

Genesee County Council on Aging
Senior Appreciation Mass
September, 2009

HOMILY

Rev. Andrew A. Czajkowski
St. John the Evangelist Parish
Davison, Michigan

A reporter was interviewing a man who was celebrating his 100th birthday.

“What are you most proud of?” he was asked.

“Well,” said the man, “I’ve lived 100 years and haven’t an enemy in the world.”

“How wonderful! What’s your secret?”

“No secret, just outlived every one of them.”

One senior citizen put it this way: “Now that I just turned 70, I wake up every morning to the sound of snap, crackle and pop. Not the cereal, but the sound my body makes getting out of bed.”

When Father Francis turned 75, he joked that this was the 36th anniversary of his 39th birthday. He said it wasn’t so bad, since 75 is only 24 Celsius.

Like the sign in front—**Welcome Seasoned Citizens**—the Bible teaches that older people should receive special honor and courtesy because of their wisdom, experience and godliness. In biblical times, the elders sat at the gates of the various towns in positions of honor; they settled disputes and dispensed advice. They were honored for their wisdom.

We find this recurring sentence in the Bible: “*He died a good old age.*” In the Book of Job we read, “*Age should speak; advanced years should teach wisdom.*”

Did you know many of the biblical heroes were up in age before they did great things? When Moses and Aaron first went to see Pharaoh to demand freedom for the Israelite slaves, Moses was 80 and Aaron was 83. When

God announced to Abraham that he and Sarah were going to have a baby, Abraham was 100 and Sarah was 90.

Robert Browning's familiar poem gives us the whole picture:

Grow old along with me!
The best is yet to be,
The last of life, for which the first was made.
Our times are in His hand
Who sayeth, "A whole I planned,"
Youth shows but half; trust God: See all nor be afraid!"

Do not be afraid. That was the theme of Pope John Paul II. That was not only what he spoke, but how he lived his life to the very end. To people like the Pope and others, life begins at eighty. Bishop Welch was writing and speaking creatively and with conviction when he was 103. Lyman Abbot was a leading editor at 86. Tennyson wrote "Crossing the Bar" at 83. Socrates was taking dancing lessons at 70.

Someone once said, "It's not how old you are, but how you are old that counts." How does that work?

Two elderly sisters bought a house beside a road and put up a sign that read: "Antiques." People would stop and the sisters would serve tea and cookies mixed with much enjoyable conversation. Later the visitors would ask to see the antiques. The sisters would eagerly answer, "You're looking at them"

These two sisters didn't bemoan their age. They didn't sit around and complain about their advanced years. They accepted their age and apparently had a good time with it.

Have you noticed that even as we get older and give up some things, the Lord is always replacing our losses with his good things? Sister Jane Schutz always said that life is a series of trade-offs. We give up some things and we gain others.

As we get older, we can't run as fast as we used to; but we can spot a phony quicker. We can't read the fine print of the paper without glasses; but we can read the signs of the times that a younger person will miss. It's true that with

age come some inevitable aches and pains. But just think of the mistakes we made at 25 that we are far too wise to repeat at 75.

One of the phrases used in the Book of Psalms describes righteous persons as similar to palm trees. Though the growth of a palm tree is slow, it lives for centuries. It is a beautiful and useful tree. The palm tree produces its best fruit after it is old. The psalmist is telling us to be like the palm tree—to keep on growing and producing in our later years. The brightest, happiest senior citizens I know are those who keep on growing, mentally and spiritually, and in service to others.

President Harry Truman once visited Justice Wendell Holmes when Holmes was in his late nineties. He found the retired justice reading Plato's *Republic*. Truman said, "Justice Holmes, why, at this point in your life, would you be reading something as deep as that?" Holmes replied, "I may be old, but I haven't stopped growing."

On behalf of Bishop Boyea, thank you for your ever so faith-filled service to our parishes. Your service is very valuable whether it is here at the altar as readers, Eucharistic ministers, servers, sacristans, or as ushers, greeters, or choir members; some of you work in the food pantry; at the soup kitchens; on the grounds of our parishes; some of you bring communion to the sick. Many of you are the backbone of our daily Mass and rosary. And, of course, your prayers are so essential for the good of our Church and our world. So, I invite you to continue to share your precious gifts with the Lord and his Church.

And I pray that God will continue to bless us with your gifts and presence for years to come.

