



THE DIOCESE OF ROCKVILLE CENTRE

Office of Human Life, Family and Bioethics



The Wisdom of Grandparents and the Elderly

by Fr Michael Lombardi, St Patricks

“I am so grateful for their wisdom, their strong work ethic and their sense of duty to God, country and family.”

Today, as I celebrate my one-month anniversary of my ordination to the priesthood, I am amazed at how quickly the time has flown by. The most immediate challenges to my new life as a priest are getting used to saying the Mass, the rhythm of the liturgical schedule, administering the sacraments and of course getting used to life in the rectory. Now that I am living and working in a house with three other men, it has been quite an adjustment to deal with various personalities, changing schedules, and personal idiosyncrasies. Yet, this is all part and parcel of living out my new priestly life. And so far, I am happy to report that life together in the rectory has been going quite smoothly, and I am enjoying my life as a priest.



One of the priests in our rectory, a senior priest in residence, has been a wonderful mentor to me in my short time here. He has been very patient and supportive. Moreover, he has had a very calming influence on me, as I continue to learn the ins and outs of the rectory and the rhythm of the daily schedule. **I consider him almost as a grandfather figure in many ways. This is because he has many of the qualities that a grandparent possesses.** He looks out for the associate priests, he takes care of a lot of the duties related to the house, he cooks dinner several nights a month, he does a lot of baking, he makes sure things are in good order, and he runs a sizable and very productive vegetable garden in the backyard.

Just the other day, he was sharing with us how he was in the garden that particular morning, and he was surveying the various vegetables that were ready to be harvested; *string beans, cucumbers, radishes, peppers* and of course...what garden would be complete without *tomatoes*. (But of course, tomatoes are not ready until about the end of August). Well wouldn't you know, while he was in the garden, he noticed that one of his tomatoes...*his prize tomato*...one that was growing sooo well...*it was gone!!!...Someone had picked his prize tomato!!* Now, anyone reading this, who has ever had a vegetable garden, and/or has ever grown *tomatoes, knows exactly what he must have been feeling!* However, I must tell you, he took the whole situation in stride...he was very gracious and humble and dare I say...calm about the whole matter. (*Clearly, this man does not have an ounce of Italian blood in him!!*) I, on the other hand, would not have been so calm, and you probably would have heard me yell all the way down the block...but I digress! Yet, what was so great about having him share this experience was that it made me think of a situation that sounded all too familiar to me and one that reached all the way back to my childhood.

When I was growing up in Syracuse, my paternal grandparents lived down the road from us, right around the corner. Every Sunday, our family would go over to my Grandparents house, right after Church. We would

stop in for a visit, and of course, have something to eat. In addition, during the week we would also help them out with whatever chores that needed to be done. They would call us and we would walk over and help them with whatever needed to be done. So, one weekday in late August, my grandfather called our house and asked my older sister who was about 13 or 14 at the time to come by and help weed the garden; do a little cleaning, water and sweep, that sort of thing. It was a rather large walk-in garden that took up the whole backyard. Well, she was out there for a while sweeping, cleaning, picking up leaf debris when suddenly she came across the biggest, most beautiful tomato she had ever seen in her life. *Well...she just had to pick it!* So she did, and she brought it inside to show my grandfather and as she recounts the story today, he looked at her with wide eyes and said, **“you picked my prized tomato!!!”** As you can imagine, she felt so bad and so nervous that she had done something wrong. But then, in his very grandfatherly way...he stopped himself and immediately assured her it was okay. He then cut the tomato up and they sat down at the kitchen table and ate it together. However, my grandfather never let her forget that day. Even as we were growing up, he always reminded us how she picked his prize tomato and even to this day we still laugh about those memories.

On Sunday July 25th, we will celebrate Grandparents Day. Just as we celebrate Mother’s Day or Father’s Day, ***Grandparents Day is a very special day in which we remember the lives and memories of family members who have gone before us and who’s long-term history is lived out in the experience of our lives today.*** Unfortunately, all four of my grandparents have long since passed but as I was growing up, I had many years with all four of my grandparents with many memories. There were many holidays that were celebrated, and many family moments were made in the years that we had together.

When I was growing up, every Sunday we would either go to my Grandparents house, or they would come to our house. We would share a meal and spend quality time together. It was a time to learn about our family history and about the lives of my grandparents as they were growing up. We would hear stories about how my Grandfather came over to this country from Italy and how he traveled at such a young age. He had to learn a new language, a new culture and he even had his name changed at Ellis Island. My grandparents taught us about the importance of hard work and saving our money. They taught us to behave well in public, and one of the biggest points learned from my grandparents was the importance of manners!

Grandparents are such a treasure to the family unit because they instill in us a long-term history of our family as well as provide a first-hand account of what life was like outside of our own time. They allow us to see life through the lens of a different and unique perspective, because they lived in a different generation. They help to assure us that the situations and problems we are facing in the present are going to work themselves through, because they went through the same or worse in years past.

I will be forever grateful for the love and wisdom that my Grandparents afforded us as we were growing up, especially the fact that we knew everything was going to be alright when they were around. When they were around, we felt safe and we felt loved. Whatever the future held for us...we were going to be okay. **I am so grateful for their wisdom, their strong work ethic and their sense of duty to God, country and family. Often, it seems that in this generation our sense of duty to God, country and family (and neighbor) is all but gone and I often long to hear their sage wisdom and their advice once again when times get tough.** But I am forever grateful for the time that had with them and through their wisdom and example, they helped to shape the person I am today.

So, for anyone who is reading this article, if you have a Grandparent who is still living, please be sure to take a moment and call them or stop by and visit them and be sure to tell them how much you appreciate and love them. Keep their memory burning brightly through your life because their struggles and their sacrifices they went through yesterday allow us to to live our dreams today.