



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE PARTICIPANTS
IN THE INTERNATIONAL FORUM
ON ACTIVE AGING**

*Castelgandolfo
Friday, 5 September 1980*

Venerable Brothers and dear friends,

1. With great pleasure I welcome all of you who make up the Castelgandolfo International Forum on Active Aging. Yours is an initiative that is sponsored, I am told, by the Opera Pia International for Active Aging, in cooperation with the United Nations Fund for Population Activities, and in consultation with the Center for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs, with a number of Bishops in attendance.

All of you are intent on rendering homage to humanity in the aging, the elderly. The Church's concern and love for this category of persons invites her to take note of your zealous initiative. And today I willingly take the occasion to offer some partial considerations on a topic that you are rightfully striving to explore in depth.

2. *A greater awareness* in society of the existence of the elderly and of their condition of life is already a good in itself. A realization of the actual situation of millions of our fellow human beings immediately prompts us to see the need for promoting their betterment; it gives us insights into what interventions are to be made and what means are to be utilized so that many lives may be rendered more fully human.

3. To turn our attention to the aging is to realize *how much they are a part of God's plan for the world*, with their mission to fulfil, their unique contribution to make, their problems to solve, their burdens to bear. A concentration on the lofty dimensions of the lives of the elderly assists us to

discover areas where true human advancement can be made; it helps us to see what should be emphasized in order to bring about progress in the present state of the elderly.

4. The Catholic Church willingly lends her support *to efforts that encourage the elderly themselves* to look with realism and serenity on the role that God has assigned to them: with the wisdom and experience of their lives they have entered a period of extraordinary grace, with new opportunities for prayer and union with God, having been endowed with new spiritual forces with which to serve others and to make a fervent offering of their lives to the Lord and Giver of life. Efforts, moreover, that are aimed *at fostering and sponsoring programmes* on behalf of the elderly are worthy of the highest praise. Christ's teaching is clear: what is done for his brethren is done for him^[1], and its value is seen in this light.

To help mobilize forces in favour of the aging is another worthy goal to be pursued: to support the initiatives that will bring the forces of science to alleviate the sufferings of the elderly; to defend their right to life and to the fullness thereof; to minister to their needs - all this is part of the horizon that is open to the men and women of our own day.

5. *To proclaim the mission of the elderly* and thereby to promote their special role in the human family is a task of great importance. The elderly are meant to be part of the social scene; their very existence gives an insight into God's creation and the functioning of society. The life of the aging helps to clarify a scale of human values; it shows the continuity of generations and marvellously demonstrates the interdependence of God's people. The elderly often have the charisma to bridge generation gaps before they are made: how many children have found understanding and love in the eyes and words and caresses of the aging? and how many old people have willingly subscribed to the inspired word that "the crown of the aged is their children's children"^[2].

To point out the resources that belong to the elderly is to sensitise the elderly themselves and to highlight the riches inherent in society - riches which society itself does not appreciate. Old age is able to enrich the world through prayer and counsel; its presence enriches the home; its immense capacity for evangelisation by word and example, and by activities eminently adapted to the talents of the elderly is a force for the Church of God yet to be thoroughly understood or adequately utilized. A description of the positive factors of aging could be extended at length.

6. Your worthy aim, to see an "active aging" is shared by men and women throughout the world.

Interest begets interest. Creative activities *for* and *with* and *by* the elderly will bring forth fruitful results for a more humanized society and a renewed civilization that will sustain a greater fellowship of love and communion of hope and peace.

It is my fervent desire that your initiative and other similar ones may present the world with a more consolidated concern for the elderly everywhere. By anticipation I greet with enthusiasm and with

sentiments of particular hope the United Nations World Assembly on the Elderly scheduled to be convened in 1982, to which this present Forum looks forward, and which it seeks to aid through its present *deliberation*.

In the context of the Catholic faith *my thoughts turn to all the elderly* of the Church who with serenity and joy give the example of earnest Christian living, while at the same time manifesting an appreciation of the mystery of human death, realistically to be accepted, but radically transformed in the Paschal Mystery of the Lord Jesus. My thoughts go to all who are bent under the weight of sickness or incapacity, to those who shoulder burdens of loneliness, rejection or fear. In prayer and with fraternal love I entrust them all to the Heart of Jesus, source of all consolation, to the Heart of Jesus, our Life and Resurrection. And I ask God, through the intercession of our Blessed Mother Mary, to sustain you in your efforts, and to bless you and all those who love and assist the elderly.

[1] Cfr. *Matth.* 25, 40.

[2] *Prov.* 17, 6.

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