

“So teach us to count our days, that we may gain a wise heart” (Ps 90:12).

I. THEMES FOR THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 11TH

Introduction

- The current aging of the global community is unprecedented.
- Aging is a varied experience.
- We are all aging.

A. Living in the Sacrament of the Present Moment

- The sacramental principle affirms that the Holy lies hidden in the ordinary.
- An incarnational spirituality is lived in the grace of each moment.
- A trinitarian God calls us into communion.
- Attention to God’s presence makes aging a contemplative journey.

B. Finding Hope in the Midst of Loss

- Aging takes us into the heart of the gospel paradox: losing and finding life.
- Resurrection is transformation all along the way and at the end.
- The tradition of the dark night illumines life’s passages.
- Hope is a gift of community and is extended to us in the sacraments.

C. Opening to God’s Mercy as We Review Our Life Stories

- Life review and reminiscence can bring healing and integrity.
- A compassionate listener mirrors God’s acceptance of each person’s story.
- The Catholic tradition roots life review in the conviction that all is redeemable.
- We open to the breadth of God’s mercy by receiving the love already offered us.

“and God, as promised, proves

to be mercy clothed in light.”—Jane Kenyon, *Notes from the Other Side*

II. THEMES FOR THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 18TH

“Choose life, then, so that you and your descendants may live, in the love of Yahweh your God. . . .” (Deut 30:19).

A. Forgiving Ourselves and Others

- Life’s second half can be an especially graced time for forgiveness.
- A willingness to forgive arises from awareness that God has forgiven us.
- Forgiveness often happens by inches; it is finally an Easter grace.
- Full reconciliation requires two people, each doing healing work.

B. Allowing the Spirit to Continually Create Us Anew

- As we age, we repeatedly lose and find ourselves again.
- Life’s later years offer opportunities to move into the maturity of Christ.
- Short prayers from the tradition gradually transfigure our hearts and desires.
- Caregiving is often a central dimension of the spiritual journey of aging.

C. Discerning A Sense of Purpose and Shaping a Legacy

- With aging come many questions about the meaning of human life.
- Our faith calls us to imagine a church and society enriched by older people’s gifts.
- Ethical or spiritual wills are a helpful ways to transmit traditions and values.
- Our hopes are fundamentally joined across the generations.

“There are a thousand thousand reasons to live this life, every one of them sufficient.”

--Marilyn Robinson, *Gilead*, p. 243

III. PRAYER AND MEDITATION SUGGESTIONS

A. A Breath Prayer for Dwelling in the Moment

(Come into God’s presence and slowly breathe in and out.)

Breathing in, I open to the life of the Spirit; breathing out I let go of my distress.

Breathing in, I receive God’s love and grace; breathing out I release my doubts and fears.

I breathe in peace, and release arguments and turmoil.

I breathe in azure skies, bird trills, and marigolds; I relinquish worries, tensions, and terrors.

I breathe in bright colors and kind people; I let go of violence and hate.

I breathe in music and dancing; I breathe away sirens and disaster.

I rest in God, in the moment, breathing in and breathing out.

--Kathleen Fischer, *The Courage the Heart Desires*, pp. 38-39.

B. A Wisdom Circle: A Guided Prayer for Those Alone or Feeling Lonely

A meditation that draws on the support of others can be helpful as we make our way through difficult times. Close your eyes and picture yourself in a calming place—near the ocean, in a meadow, in a favorite room. Then invite, one by one, wise people whose love you trust, to form a circle around you. These wisdom figures can be living or dead, religious or not. People sometimes choose Jesus or Mary of Nazareth, favorite saints such as Francis of Assisi, or grandparents and parents, mentors and friends. Once you have filled out the circle, simply *be* in that encompassing presence and take in anything that is given to you. Sometimes it is simply a sense of love and comfort. At other times there is a shared wisdom: (“Be strong.” “I have been there and I understand.” “Trust your gifts.” “You are Beloved of God.”) Remember that you can return to this circle at later times, again drawing strength from it. If you are not comfortable with imagining, just write or draw this circle of wisdom figures.

--Kathleen Fischer, *The Courage the Heart Desires*, pp. 76-77

C. Biblical Passages for Meditating on Aging as a Spiritual Journey:

Deuteronomy 30:19; Psalms 6:6-7, 23, 69:1-3, 90, 92, 136; Ecclesiastes 3:1-8; Isaiah 46:4; Joel 2:28; The Book of Ruth; Mark 11: 25; Luke 6:37-38, 15:11-32, 24:11-32; John 12: 24; 15: 1-5; 21:15-19; 2 Corinthians 4:7-18, 15:35-58; Ephesians 3:14-20; Revelation 21:1-4.

IV. SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

Rita Bresnahan, *Walking One Another Home: Moments of Grace and Possibility in the Midst of Alzheimer's*. Liguori, MO: Liguori, 2003.

Herbert Brokering, *I Will to You: Leaving a Legacy for Those You Love*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2006.

The Catholic Prayer Bible: Lectio Divina Edition. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 2010.

Kathleen Fischer, *Forgiving Your Family: A Journey to Healing*. Nashville: Upper Room, 2005.

Kathleen Fischer, *Winter Grace: Spirituality and Aging*. Nashville: Upper Room, 1998.

Forum on Religion, Spirituality, and Aging: www.asaging.org/forsa.

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, "Blessings of Age: A Pastoral Message on Growing Older within the Faith Community," November, 1999: www.usccb.org.

Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Quest for the Living God: Mapping Frontiers in the Theology of God*. New York: Continuum, 2007.

Melvin A. Kimble, Susan McFadden, James W. Ellor, and James J. Seeber (Eds.), *Aging, Spirituality and Religion: A Handbook*. Volumes 1 & 2. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995 and 2003.

Jane M. Thibault, *A Deepening Love Affair: The Gift of God in Later Life*. Nashville, Upper Room, 1994.

David O. Moberg (Ed), *Aging and Spirituality: Spiritual Dimensions of Aging Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy*. New York: Haworth, 2001.

Richard L. Morgan, *Remembering Your Story: Creating Your Own Spiritual Autobiography*. Nashville: Upper Room, 2002.

Henri Nouwen, *Aging: The Fulfillment of Life*. New York: Image, 1976.

Karl Rahner, *The Practice of Faith: A Handbook of Contemporary Spirituality*. New York: Crossroad, 1986.

Harry C. Simmons (Ed.), Online Annotated Bibliography on Religion, Spirituality and Aging: <http://tech.union-psce.edu/aging>.