

## **Bring generations together this summer**

*By Sister Constance Veit, lsp*

This summer Catholics around the world are invited to participate in two exciting, inter-related events in the life of the church. The World Day for Grandparents and the Elderly will take place Sunday, July 23, and World Youth Day is being celebrated in Lisbon, Portugal during the first week of August.

To highlight his desire for the young and the old to deepen their bonds with one another, Pope Francis chose to draw the themes of these two celebrations from a single biblical passage – that of the Visitation of Mary to her cousin Elizabeth, found in the first chapter of Saint Luke’s Gospel.

This biblical passage is often associated with the Advent season, since the Visitation occurs between the angel Gabriel’s announcement to Mary that she would become the mother of the Savior, and the birth of her Savior-Son in Bethlehem.

But echoes of the Visitation are quietly woven into our daily prayer life as Catholics. Part of the traditional Hail Mary prayer – *Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb* – is drawn from Elizabeth’s greeting to her young cousin when the Virgin arrived to visit her.

The Magnificat – the exuberant hymn of praise to God sung by Mary during the Visitation – is repeated every evening, year-round, by all those who pray the liturgy of the hours.

As we sing this canticle day after day, it imprints itself on our memories and on our souls.

But I think that even as we repeat the Hail Mary and the Magnificat each day, we tend to take for granted the encounter from which these texts were born.

By focusing our attention on the Visitation this summer, Pope Francis is inviting us to find new meaning in this scene.

In his messages for the World Day for Grandparents and the Elderly and World Youth Day, the pope presents the Visitation as a significant intergenerational encounter.

“In the meeting between Mary and Elizabeth, between young and old, God points us towards the future that he is opening up before us,” he wrote. “Indeed, Mary’s visit and Elizabeth’s greeting open our eyes to the dawn of salvation: in their embrace, God’s mercy quietly breaks into human history amid abundant joy.”

Pope Francis continued, “I encourage everyone to reflect on that meeting, to picture, like a snapshot, that embrace between the young Mother of God and the elderly mother of Saint John the Baptist, and to frame it in their minds and hearts as a radiant icon.”

Following the pope’s advice, we could add the first chapter of Saint Luke’s Gospel to our summer reading list, especially verses 39-56!

The pope is asking us to do more than just frame an image of the Visitation in our minds, however. He is also inviting us “to make a concrete gesture that would include grandparents and the elderly.”

He challenges us, “Let us not abandon them. Their presence in families and communities is a precious one, for it reminds us that we share the same heritage and are part of a people committed to preserving its roots ... Let us honor them, neither depriving ourselves of their company nor depriving them of ours. May we never allow the elderly to be cast aside!”

To the pope’s suggestions that we reflect on the biblical text of the Visitation and make a concrete gesture to include the elderly in our lives, I would like to add a third suggestion for this summer.

Just as it is important for the young to reach out to the old, the opposite is also true. If you are an older adult with young people among your relatives or neighbors, why not honor the spirit of World Youth Day by reaching out to them with a gesture of welcome or support?

Pope Francis really believes that the young won’t make it without their elders.

He has said that if older people do not reach out to the young, the latter “will no longer see the things that must be done to open up the future ... If grandparents fall back on their melancholies, young people will look even more to their smartphones. The screen may stay on, but life will die out before its time.”

Let’s do all we can to make sure that life does not die out before its time!

Whether you are young, like Mary, or older, like her cousin Elizabeth, this summer set aside some time to reach out to someone who is not from your own age cohort. If you do, your life, and the lives of others, will be richly blessed.

*Sister Constance Veit is the communications director for the Little Sisters of the Poor in the United States and an occupational therapist.*

Pope Francis' message for the World Day for Grandparents and the Elderly 2023:

<https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/nonni/documents/20230531-messaggio-nonni-anziani.html>

Pope Francis' message for World Youth Day 2023:

[https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/youth/documents/papa-francesco\\_20220815\\_messaggio-giovani\\_2022.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/youth/documents/papa-francesco_20220815_messaggio-giovani_2022.html)