

Meditations: July 26, Saints Joachim and Anne

Some reflections that can assist our prayer on the feast day of our Lady's parents.

- The generations that precede us
- Contribution of grandparents
- The elderly, a family's treasure

ONE DAY, while Jesus was preaching, a woman raised her voice in the crowd to praise his Mother: *Blessed is the womb that bore you, and the breasts at which you nursed (Lk 11:27)*. Today the Church invites us to

go back further in that chain of gratitude. First, she tells us: “Let us praise Joachim and Anne, to whom, in their generation, the Lord gave him who was a blessing for all the nations.”^[1] And then she encourages us to go even further: *Let us now praise famous men, and our fathers in their generations. These were men of mercy, whose righteous deeds have not been forgotten; their prosperity will remain with their descendants, and their inheritance to their children’s children (Sir 44:1.10-11).*

God became man with all the consequences this entailed. When Mary welcomed Jesus into her womb, her entire family welcomed Him with her: a family with its own roots, with a history where God’s mercy is interwoven with the free decisions of many men and women. Jesus allowed himself to be molded by that inheritance; it shaped his personality traits, and gave Him a

past, family ties, customs and traditions. Our Lord entered fully into that home: *This is my house for ever and ever: here will I dwell, for I have chosen it (Ps 131:14).*

Saint Matthew and Saint Luke devoted ample space in their Gospels to Jesus' genealogy. Today we can also turn our thoughts to the chain of generations that precedes us and that God has used to shape our life. It is comforting to discover that He has not wanted us to be a "loose verse," but rather a link in a chain. He has given us firm ground on which we can stand, a land prepared by God with great care, thinking personally of us, so that we can put down roots there.

ACCORDING to an ancient tradition, Joaquim and Anne had a house in

Jerusalem, close to the Probatic Pool, where a large crowd of sick people would gather and where Jesus would one day heal a paralytic. His mother, Mary, was born in that house; and perhaps it was there that the Holy Family stayed on their frequent trips to Jerusalem, giving Jesus the opportunity to enjoy the affection of his grandparents.

Like parents, grandparents offer a testimony to “the value and meaning of life, shown through the life of specific persons, and confirmed in the various circumstances and situations that occur over the years.”^[2] At the same time, they contribute in a unique way to the family environment through their understanding and care. Indeed, young people often want things to turn out perfectly the first time. But sooner or later one comes to realize that failures will often be more frequent than victories. It is then that

frustration threatens to stifle one's hope. Grandparents, who have already experienced all this and seen so many things in life, can understand very well their grandchildren's feelings.

God can send us his own tenderness through grandparents. Through their availability and readiness to listen, they help us to see the relative importance of our defeats and, above all, to focus on all the good around us. "When we were growing up and felt misunderstood or fearful about life's challenges, they kept an eye on us; they knew what we were feeling, our hidden tears and secret dreams. They held us in their arms and sat us on their knees. That love helped us grow into adulthood."^[3] —

THE PACE OF LIFE TODAY can sometimes make it hard for us to share enough time with the members of our own family; and how much more is this the case with those who don't live with us all the time. Saint Josemaría used to say that someone who suffers from a limitation or who is sick is a treasure for the whole family, since this situation unleashes love in others. Something similar could also be said of the elderly. With our care and affection for them, we are not only carrying out an act of justice, but also expanding our capacity to love. Listening to them carefully, helping them with a task or showing affection and closeness are some gestures that quench our thirst for building strong relationships, especially within our family.

A relationship can be established between young people and the elderly that enriches both of them. Young people can learn attitudes

such as availability and generosity from their elders, besides many life experiences that they can pass on to them; they also help young people to know about the past in order to face the future. The elderly, in turn, feel rejuvenated by contact with the young. Young people remind them that they are not alone and that they still have much to contribute. “Old age is a season to continue bearing fruit. A new mission awaits us that invites us to look towards the future.”^[4] We can ask our Lady to teach us to honor our grandparents and the elderly, in order to perpetuate this chain of blessings that God pours out abundantly from generation to generation.

^[1] General Roman Missal, Entrance Antiphon for the Feast of Saint Joachim and Saint Anne.

^[2] Saint Josemaría, *Christ is Passing By*, no. 28.

^[3] Francis, Homily, 25 July 2021.

^[4] Francis, Message, 24 July 2022.

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