
A BLESSING TO THE WORLD, A TREASURE FOR THE CHURCH (2)



I thank the Catholic Organization for Life and Family (COLF) for permission to publish here their important message for the International Year of Older Persons. COLF is a joint project of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops and the Knights of Columbus. It promotes respect for human life and dignity, and the essential role of the family. Members of the COLF Board of Directors are: Archbishop Bertrand Blanchette, Ms. Louise Couture, Archbishop Adam Exner, O.M.I., Ms. Dolores Fehr, Ms. Sharon Harland, Mr. Jean-Claude LaForest, Ms. H el ene Leboeuf and Mr. Michael Sheehan. Copies of this Message are available from the COLF offices at 90 Parent Avenue, Ottawa, Ontario K1N 7B1.

WE NEED YOU

More than ever, our society needs the talents, experience and wisdom of seniors. Reach out and surround yourself with a balanced network of relationships that will give you the peace and joy of knowing that you have a place, an essential role to play. Moreover, you will be responding to the Gospel call for social justice and doing what the Lord requires of all of us. As the prophet Micah says so beautifully: *What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, to love kindness and walk humbly with your God?* (Micah 6:8)

A TREASURE FOR THE CHURCH

Aging has its share of difficulties, challenges and disappointments. As the body ages, it becomes necessary to slow down the overall pace of life. This change of pace can allow time for spiritual development of the value and meaning of human life. It is an ideal time for contemplation and reorientation towards others and towards God. It is a time to change one's perception of the world and other people, to learn to see the other as God does and to realize that in the grand scheme of things, only love counts. Old age opens a window on one of the most fundamental aspects of our existence: the certainty of death. As a senior, your words, your actions, your attitudes - in fact your entire life - can be a sign of profound hope for those around you. You can be an active witness to the tenderness and mercy of God, to God's inexhaustible patience and compassion for our suffering. You can be a sign of the importance of giving of oneself, of the fleeting nature of material things, and of the passing of time that prepares us for the most important meeting of our life: coming face to face with God.

TO LIVE TO THE FULLEST

By living life to the fullest, in joy, to the very end, you are close collaborators and full partners in building the world of tomorrow for future generations. In this respect, your tireless efforts to believe in, defend and preserve the dignity of life with all your might are your fundamental contribution to the building of a society that serves the interests of its weakest members. By striving to remain available every day and by taking time to pray for your loved ones, you remind the world of the thing it most sorely needs to remember: the priceless value of human life in the eyes of God. When you reach the final hours of your earthly journey, try to accept peacefully and in faith the inevitable falling away, loss of independence and hours of loneliness. We learn from your lives at this stage the simple truth that life, even when restricted, is worth living to its natural end, and that God, who loved us into existence, is with us always.

GRATITUDE

Let us celebrate with joy and gratitude during this International Year the great blessing and treasure that older people are for the Church and for the world! Let us rejoice with the psalmist who said so many centuries ago: *They are planted in the house of the Lord,/ they flourish in the courts of our God,/ They still bring forth fruit in old age,/they are everfull of sap and green.* (Psalm 92:13-15)

How could I not add to this Message the words of Father Robert Lebel's song which he composed especially for the elderly, under the title *We Have A Life Left*:

We have a life left despite the time running out, we have a life left to fill our days.

We have a life left, whatever its direction, we have a life left to take us to Love.

It is true that we sometimes try to hang on to the past without knowing why and without wanting to stay there.

But we well know deep within that the sand is going in the hourglass of life

and that it is important to live each day by being fully present.

It is true that we sometimes suddenly feel a great emptiness around us, when reminded of our children.

Because we are no less their parents when they need us less.

We can love them in other ways than holding them on our knees.

And it is true that there are nights when fear wells up inside at not having succeeded in life as the heart would have wished.

Still, is it not also true that in order to spread happiness we gave our best to our children and friends?

And if it is true that we get lonely when those around us disappear one by one

and that for hours on end we pray the Lord to have us meet again one day,

this is what life is made of, and we will not evade it. No! This isn't madness but simply Love.

+ François Thibodeau

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Bishop of Edmundston

« From A Bishop's Journal » (279) (26 May 1999)