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Pope prays that people will care for and listen to grandparents

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Just as fine wine grows stronger with age, grandparents and other elderly Catholics "have the strength to leave us a noble inheritance," Pope Francis said at his early morning Mass.

Celebrating the liturgy Tuesday in the chapel of his residence, Pope Francis once again denounced a cultural tendency "to discard" the elderly "because they are a bother."

Instead, "the elderly are those who transmit history to us, who transmit doctrine, who transmit the faith and give it to us as an inheritance," the pope said, according to Vatican Radio.

The day's first reading, from the Second Book of Maccabees, told the story of the 90-year-old Eleazar, who chose martyrdom rather than violating Jewish dietary laws or just appearing to violate them because he didn't want to give a bad example to the young.

"By manfully giving up my life now, I will prove myself worthy of my old age," Eleazar says, "and I will leave to the young a noble example of how to die willingly and generously for the revered and holy laws."

Pope Francis said that as a child, he heard a story of a family with a mother, father, many children and a grandfather, who would get food all over his face when he ate. The father bought a small table and set it off to the side so the grandfather would eat, make a mess and not disturb the rest of the family.

One day, the pope said, the father comes home and finds his son playing with a piece of wood. "What are you making," the father asks. "A table," the son replies. "Why?" the father asks. "It's for you, Dad, when you're old like Grandpa," he says.

"This story has done me such good throughout my life," said the pope, who will celebrate his 77th birthday Dec. 17.

"Grandparents are a treasure," he said. "Often old age isn't pretty, right? There is sickness and all that, but the wisdom our grandparents have is something we must welcome as an inheritance."

A society or community that does not value, respect and care for its elderly members "doesn't have a future because it has no memory, it's lost its memory," Pope Francis said.

Invoking Eleazar as well as the senior Sts. Simeon, Anna and Polycarp, the pope prayed "for the grace to care for, listen to and venerate our grandparents."

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