

# Pope Francis offers insights into aging – for all of us



Several months ago, my wife, who is not quite two years younger than me, began having a hard time seeing. She made an appointment with the eye doctor, and when she came home, she confirmed what we had suspected: She needed bifocals, and the doctor prescribed her “multifocal” contact lenses. Only in her early 40s, she seemed too young to need old-person glasses, but there we all were, poking fun at her misfortune. She took it well. She always does.

As Catholics, we don’t necessarily believe in karma, but we are told that we will reap what we sow (cf. Gal 6:7). Because God has an incredible sense of timing and humor, months after we all made fun of my patient and young wife, life around me started to look a little blurry as well. I was getting headaches, and I found myself holding books, menus, my phone and other things farther from my face as I tried to read them. And so I, too, made an appointment. Same doctor, same diagnosis, same mocking. I deserved it.

My eyes aren’t the only parts of me getting older. My wife and I recently completed what we thought would be a relatively easy renovation project in our home – one that involved a lot of bending and stooping and kneeling and squatting. The next morning, I needed a crane to get out of bed, and my allotment of Advil did nothing to ease the pain.

And we’re not alone. My dad, in his early 70s, was having considerable pain in his right hip, which had already been replaced. Doctors found that it was infected; he had to have a new one put in again. As he recovered, he was homebound – chair-bound, really – for the better part of three weeks.

While he didn't require too much help – some grocery shopping, picking up his medications and some light cleaning – my two siblings and I did catch a glimpse of what our futures might look like five or 10 – or, God willing, 15 – years down the road.

They say that Father Time is undefeated. Just over the past couple of months, I'm finding that to be true.

While it's probably only a coincidence, just as my aging eyes were being opened to the realities of growing older, Pope Francis in late February began giving a new series of catechetical talks on the value of the elderly during his Wednesday general audiences. His insights on aging are not only profound and practical, but also sorely needed in our society. Here are some highlights:

- “There is a lack of encouragement for people to seek [the elderly] out, and there is a lack of education for the community to recognize them. In short, for an age that is now a decisive part of the community space and extends to a third of the entire lifespan, there are – at times – care plans, but not projects of existence. Care plans, yes; but not plans to let them live to the full. And this is a void of thought, of imagination and of creativity” ([Feb. 23](#)).
- “A society in which the elderly do not speak with the young, the young do not speak with the elderly, adults do not speak with neither the elderly nor young people, is a sterile society, without a future, a society that does not look to the horizon but rather looks at itself. And it becomes lonely. May God help us find the right music for this harmonious relationship among the various ages: the little ones, the elderly, adults, everyone together: a beautiful symphony of dialogue” ([March 2](#)).

- “What is the meaning of my old age? ... The meaning is this: being a prophet of corruption and saying to others: ‘Stop, I have taken this path and it does not lead you anywhere! Now I will tell you about my experience’” ([March 16](#)).
- “An old age that is granted this clarity is a precious gift for the generation that is to follow. Listening personally and directly to the story of lived faith, with all its highs and lows, is irreplaceable” ([March 23](#)).
- “Old age that has cultivated the sensitivity of the soul extinguishes all envy between generations. ... This is what happens to an elderly person who is open to a young person who is open: he or she bids farewell to life while, so to speak, handing over life to the new generation” ([March 30](#)).

Each of his catechetical talks is worth reading in full – regardless of whether you do or don’t need special glasses to do so.

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