

THE DIGNITY OF OLDER PEOPLE AND THEIR MISSION IN THE CHURCH AND IN THE WORLD

Pontifical Council for the Laity

EXCERPTS

The third age seems particularly conducive to transcendental values.

Often lived in a simple way, but not for that reason any less profound, the religious faith of older people of both sexes is highly diversified; this is also determined by the relative strength of their faith in their earlier life.

At times, it is distinguished by a kind of fatalism: in such cases, suffering, disabilities, illnesses, the losses inseparable from this phase of life, are regarded, if not as divine punishments, at least as signs of a God who is no longer benevolent. The ecclesial community has the responsibility to purify this fatalism by helping to develop the religious faith of older people and by restoring a horizon of hope to it.

In this task, catechesis has a role of primary importance to play. It is the job of catechesis to purge faith of fear, to overcome the image of a wrathful God, and to lead the older person to discover the God of love.

Older people are the privileged witnesses, who can testify—both before human society and before the Christian community—to God's fidelity: he always keeps the promises he has made to man.

The pastoral task of evangelizing or re-evangelizing older members of the community must aim at fostering the spirituality that is peculiar to this age of life: i.e. a spirituality based on the continual rebirth that Jesus himself recommended to the elderly Nicodemus. Jesus urged Nicodemus not to let old age stand in the way of rebirth. To be reborn to a life that is ever new and full of hope, we don't need to go back to our mother's womb: we need to be “born from above”, by opening ourselves up to the gift of the Spirit; for “what is born of human nature is human; what is born of the Spirit is spirit” (*Jn* 3:6).

Christ's call to holiness is addressed to all his disciples, in every phase of human life: “You must therefore set no bounds to your love, just as your heavenly Father sets none to his” (*Mt* 5:48). In spite of the passing of years, which risks dampening enthusiasm and draining away energy, older people must therefore feel themselves more than ever called to persevere in the search for Christian holiness: Christians must never let apathy or tiredness impede their spiritual journey.

