

# INTRODUCTION



*A long life is a blessing—the elderly are living signs of the goodness of God who bestows life in abundance.*

As we age, we can grow resigned to a gradual loss of energy, mobility, and mental acuity. It's easy to give in to the feeling that the best of our life is over.

We are blessed to have Pope Francis as a model of what aging can look like. Though his mobility is reduced, he still relishes the adventure of what this stage of life offers, and he finds it rich and rewarding. Far from seeing life as being “over,” he preaches that there are gifts that only advanced age can offer to younger generations. In our golden years our very frailty can be a model of how to continue witnessing to the gospel in our world.

This booklet takes Pope Francis's words on aging and demonstrates what this stage of life can offer as we continue to be vibrant (if somewhat muted) members of the body of Christ. May these thirty reflections on Pope Francis's words open our eyes and hearts to how God is calling to us today.

# 1 | RECOGNIZING THE CHALLENGE

*Even when we are experiencing advanced age, it is hard to understand. It takes us by surprise.*

No one prepares us for old age, Pope Francis says, and it can be difficult to reconcile the wrinkled and lined face we see in the mirror with the youthful person who still lives inside us. Society doesn't help, he maintains—it offers all kinds of plans for managing our health but no guides to how to live this stage of life to the full. The surprise we feel at realizing we're old is the same our young ones feel as they reach different milestones of growth. Our astonishment and acceptance can teach so much.

## **PONDER**

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What were the first signs that drew me up short and made me realize my limitations?

## **PRAY**

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God of all ages and stages, help me to accept what I cannot change and find new ways to praise you.

## 2 | RECOGNIZING THE GIFT

*Growing old is more than the irrevocable passage of time. Aging is a blessing, not a condemnation.*

If you woke up this morning, the saying goes, then you haven't finished what God has called you to do. Pope Francis echoes this sentiment to counter the feeling that we just can't keep up with the world's fast pace. "Along with old age and white hairs," he says, "God continues to give us the gift of life. If we trust in him, we will find the strength to praise him still." Illness and lack of physical strength can provide a new kind of witness for us—grace is still abundant, and we can show the young that aging is to be celebrated.

### **PONDER**

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How have I learned to cope with the changes in my body? Do I accept change gracefully or fight it?

### **PRAY**

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God of all ages and stages, let me feel strength in my weakness, so that I may bow but not be bent as I give you glory.

### 3 | CELEBRATING WHO WE ARE

*We elderly are truly a “new people.”  
There have never been so many of us in history.*

Pope Francis praises the gift of a long life but also reminds us that with the increase in our numbers, the risk of being discarded or cast aside also grows. How can we demonstrate our vitality in the face of the culture of youth that surrounds us? Pope Francis suggests that we concentrate on what we can do that the young have less time for—like praying for others and sharing our faith journey. The serenity of old age can be a wonderful witness, as can having the time and temperament to listen.

#### **PONDER**

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Have I become a better listener as I've gotten older? Have I grown in wisdom?

#### **PRAY**

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God of all ages and stages, open my ears and eyes and heart to others, to show patience when impatience seems an easier response, and to share your goodness.

## 4 | EMBRACING A NEW RHYTHM

*The arrogance of the time on the clock must be converted into the beauty of the rhythms of life.*

We seniors have a new rhythm of life, Pope Francis says, one that only we can share with the young. It may not be as quick or purpose-driven as theirs, but it has its own beauty and dignity. In the face of the world's hustle and bustle, we offer a chance to stop and rest, to ponder the deeper questions of life, death, and our ultimate destination. We will spend a third of our life being old, Pope Francis stresses. It's time to hear the new music!

### **PONDER**

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What new rhythms of life have I discovered and embraced?

### **PRAY**

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God of all ages and stages, help me to respond to the newness of this stage of life. If our rhythm slows, help us to enjoy the more intricate patterns that our life lessons have given us so that our life becomes a hymn of joy.

## 5 | EQUAL BUT DIFFERENT

*Being old is just as important and beautiful as being young. Let us remember this.*

Pope Francis cautions against losing what he calls the “alliance” between generations in our “throw-away culture of productivity.” We have to learn to appreciate the very different type of beauty that the elderly present—a beauty born of wisdom and experience, a beauty that reverences the slower rhythms of everyday life, a beauty that has time to share what it has learned with those who are just beginning to live their lives. This how we begin to learn to see with God’s eyes.

### **PONDER**

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Do I feel diminished in my advancing years? What new gifts am I coming to recognize and accept?

### **PRAY**

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God of all ages and stages, give me your eyes to see that at this time of life I am still able to share my gifts.