

Living by Faith

By Sonia Bernardo, SFO

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Dear Brothers and Sisters,

As we age we have many fears. Unfortunately, they say that fear is part of aging. So many questions pop up. Will I lose my eyesight or hearing? Will my resources last as long as I live? Will I have to live in a nursing home? How safe am I in my own home? Will I experience much pain, before I die? The most important question of all is—will I be independent? When we talk to our friends of the same age we are concerned that we will be someone else's "responsibility." What a cold word! But wait...in I John 4:18, we are comforted with the words, "Perfect love casts out fear." God's love is timeless, and unconditional. His promise of love lasts forever.

It has been said that people do not grow old; they become old, when they stop growing. As we age, we can make wonderful contributions, which do not require physical strength. In her book, And Not One Bird Stopped Singing, Doris Jones says, "If we can continue giving of ourselves, we also can receive graciously. We have much to learn, much to give, and much to receive. Facing our fears can give us power over them, as we discover and process the issues of our own inner space." She suggests that, as we age, this is a good time to prayerfully assess our past. We can ask ourselves, if there are any amends to be made or persons to be forgiven. If so, we can offer our forgiveness? If old wounds have been nurturing bitterness and resentment, we must purge them. Destructive emotions can lead to an empty life. The abundant life is what we seek. It is the best in us and for us. Jones says, "This requires honesty, openness, and willingness to face the good, the bad, and the ugly that live in all of us. It may call for confession, repentance, asking and receiving forgiveness, and looking at prejudices. Emotional disability is more crippling than physical disability. We do not choose to die, or when, but we can decide how we are going to live, and the foundation of our lives is our inner space."

As Franciscans, our Seraphic father St. Francis teaches us how to become instruments of our own peace.

"Lord, make me an instrument of your peace. Where there is hatred let me sow love. Where there is injury, pardon...For it is in giving that we receive..."

Each stage of life is a gift with different graces that we receive from God. Each stage has its own challenges, its own pains and blessings too. Today, let us thank the Lord for the gift of wisdom that we have accumulated from our life experiences.

We are grateful for this time, when we can pause from our busy schedules long enough to realize that our hearts still beat with compassion and love, that our hands can still reach out to serve others, and that our minds are still wide open to receive the Word of the Lord.

We can trust God completely because of our close relationship with Him over the years. We can open our hearts to Him and honestly offer our thoughts, frustrations, hopes and dreams as well. He knows us well. Even before we speak, He already knows what we are going to say. He is familiar with all our ways. He knows our hopes. He knows our wounds. He knows our fears. Yes, He even knows that sometimes we tend to deny our aging.

We are offended by those by those who speak to us as though we were children. Our hearing may be bad; our vision may be fading; our knees may give way and we may stumble too often, but, O God, we have wisdom to share; we have dignity, and we have a lot of love to give away.

We are grateful for the years of retirement that God has blessed us with. Now there is time to enjoy our grandchildren, finish the projects we started and put aside many years ago. We are overjoyed by the numerous opportunities that are presented to us. We can travel and see the many different cultures and diverse peoples of the world. We can learn new skills. We can prepare sandwiches for the homeless. We can join the parish faith sharing group.

We thank God for this time allotted to us in which we savor the slowed-down pace of life, to cultivate our own spirituality. We will wait for our strength to be renewed. We will wait for the weariness and discomfort to be replaced by joy, peace and hope. We thank God and we place our lives in His hands because we know that at the end, His final Word is life. Amen.

May the peace of Christ remain in your hearts,
Sonia