint Jerome observes, with the quieting of the passions, it increases wisdom, and brings more mature counsels. In a certain sense, it is the season for that wisdom which generally comes from experience, since time is a great teacher. The prayer of the Psalmist is well known: "Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain wisdom of heart" (Ps 90:12). .(SAINT JOHN PAUL II, *Letter to the Elderly*, 5)

### **THE CHURCH AND THE ELDERLY**

6. In the tradition of the Church there is a wealth of wisdom that has always supported a culture of closeness to the elderly, a disposition of warm and supportive companionship in this final phase of life. This tradition is rooted in Sacred Scripture, as these passages from the Book of Sirach attest: "Do not disregard the discourse of the aged, for they themselves learned from their fathers; because from them you will gain understanding and learn how to give an answer in time of need" (Sir 8:9). (POPE FRANCIS, *General Audience*, 4 March 2015)
7. The Gospel comes to meet us with a really moving and encouraging image. It is the image of Simeon and Anna, who are spoken of in the Gospel of Jesus' childhood, composed by St Luke. They were certainly elderly, the "old man", Simeon, and the "prophetess", Anna, who was 84 years old. This woman did not hide her age. The Gospel says that they awaited the coming of God every day, with great trust, for many years. ... So, when Mary and Joseph went to the temple to fulfil the provisions of the Law, Simeon and Anna moved quickly, inspired by the Holy Spirit (cf. Lk 2:27). The burden

of age and waiting disappeared in an instant. They recognized the Child, and discovered *new strength, for a new task*: to give thanks for and bear witness to this Sign from God. Simeon improvised a beautiful hymn of jubilation (cf. Lk 2:29-32) — in that moment he was a poet — and Anna became the first woman to preach of Jesus: she “spoke of him to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem” (Lk 2:38). Dear grandparents, dear elderly, let us follow in the footsteps of these extraordinary elders! Let us too become like poets of prayer: let us develop a taste for finding our own words, let us once again grasp those which teach us the Word of God. *The prayer of grandparents and of the elderly is a great gift for the Church! ...* Above all, we need old people who pray; prayer is the purpose of old age. (POPE FRANCIS, *General Audience*, 11 March, 2015)

8. Through solidarity between the young and the old it has helped people to understand that the Church is effectively a family made up of all the generations, where each person must feel “at home” and where it is not the logic of profit and of possession that prevails but that of giving freely and of love. When life becomes frail, in the years of old age, it never loses its value and its dignity: each one of us, at any stage of life, is wanted and loved by God, each one is important and necessary (POPE BENEDICT XVI, *Visit to the Home for the Elderly "Viva gli anziani"* Rome, 12 November 2012).
9. The pastoral activity of the Church must help everyone to discover and to make good use of the role of the elderly within the civil and ecclesial community, in particular within the family. In fact, the life of the aging helps to clarify a scale of human values; it shows the continuity of generations and marvelously demonstrates the interdependence of God's people. The elderly often have the charism to bridge generation gaps before they are made: how many

children have found understanding and love in the eyes and words and caresses of the aging! And how many old people have willingly subscribed to the inspired word that the 'crown of the aged is their children's children' (Prv. 17:6)! (FAMILIARIS CONSORTIO, 27)

- 10.** The Church cannot and does not want to conform to a mentality of impatience, and much less of indifference and contempt, towards old age. We must reawaken the collective sense of gratitude, of appreciation, of hospitality, which makes the elder feel like a living part of his community. (POPE FRANCIS, *General Audience*, 4 March 2015).
- 11.** We old people are all a little fragile. Some, however, are particularly weak, many are alone, and stricken by illness. Some depend on the indispensable care and attention of others. Are we going to take a step back? Abandon them to their fate? A society without proximity, where gratuity and affection without compensation—between strangers as well — is disappearing, is a perverse society. The Church, faithful to the Word of God, cannot tolerate such degeneration. A Christian community in which proximity and gratuity are no longer considered indispensable is a society which would lose her soul. Where there is no honour for the elderly, there is no future for the young. (POPE FRANCIS, *General Audience*, 4 March 2015).
- 12.** Any Church community, if it thinks it can comfortably go its own way without creative concern and effective cooperation in helping the poor to live with dignity and reaching out to everyone, will also risk breaking down, however much it may talk about social issues or criticize governments. It will easily drift into a spiritual worldliness camouflaged by religious practices, unproductive meetings and empty talk. Jesus, the evangelizer par excellence and the Gospel in person, identifies especially with the little ones (cf. Mt 25:40). It is

essential to draw near to new forms of poverty and vulnerability, in which we are called to recognize the suffering Christ, even if this appears to bring us no tangible and immediate benefits. I think of the homeless, the addicted, refugees, indigenous peoples, the elderly who are increasingly isolated and abandoned, and many others. (Cf. EVANGELII GAUDIUM, 207. 209. 210)

- 13.** During the Synod, one of the young auditors from the Samoan Islands spoke of the Church as a canoe, in which the elderly help to keep on course by judging the position of the stars, while the young keep rowing, imagining what waits for them ahead. Let us steer clear of young people who think that adults represent a meaningless past, and those adults who always think they know how young people should act. Instead, let us all climb aboard the same canoe and together seek a better world, with the constantly renewed momentum of the Holy Spirit. (CHRISTUS VIVIT, 201).
- 14.** Most families have great respect for the elderly, surrounding them with affection and considering them a blessing. A special word of appreciation is due to those associations and family movements committed to serving the elderly, both spiritually and socially. In highly industrialized societies, where the number of elderly persons is growing even as the birth rate declines, they can be regarded as a burden. On the other hand, the care that they require often puts a strain on their loved ones. Care and concern for the final stages of life is all the more necessary today, when contemporary society attempts to remove every trace of death and dying. The elderly who are vulnerable and dependent are at times unfairly exploited simply for economic advantage. Many families show us that it is possible to approach the last stages of life by emphasizing the importance of a person's sense of fulfillment and participation in the Lord's paschal mystery. A great number of elderly people are cared for in Church



institutions, where, materially and spiritually, they can live in a peaceful, family atmosphere. Euthanasia and assisted suicide are serious threats to families worldwide; in many countries, they have been legalized. The Church, while firmly opposing these practices, feels the need to assist families who take care of their elderly and infirm members. (AMORIS LAETITIA, 48)

**15.** The experience of love in families is a perennial source of strength for the life of the Church. The unitive end of marriage is a constant summons to make this love grow and deepen. Through their union in love, the couple experiences the beauty of fatherhood and motherhood, and shares plans, trials, expectations and concerns; they learn care for one another and mutual forgiveness. In this love, they celebrate their happy moments and support each other in the difficult passages of their life together. The beauty of this mutual, gratuitous gift, the joy which comes from a life that is born and the loving care of all family members – from toddlers to seniors – are just a few of the fruits which make the response to the vocation of the family unique and irreplaceable, both for the Church and for society as a whole. (AMORIS LAETITIA, 88)

**16.** “Do not cast me off in the time of old age; forsake me not when my strength is spent” (Ps 71:9). This is the plea of the elderly, who fear being forgotten and rejected. Just as God asks us to be his means of hearing the cry of the poor, so too he wants us to hear the cry of the elderly. This represents a challenge to families and communities, since the Church cannot and does not want to conform to a mentality of impatience, and much less of indifference and contempt, towards old age. We must reawaken the collective sense of gratitude, of appreciation, of hospitality, which makes the elderly feel like a living part of the community. Our elderly are men and women, fathers and mothers, who came before us on our own road,

in our own house, in our daily battle for a worthy life. Indeed, how I would like a Church that challenges the throw-away culture by the overflowing joy of a new embrace between young and old! (AMORIS LAETITIA, 191)

### **YOUTH-ELDERLY RELATIONSHIP**

- 17.** On the memorial of Saints Joachim and Anne, Jesus' 'grandparents', I would like to invite the young to perform a gesture of tenderness towards the elderly, especially the loneliest, in their homes and in residences, those who have not seen their loved ones for many months. Dear young people, each one of these elderly people is your grandparent! Do not leave them by themselves. Use the inventiveness of love, make telephone calls, video calls, send messages, listen to them and, where possible, in compliance with healthcare regulations, go to visit them too. Send them a hug. They are your roots. An uprooted tree cannot grow; it does not blossom or bear fruit. This is why the bond and connection with your roots is important. 'The blossom of a tree comes from what it has underground', says a poet from my homeland. Therefore I invite you to give a big round of applause for our grandparents, everyone! (POPE FRANCIS, *Angelus*, July 26, 2020)
- 18.** Thanks to the progress of medicine life-spans have increased: but society *has not "expanded" to life!* The number of elderly has multiplied, but our societies are not organized well enough to make room for them, with proper respect and practical consideration for their frailty and their dignity. While we are young, we are led to ignore old age, as if it were a disease to keep away from; then when we become old, especially if we are poor, if we are sick and alone, we experience the shortcomings of a society programmed for efficiency, which consequently ignores its elderly. And the elderly

are a wealth not to be ignored. (POPE FRANCIS *General Audience*, 4 March 2015).

19. I would like to reaffirm that the elderly are a value for society, especially for the young. There can be no true human growth and education without fruitful contact with the elderly, because their life itself is like an open book in which the young generations may find precious indications for their journey through life. (POPE BENEDICT XVI, *Visit to the Home for the Elderly "Viva gli anziani"*, Rome, 12 November 2012).
20. "Accept the authority of those who are older" (1 Pet 5:5). The Bible never ceases to insist that profound respect be shown to the elderly, since they have a wealth of experience; they have known success and failure, life's joys and afflictions, its dreams and disappointments. In the silence of their heart, they have a store of experiences that can teach us not to make mistakes or be taken in by false promises. An ancient sage asks us to respect certain limits and to master our impulses: "Urge the younger men to be self-controlled" (Tit 2.6). It is unhelpful to buy into the cult of youth or foolishly to dismiss others simply because they are older or from another generation. Jesus tells us that the wise are able to bring forth from their store things both new and old (cf. Mt 13:52). A wise young person is open to the future, yet still capable of learning something from the experience of others. (CHRISTUS VIVIT, 16)
21. Today, thank God, many young people in parishes, schools, movements and university groups often go out to spend time with the elderly and the infirm, or to visit poor neighbourhoods, or to meet people's needs through "nights of charity". Very often, they come to realize that there they receive much more than what they give. We grow in wisdom and maturity when we take the time to touch the suffering of others. The poor have a hidden wisdom and

with a few simple words, they can help us discover unexpected values. (CHRISTUS VIVIT, 171)

- 22.** The word of God encourages us to remain close to the elderly, so that we can benefit from their experience: “Stand in the assembly of the elders. Who is wise? Cling to him... If you see an intelligent man, visit him; let your foot wear out his doorstep” (Sir 6:34.36). In every case, the long years they lived and all they have experienced in life should make us look to them with respect: “You shall rise up before the hoary head” (Lev 19:32). For “the glory of young men is their strength, but the beauty of old men is their grey hair” (Prov 20:29). (CHRISTUS VIVIT, 188)
- 23.** The prophecy of Joel contains a verse that expresses this nicely: “I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams” (3:1; cf. Acts 2:17). When young and old alike are open to the Holy Spirit, they make a wonderful combination. The old dream dreams, and the young see visions. How do the two complement one another? The elderly have dreams built up of memories and images that bear the mark of their long experience. If young people sink roots in those dreams, they can peer into the future; they can have visions that broaden their horizons and show them new paths. But if the elderly do not dream, young people lose clear sight of the horizon. (Christus Vivit, 192-193)
- 24.** In the book *Sharing the Wisdom of Time*, I expressed some thoughts in the form of questions. What do I ask of the elders among whom I count myself? I call us to be memory keepers. We grandfathers and grandmothers need to form a choir. I envision elders as a permanent choir of a great spiritual sanctuary, where prayers of supplication and songs of praise support the larger community that works and struggles in the field of life. It is a beautiful thing when

“young men and maidens together, old men and children, praise the name of the Lord” (Ps 148:12-13). (CHRISTUS VIVIT, 196)

## **25. First World Day for Grandparents and the Elderly**

Let us listen to Pope Francis: “On 2<sup>nd</sup> February, we will celebrate the feast of the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple, when Simeon and Anna, both elderly, enlightened by the Holy Spirit, recognized Jesus as the Messiah. The Holy Spirit still stirs up thoughts and words of wisdom in the elderly today: their voice is precious because it sings the praises of God and safeguards the roots of peoples. They remind us that old age is a gift and that grandparents are the link between generations, passing on the experience of life and faith to the young. Grandparents are often forgotten and we forget this wealth of preserving roots and passing on. This is why, I have decided to establish *World Day for Grandparents and the Elderly*, which will be held throughout the Church every year on the fourth Sunday of July, close to the feast of Saints Joachim and Anne, Jesus’ “grandparents”. It is important for grandparents to meet their grandchildren and for grandchildren to meet their grandparents, because — as the prophet Joel says — grandparents, before their grandchildren, will dream, and have illusions [great desires], and young people, taking strength from their grandparents, will go forward and prophesy. And 2 February is indeed the feast of the encounter between grandparents and their grandchildren. (POPE FRANCIS, *Angelus*, 31 January 2021)

**Let us read the Message, attached, of Pope Francis for this World Day**

## **26. Feast day of St. Ann and St. Joachim:**

*“We accept suffering, convinced that when offered to God, it is a precious means which contributes to the building up of our Communities and to the fruitfulness of our mission. We accompany the aged and sick Sisters, taking care of their every need and*

*entrust them to the Lord who is always a loving Father*". (SSA Constitutions art. 88)

Let us give thanks for the holiness of the faithful People of God, whom we are called to shepherd and through whom the Lord also shepherds and cares for us. He blesses us with the gift of contemplating that faithful People in those parents who raise their children with immense love, in those men and women who work hard to support their families, in the sick, in elderly religious who never lose their smile. In their daily perseverance, I see the holiness of the Church militant. Let us be grateful for each of them, and in their witness find support and encouragement. "For his mercy endures forever". (POPE FRANCIS, *Letter to Priests*, 2019)

**Let us pray today, for the elderly Religious women and men and Priests.**

27. Our elders are men and women, fathers and mothers, who came before us on our own road, in our own house, in our daily battle for a worthy life. They are men and women from whom we have received so much. The elder is not an alien. We are that elder: in the near or far future, but inevitably, even if we don't think it. And if we don't learn how to treat the elder better, that is how we will be treated. (POPE FRANCIS, *General Audience*, 4 March 2015)
28. "The elimination of the elderly from the life of the family and of society represents the expression of a perverse process in which there is no longer gratuitousness, generosity, that wealth of feelings that make life not just a give and take, that is, not just a market ... Eliminating the elderly is a curse that this society of ours often brings down on itself". (J.M. BERGOGLIO, *Only love can save us*, LEV Vatican City 2013, p. 83).

- 29.** Not every older person, grandfather, grandmother, has a family who can take him or her in. And so homes for the elderly are welcome... may they be real homes and not prisons! And may they be for the elderly, and not for the interests of anyone else! They must not be institutions where the elderly live forgotten, hidden and neglected. I feel close to the many elderly who live in these institutions, and I think with gratitude of those who go to visit and care for them. Homes for the elderly should be the “lungs” of humanity in a town, a neighbourhood or a parish. They should be the “sanctuaries” of humanity where one who is old and weak is cared for and protected like a big brother or sister. It is so good to go visit an elderly person! Look at our children: sometimes we see them listless and sad; they go visit an elderly person and become joyful! (POPE FRANCIS, *Meeting with the elderly*, 28 September 2014)
- 30.** What can we elderly persons give to the young? We can remind today’s young people, who have their own blend of heroic ambitions and insecurities, that a life without love is an arid life. What can we tell them? We can tell fearful young people that anxiety about the future can be overcome. What can we teach them? We can teach those young people, sometimes so focused on themselves, that there is more joy in giving than in receiving, and that love is not only shown in words, but also in actions. (CHRISTUS VIVIT, 197)
- 31.** In the Bible longevity is considered a blessing of God; today this blessing is widespread and must be seen as a gift to appreciate and to make the most of. And yet frequently society dominated by the logic of efficiency and gain does not accept it as such: on the contrary it frequently rejects it, viewing the elderly as non-productive or useless. All too often we hear about the suffering of

those who are marginalized, who live far from home or in loneliness. I think there should be greater commitment, starting with families and public institutions, to ensure that the elderly be able to stay in their own homes. The wisdom of life, of which we are bearers, is a great wealth. The quality of a society, I mean of a civilization, is also judged by how it treats elderly people and by the place it gives them in community life. Those who make room for the elderly make room for life! Those who welcome the elderly welcome life! (POPE BENEDICT XVI, *Visit to the Home for the Elderly "Viva gli anziani"* Rome, 12 November 2012)



**Teach us to number our days,  
that we may get  
a heart of wisdom.**

**(Ps. 90: 12)**