

Old Age

By Bishop George Khodr

Aging is not the end; it is only apparently. It might be a new beginning or a fresh start. It would be so if we hold that the body is only one constituent of the human being and not all. And so Man has to realize that the vision of Truth and Light is possible at any stage of one's life. Old age is not supposed to be the stage where one waits for death to come. Being ready for death is a matter we need to look after in every stage of our life.

Each age has its splendor. Youth for instance, is the age of dynamism, ambition and great hopes; yet hope is not confined to youth. And if old age is the time of maturity, it is also the age of forgiveness and magnanimity and the milder of lusts; in old age, what is good hails into our life, like the yielding to Grace and to the capacity to love. And love is God's name itself, as St. John says, and as such it is a "touching" of Heaven and an invocation to receive its blessings.

When old age sets, there comes with it a great benefit of the long term experiences of life, of which is the purification from all of what hinders Grace to dwell in us. Though one runs the risk of sorrows and life's heavy difficulties that can burden us heavily, yet the body can rise, or better, be raised by God - according to His will - who renews it with hope as He does to youth.

The different stages of life are not separate from each other; the elderly often "leap ahead", as youth do, and have the expectation of many years of life filled with the same goodness of life. In that sense, the goodness of one stage of life does not cease with it but extends into another. As such Man, like an expanse in time, lives in hope and does not get necessarily discontinued with sickness; while sickness, for him, can be a time of purification, quietness and a new start towards God. And God, in His will, grants us years in this life or He can call us to Himself, for the Heavenly Mansions are full of joy; as it says in Romans 6: 7 "...For he who has died is freed from sin".

At times, God breaks us in our flesh to chastise us with the 'breaking' and to make us transparent by Grace, in such a way that others behold in us that Grace (transparency) rather than the brokenness of the body. And in Heaven such transparency is called "light"; such light is in proximity with the divine light and almost mingles with it; as such the divine light is then of both: God who is its source and those He shines on with His light thus having almost no distinction between the Lord and those who love Him.

Due to that, the elderly like us to love them so that their liveliness increases and so that the youth would seek after the wisdom of the elderly and hold on to it as such the different "ages" are mingled together in creative love making us a

united humanity founded on different age-leaps, all having the same nature that of love.

And in case the end of life comes, the elderly who loves the Lord prepares himself to meet Him having faith that a better life awaits him as he moves on to glory. But this is not the end. This is only another race in which the last victory is won. The elderly does not experience a severance from the reward awaiting him, for he knows that his heart will be infused with the love of God in such a way that these "bones will be raised on the last day". The believer is a traveler but not for far because Heaven is not far. Heaven has dwelt in his heart. Heaven has held him in comfort; and at a profound level he moves from himself to that self of his in which a greater presence (God) will dwell renewing it.

There is no discontinuity; if you had been the dwelling of God then God will be your dwelling there. That is if you had been one with your Lord in this world you will remain one with him in His world and one with the community of the saved. And you will dwell there in the good that is beyond description. And if you had been close to the Perfect and had yearned for Him and was filled with Him and taught others to yearn for Him too, then you become whole there and would be perfected.

Life is that yearning for God; and often that yearning grows stronger as we get close to leave this world. And such yearning is life and bliss. And if that fills us then God will answer us and have compassion on us and carries us to Himself before death; we also know that our loved ones who went to Him before us will ask for mercy for us because those who have departed remain one with those who stay on this earth since unity is not a matter of space and time but is in the togetherness of the hearts of those in whom God dwells.

Old age is a grace for those who are in the Spirit of God and those who keep their hearts and minds pure, away from resentments and grudges. Perhaps God's will is to keep the elderly away from lusts thus they grow not only in age but also in the real rest and peace. And then comes an end which is only a beginning of the perfect quietude which awaits us in Paradise. And if we dwell in it we become renewed by God wiping away all tears from our eyes.

According to many experts in the world, it is preferable for the elderly to remain in their own homes than to be moved to an "old people's home". There they are isolated from the affection they need to receive from their family. I know that this demands much care for their health and that in a home where both, husband and wife go to work, no one might remain at home; in this case the "old people's home" might be the better solution for health care. But there is no doubt that being in the "old people's home" brings sorrow and a feeling of loneliness. In fact, if it is financially affordable, it is better that one of the spouses would stay at home so the elderly can live in peace and joy. But if moving to an "old people's

home is inevitable, then the elderly should be visited regularly by his family. Thus it is advisable that he be in a nearby place to make visits easy and regular so that the family can relieve him from the sense of loneliness as much as possible.

So one finds in some countries institutions that help the elderly who have bad health conditions to go on with their lives by being comforted through religious or other means. Such institutes are necessary everywhere.

It is important that humanity embrace the elderly joyfully. He has not left this life yet and he is eligible to right living not only in physical health, but also in what concerns psychological and spiritual well-being.

The number of the elderly will increase in the years to come and the responsibility is going to be immense. Yet this should be the concern of the whole community. And there might be the need to come out with new means so the elderly do not feel that they are a nuisance to those who are young or that they are a burden on the community.

The elderly are the beloved of God; and this is our basis of dealing with them.