Quotable
What does Pope Francis say about the young and the old?

Elderly people, on a social level, should not be considered as a burden, but for what they really are, that is, a resource and a wealth. They are the memory of a people! This is demonstrated by their contribution to voluntary activities, precious opportunities to live the dimension of gratuitousness....

The biggest challenge for society in the coming years is to promote the human resources that older people bring to the community with increasing effectiveness.... It will therefore be important that the elderly are considered bearers not only of needs, but also of new demands, or as I often say - echoing the Bible - of "dreams" (cf.GL 3: 1) - that the elderly are dreamers - dreams, however, full of memory, not empty, vain, like those of certain advertisements; the dreams of the elderly are imbued with memory, and therefore fundamental for the journey of the young, because they are the roots. From the elderly comes that sap that makes the tree grow, makes it bloom, gives new fruits.

The future of a people necessarily presupposes a dialogue and an encounter between the elderly and the young for the construction of a society that is more just, more beautiful, more supportive, more Christian. Young people are the strength of a people's journey and the elderly strengthen this further with their memory and wisdom.

Old age is a time of grace, in which the Lord renews His call to us: He calls us to preserve and pass on our faith, He calls us to pray, especially to intercede; He calls us to be close to those in need. The elderly and grandparents have a unique and special ability to grasp the most problematic situations. And when they pray for these situations, their prayer is strong, it is powerful!

Grandparents, who have been blessed to see their children's children (cf.Ps128: 6), are entrusted with a great task: to transmit the experience of life, the history of a family, a community, a people.... The future - and this is not an exaggeration - will be in the dialogue between young and old. If grandparents do not dialogue with grandchildren, there will be no future. We are all called upon to counter this poisonous throwaway culture. We are called to build with tenacity a different society, more welcoming, more human, more inclusive, which does not need to discard those who are weak in body and mind, rather, a society that measures its "pace" precisely by these people.

We need the wisdom and experience of the elderly to build a world that is more respectful of the rights of all. Continue with courage to bring your precious witness to the different environments in which you work.... And, do not forget, talk to the young, but not to berate them, no: to listen to them, and then to sow something. This dialogue is the future!

– Pope Francis, from a talk on December 16, 2019

Excerpts from Christus Vivit, by Pope Francis
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. CV 16
It pains me to see young people sometimes being encouraged to build a future without roots, as if the world were just starting now. For “it is impossible for us to grow unless we have strong roots to support us and to keep us firmly grounded. It is easy to drift off, when there is nothing to clutch onto, to hold onto” CV 179

Realize that there is beauty in the laborer who returns home grimy and unkempt, but with the joy of having earned food for his family. There is extraordinary beauty in the fellowship of a family at table, generously sharing what food it has. There is beauty in the wife, slightly disheveled and no longer young, who continues to care for her sick husband despite her own failing health. Long after the springtime of their courtship has passed, there is beauty in the fidelity of those couples who still love one another in the autumn of life, those elderly people who still hold hands as they walk. There is also a beauty, unrelated to appearances or fashionable dress, in all those men and women who pursue their personal vocation with love, in selfless service of community or nation, in the hard work of building a happy family, in the selfless and demanding effort to advance social harmony. To find, to disclose and to highlight this beauty, which is like that of Christ on the cross, is to lay the foundations of genuine social solidarity and the culture of encounter. CV 183

Helping the young to discover the living richness of the past, to treasure its memory and to make use of it for their choices and opportunities, is a genuine act of love towards them, for the sake of their growth and the decisions they are called to make. CV 187

The world has never benefitted, nor will it ever benefit, from a rupture between generations. That is the siren song of a future without roots and origins. It is the lie that would have you believe that only what is new is good and beautiful. When intergenerational relationships exist, a collective memory is present in communities, as each generation takes up the teachings of its predecessors and in turn bequeaths a legacy to its successors. In this way, they provide frames of reference for firmly establishing a new society. As the old saying goes: “If the young had knowledge and the old strength, there would be nothing they could not accomplish.” CV 191

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? CV 192

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. CV 93

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 say 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.”

If we journey together, young and old, we can be firmly rooted in the present, and from here, revisit the past and look to the future. To revisit the past in order to learn from history and heal old wounds that at times still trouble us. To look to the future in order to nourish our enthusiasm, cause dreams to emerge, awaken prophecies and enable hope to blossom. Together, we can learn from one another, warm hearts, inspire minds with the light of the Gospel, and lend new strength to our hands. CV 199

Roots are not anchors chaining us to past times and preventing us from facing the present and creating something new. Instead, they are a fixed point from which we can grow and meet new challenges. It does us
no good "to sit down and long for times past; we must meet our culture with realism and love and fill it with the Gospel. We are sent today to proclaim the Good News of Jesus to a new age. We need to love this time with all its opportunities and risks, its joys and sorrows, its riches and its limits, its successes and failures." CV 200

The Church is like 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. CV 201

I ask the elderly, from my heart: do not cease to be the cultural storehouse of our people, a storehouse that hands on justice, hands on history, hands on values, hands on the memory of the people. And the rest of you, please, do not oppose the elderly: let them speak, listen to them and go forward. But know this, know that at this moment, you young people and you elderly people are condemned to the same destiny: exclusion. Don't allow yourselves to be excluded.


How important grandparents are for family life, for passing on the human and religious heritage which is so essential for each and every society! How important it is to have intergenerational exchanges and dialogue, especially within the context of the family. The Aparecida Document says, “Children and the elderly build the future of peoples: children because they lead history forward, the elderly because they transmit the experience and wisdom of their lives” (No. 447). This relationship and this dialogue between generations is a treasure to be preserved and strengthened! In this World Youth Day, young people wish to acknowledge and honor their grandparents. They salute them with great affection. Grandparents. Let us salute grandparents. Young people salute their grandparents with great affection and they thank them for the ongoing witness of their wisdom.


Talk to your grandparents. Because if you want to be hope for the future, you have to receive the torch from your grandfather and your grandmother.


You, dear young people, are not the future. We like to say, “you are the future”. No, you are the present. You are not the future of God, you young people are the now of God. He invites you and calls you in your communities and cities to go out and find your grandparents, your elders; to stand up and with them to speak out and realize the dream that the Lord has dreamed for you.


Every time we forego something that we like for the good of others and especially for those most in need, or for the good of our roots as in the case of our grandparents and our elderly, the Lord pays it back a hundredfold.
Dear friends, you have had a more lively and real experience of faith; you have experienced the strength born of prayer and a new and different kind of joy, the fruit of working side by side even with people you did not know. Now is the moment when you are sent forth: go out and tell, go out and bear witness, go out and spread the word about everything you have seen and heard. And don’t do this with lots of words but rather, as you did here, with simple and ordinary gestures, those that transform and renew all things. Gestures capable of creating a mess, a constructive mess, a loving mess. Let me tell you something. On my first day here I saw a woman with a bonnet, an elderly lady, a grandmother, at the barrier where we were driving by, and she had a sign saying: “We grandmothers also know how to make a mess” with the words added below, “with wisdom”. Join the grandparents to make a mess, it will be a real mess, a really clever mess, don’t be frightened of it, go out and speak. I thought the lady was quite elderly and so I asked her age: she was 14 years younger than me, what an embarrassment!


It’s true, attention to the elderly makes the difference in a civilization. Is there attention to the elderly in a civilization? Is there room for the elderly? This civilization will move forward if it knows how to respect wisdom, the wisdom of the elderly. In a civilization in which there is no room for the elderly or where they are thrown away because they create problems, this society carries with it the virus of death.

I remember, when I was visiting a retirement home, I spoke with each person and I frequently heard this: “How are you? And your children? Well, well. How many do you have? Many. And do they come to visit you?. Oh sure, yes, always, yes, they come. When was the last time they came?” I remember an elderly woman who said to me: “Mmm, for Christmas”. It was August! Eight months without being visited by her children, abandoned for eight months! This is called mortal sin, understand? Once as a child, a grandmother told us the story of an old grandfather who got dirty while eating because he couldn't easily bring the spoonful of soup to his mouth. And his son, that is, the father of the family, had decided to move him from the dinner table and set up a little table in the kitchen to eat alone, so he couldn’t be seen. In this way he wouldn’t make a bad impression when friends came over to lunch or dinner. A few days later, he came home and found his youngest child playing with some wood and a hammer and nails, he was making something there, he said: “What are you making? — I’m making a table, papa. — A table, why? — To have one for when you grow old, so that you can eat there”. Children are more aware than we are!

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).

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. 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.

The Lord never discards us. He calls us to follow Him in every age of life, and old age has a grace and a mission too, a true vocation from the Lord. Old age is a vocation. It is not yet time to “pull in the oars”. This period of life is different from those before, there is no doubt; we even have to somewhat “invent it ourselves”, because our societies are not ready, spiritually and morally, to appreciate the true value of this stage of life. Indeed, it once was not so normal to have time available; it is much more so today.

The Gospel comes to meet us with a really moving and encouraging image. It is the image of Simeon and Anna, whom are spoken of in the Gospel of Jesus’ childhood, composed by St Luke. There 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. They truly wanted to see Him that day, to grasp the signs, to understand the origin. By then, they were also perhaps more resigned to die first: that long wait, however, continued to occupy their whole life, having no commitments more important than this: to await the Lord and pray. So, when Mary and Joseph went to the temple to fulfill 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).

The prayer of grandparents and of the elderly is a great gift for the Church! The prayer of grandparents and of the elderly is a great gift for the Church, it is a treasure! A great injection of wisdom for the whole of human society: above all for one which is too busy, too taken, too distracted.

We need old people who pray because this is the very purpose of old age. The prayer of the elderly is a beautiful thing. We are able to thank the Lord for the benefits received, and fill the emptiness of ingratitude that surrounds us. We are able to intercede for the expectations of younger generations and give dignity to the memory and sacrifices of past generations. We are able to remind ambitious young people that a life without love is a barren life. We are able say to young people who are afraid that anxiety about the future can be overcome. We are able to teach the young who are overly self-absorbed that there is more joy in giving than in receiving. Grandfathers and grandmothers form the enduring “chorus” of a great spiritual sanctuary, where prayers of supplication and songs of praise sustain the community which toils and struggles in the field of life.

How beautiful, however, is the encouragement an elderly person manages to pass on to a young person who is seeking the meaning of faith and of life! It is truly the mission of grandparents, the vocation of the elderly. The words of grandparents have special value for the young. And the young know it. I still carry with me, always, in my breviary, the words my grandmother consigned to me in writing on the day of my priestly ordination. I read them often and they do me good.

How I would like a Church that challenges the throw-away culture with the overflowing joy of a new embrace between young and old! This is what I ask of the Lord today, this embrace! http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/audiences/2015/documents/papa-francesco_20150311_udienza-generale.html