

Honor our elders creatively

By Sr Constance Veit, l.s.p.

As a Little Sister, I don't usually follow pop culture trends but something in the music world recently caught my attention.

Last weekend the Eurovision Song Contest, the world's largest music competition, crowned Ukraine over forty other countries with a unique song combining rap, hip-hop and traditional folk music.

It was wonderful to see everyone gather around the Ukrainian musicians as they celebrated a rare moment of joy. But what really struck me was the subject of their winning song – *Stefania* is a tribute to the lead singer's aging mother: "The field blooms but she is turning gray ... She rocked me; gave me a rhythm. You can't take willpower from me as I got it from her. She knew more than King Solomon...."

Stefania was not the only Eurovision song to honor family ties. Portugal's entry, performed in subtle harmonies by an all-female group, expressed the composer's pain at the loss of her grandfather, together with her joy in having known and loved him.

MARO, a Portuguese artist who attended music school in Boston, reflected on the meaning of her song, *Saudade*, "It's about loss but it's also celebration. It's crazy how impactful our grandparents can be and it's a reference to so many values, including unconditional love."

Yes, it's amazing how impactful our elders can be and how unconditionally they love us!

These two songs brought joy to my heart as they reminded me of Pope Francis' oft-repeated call for young people to remember and honor their elders.

Throughout the pandemic, the media has emphasized dark stories of the suffering and isolation of seniors. Now on a daily basis we see images of elderly Ukrainians who find themselves alone amidst the ravages of war.

We need a bit of "Good News" involving the elderly! Witnessing the love of these young Ukrainian and Portuguese musicians for their elders filled me with admiration and hope.

On July 24, the church will celebrate the second annual World Day of Grandparents and the Elderly.

Wouldn't it be fantastic if young people across America used their talents to create music and works of art in honor of their elders on this special day? They may not receive a prestigious trophy or international acclaim but God will reward them with the joy of those who know how much more blessed it is to give than to receive!

The theme of this year's World Day for Grandparents and the Elderly is *In Old Age They Will Still Bear Fruit*.

In his message for the occasion, Pope Francis made the following observation, “Old age is not a time of life easily understood even by those of us who are already experiencing it ... The more developed societies expend large sums on this stage of life without really helping people to understand and appreciate it; they offer healthcare plans to the elderly but not plans for living this age to the full. This makes it hard to look to the future and discern what direction to take. On the one hand, we are tempted to ward off old age by hiding our wrinkles and pretending to be forever young, while on the other, we imagine that the only thing we can do is bide our time, thinking glumly that we cannot ‘still bring forth fruit.’ ”

The pope continued, “The fast pace of the world – with which we struggle to keep up – seems to leave us no alternative but to implicitly accept the idea that we are useless.”

Please do not allow your parents, grandparents or other elders in your life to accept this false idea, no matter how limited or disabled they may feel. No human being is ever useless or without value. No one is ever completely incapable of entering into relationship with others and making a difference in the world!

And so, as July 24 approaches, let’s be creative in finding ways to honor the elders in our lives. Let’s show them we are grateful for their unconditional love and all they have given us. Let’s help our elders to appreciate the many ways in which they still bear fruit!

Pope Francis told seniors that they have the responsibility of teaching the rest of us to regard others with the same loving gaze with which they regard their own grandchildren and that having grown in humanity by caring for others, they are teachers of a way of life that is peaceful and attentive to those in greatest need.

Let’s show them that we have learned these lessons well as we accompany them with reverence and loving attention!

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