

OLD AGE AND SUFFERING IN A DIMENSION OF BEAUTY AND DIGNITY OF THE HUMAN BEING

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Abstract

It can be said that the it is the most optimistic fact that human being although feels the effect of aging on his body, can have the way of thinking always open on the eternity – what keeps his soul in everlasting youth. We all professors, priests doctors, nurses, parents, teachers, and students can build new social conscience about the importance of old. The old that can be understand as the capital of wisdom of our nation, internal guide, living link to the past, guardian for the young people... Modern men living in the world of thousands meanings have to wait many years or even generations to understand what the most important thing to him is... Although old people frequently need physical help from the young they can help the young to find their road through life. Building bridges between new and old generation.

Keywords: human being, old, suffering, pain, time, disease, experience

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*"Not only is the future eternal - not only!
And the past, Yes, eternity is era:
What is done, will not be undone with a moment
It will come back as the idea, does not return
itself"0.*

Quoting Norwid I would like at the beginning to remind us all that old age understood as the future is frequently a sum of experiences and feelings that are happening now. In a word, what we will be in old age like depends on what we are like now. Man with his life creates a certain narrative, story, writes a book. Contemporary humanities after studies of the human individual come to the conclusion that the understanding of the human being must go in the context of the time structure. This can be understood that a person develops in time. Each period of life is examined specifically, measured only with a scale adjusted to it, however we have to do with a linear development that is the sequences following each other in the specific coupling. In order to understand the last stage of human life, colloquially called old age we should do not omit the fact that the three preceding, the time of childhood, time of adolescence and the time of adulthood have great influence on what the period of so-called "autumn of life" 2 will be like

as a result. The striving for intellectual, spiritual development, continuous extending of reflection and glance at the reality in which we function should constitute the essence of human life. With that knowledge acquired and fostered over the years, we can share at the final stage of our life. More often than not it is an invaluable gift for younger generations, we can help in this way to solve problems or make right choices and as a result to warn against threats and multiply good values. This optimistic thought I would like to expand in the further part of my work. It will not only be the praise of this period of life, but I will try to see the good and the bad sides of old age that inevitably awaits each of us and what it carries along. In the topic I remarked that it is about the beauty and dignity of human being and we will hold on to it.

Old age is associated with different problems, both psychological and somatic, with infirmity, pain, there also appears suffering. Suffering as part, component of life, becomes a very important element, which creates in every man a true picture of themselves. Such statements of humanity understood as blessing are often the most beautiful, conscious experience of the presence of God in our lives. In a word, how we

suffer, what emotions accompany us constitutes the most important learning and experiencing the humanity in its fullest aspect. Sometimes I wondered, that "God sells wisdom for work and suffering". So says the old Ukrainian proverb. By suffering and thanks to it man becomes wiser...?

Growing old brings with it one of the fundamental issues in all human development. Character and human nature seem to be in constant opposition to the fact and the aging process. It is very hard to master the great crisis, which then is felt on many areas of life. The only purpose of such people is inefficient struggle and they often experience "Pyrrhic victory". Gradually they become embittered and resigned. Then their lives are devoid of all ambitions, they lose their vitality and they are often subject to weariness and apathy. Their lives, and in fact the professional aspect, thanks to which they could satisfy their practical objectives becomes only apparent persistence in something that already does not meet their expectations. As the time passes the aversion to this state of affairs causes frustration and permanent grumbling. In this way they waste one of the best opportunities for growth and human development. Sometimes it takes very long time to adjust to the new conditions, but if it happens then the time of growing old gives man a great chance to reach maturity – it allows to reach the real human fullness. When suffering accompanying old age appears, we yield to dual attitude – we diminish, belittle this painful experience of reality, or excessively hold God responsible for the suffering and evil of this world. That is why John Paul II states: " Even though in its subjective dimension, as a personal fact contained within man's concrete and unrepeatable interior, suffering seems almost inexpressible and not transferable, perhaps at the same time nothing else requires as much as does suffering, in its

"objective reality", to be dealt with, meditated upon, and conceived as an explicit problem; and that therefore basic questions be asked about it and the answers sought." 3 This reflection and the answers we are looking for all your lives...

It is worth asking what old age is? The answer was sought also by our beloved compatriot, servant of God John Paul II in the "Letter to my Brothers and Sisters - people in old age! „He asks what old age is?" Sometimes it is called the autumn of life – so wrote already Cicero – by analogy to the seasons of the year, following each other in the life of nature. We see how the world around us changes within a year, when we look at the mountains and the plains, fields and valleys, forests, plants and trees. There exists a close similarity between human biological rhythms and the cycles of nature, the part of which he is 6. He writes that although man is part of that reality he is different from it, as he is created in the image of our Creator. In spiritual dimension his life is the sum of the stages that follow each other as the already mentioned seasons of the year. Man should live consciously and responsibly each of these stages. In the same letter we further read: "so if childhood and youth are times in which man gradually learns his humanity, recognizes his capabilities, in some way he creates a project of life which he will perform in the mature age, then old age is not deprived of particular value, because – as St. Jerome says— mitigating the passions «multiplies the wisdom and gives more mature advice» 6. What it means? This passage makes clear that old age is sometimes particularly marked by wisdom, which stems from the age and experience. As it is commonly known time is the best teacher. In the book "Old Age as the Time of Hope" by Alessandro Pronzato we find passages, in which the writer - philosopher enumerates the qualities, which we can learn from older people. This world, in order

to become acquainted with it we enter "as if on tiptoe" with great respect and discretion, receptive of wisdom. After time we realize that from this world we receive more than we ourselves have the illusion to give. We often learn from older people faithfulness not as a constraint but as great joy and fulfilment. We are dealing here with religious fidelity, as the author writes, "authentic Christian wisdom of unprecedented depth, which allows interpreting life, also in its surprising fragments with absolute peace. (...) The Cross felt as a natural consequence of joining Christ and his Gospel." [7] You can venture a statement, that old age enables man the only and unique opportunity to experience and participate in the Passion and Resurrection of Jesus. The suffering here on earth embodies what every Christian should feel on the basis of the power of faith [8]. Unfortunately, the time of the autumn of life often appears as time of great suffering, incomprehension by one's nearest and dearest, even rejection. However, these experiences only strengthen faith and give hope and often incomprehensible closeness to God. Jesus in the Gospel of John says:

"I tell you for certain that when you were a young man, you dressed yourself and went wherever you wanted to go. But when you are old, you will hold out your hands. Then others will wrap your belt around you and lead you where you don't want to go." /Jn 21, 18/ [9]. This incapacity to go to the so called one's own side and often infirmity encountered and misunderstanding of this blessed time cause in many older people a kind of a rebellion and bitterness. The feeling that God does not exist, frequent lack of sense and the advisability of what happens - such feelings accompany people who are not reconciled to their old age. It seems to them that God is silent. God is often silent to make the understanding of the fact of suffering

and loneliness an authentic testimony of faith. Those who survive this test will experience salvation. "This is why I am suffering now. But I am not ashamed! I know the one I have faith in, and I am sure he can guard until the last day what he has trusted me with." /2Tm 1.12/. We admit that the very vivid words of St. Paul can be the clue and a huge consolation, that the silence of God is only apparent, and the suffering and misery that are part of life, donated for the salvation of others reveal the magnificence of God and God's plan of salvation 10.

Pope John Paul II thanks to or through his personal experience perfectly learnt and understood the meaning of the word "suffering". No wonder, that his statements on this difficult subject were always incredibly authentic and personal. They gave a sense of a deep experience and reflection. John Paul II taught that suffering and its mystical dimension takes place only in real focusing on the Cross of Christ and thanks to that focusing it becomes an experience rising to the importance of the entry into the secrets of Holiness and Salvation. The Holy Father writes: "In his human suffering everyone can become the participant of redemptive suffering of Christ" and further „with your pain you can strengthen the unstable, call to improve the failing, fill with serenity and trust those who doubt and are terrified. Your suffering if completely adopted and combined with the sufferings of the Crucified can become a unique power in the fight for the victory of good over the forces of evil, which in various ways threaten modern man ", " (...) suffering exists in the world in order to release love, to produce deeds of the love of neighbour, in order to convert the whole civilization into the civilization of love ". John Paul II, by his model of life gave the picture and testimony of the word. Pain resulting from old age additionally intensifies the suffering.

To fully understand the meaning of suffering I will refer briefly to the latest research of modern medicine, which for many years has been studying the phenomenon of pain and trying to find an effective method to fight against it. Suffering according to Wikipedia is a negative mental state either physical or emotional often experienced as a pain (physical), unpleasant experience of the body. Mental suffering is associated with experiencing negative emotions such as anxiety, resentment, sadness, or pity 11. The beginning of the development of the science of pain is the period of World War II and especially immediately thereafter. In 1945 John J. Bonica (Seattle, USA) wrote that the complex issue of pain requires a vast knowledge and experience far exceeding the possibilities of a single person. The beginnings of the development of the painkiller treatment in Poland go back to the end of the sixties. It was initiated by anaesthetists for whom the problem of combating pain was always close. At that time, at the Institute of Oncology in Gliwice, PhD Boleslaw Rutkowski started the use of pharmacological remedies for patients suffering from cancer pain. In December 1991, the Polish Association for the Study of Pain was registered, which is in fact the Polish branch of the International Association for the Study of Pain (Polish Chapter of IASP) with 198 members of different specialties' [12].

It all is related to the question of the meaning and the cause of pain and suffering. The Answer of the Christian to such question is fundamentally different from the one other culture and traditions propose. Christianity proclaims the essential good of existence and good of what exists. In consequence we perceive the human suffering in the definition of evil, which is a lack, restriction or perversion of good. John Paul II also writes on this occasion that man suffers when experiences any evil. The

relationship between one and the other is emphasized by the vocabulary of the Old Testament as the identity evil = suffering. The vocabulary did not possess the separate word for "suffering", thus all that was suffering was described as "evil". Only the Greek, and with it the New Testament (and the Greek translations of the Old Testament), uses the verb "paschw — I feel..., experience, suffer," thanks to it suffering is not directly identified with evil (objective), but it defines the situation in which a man suffers from evil, and suffering from evil he becomes the subject receiving the suffering 12. In Christian understanding, therefore the reality of suffering is explained through evil that is always in some way related to GOOD. At the basis of each particular suffering experienced by man, and also in the definition of suffering of the whole world the question of its reason, purpose and meaning is included? The question does not only accompany human suffering, but marks out its human essence. It is therefore a difficult lesson of love of our Creator to Man. You can say that along with the Passion of Christ all human suffering found itself in the new situation. Job seemed to have a premonition of this situation when he spoke, "But I know: my saviour is alive..." — and to it he directed then his suffering, which without the Redemption could not fully manifest its essence. In the cross of Christ not only the redemption was accomplished through suffering, but also human suffering has also been redeemed. Christ — without any own fault — took "all the evil of sin". Experience of this evil marked out the unparalleled size of suffering of Christ — this suffering, which has become the price of Redemption. The song of the suffering servant from the Book of Isaiah says about it. In their time the witnesses of the new Covenant in the blood of Christ would talk about it. Here are the words of Peter the Apostle from the first letter: "you know that with your inherited from

ancestors bad behaviour you have been redeemed not with something transient, silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ as the immaculate Lamb and without stain" 12. What a beautiful answer to the question what suffering is? It is the redemption of our faults, our sins and thanks to this suffering we can feel as Children of the Light. Suffering and Love. Finally love always remains unfathomable, though it is the fullest meaning of suffering. The question, however, is to what extent can we open up and grasp sublime of love of God, because Christ lets us enter in this mystery and discover the answer "why suffering?" Love is the fullest, most accurate, and probably the only source of answer to the question about the meaning of suffering. The response gave us God when he sacrificed his only son on the cross. We Christians look at suffering in perspective of the revealed Love. All without this Love, every pain, every suffering would be unbearable nonsense. God is a God of love, Emmanuel, who shares the human fate and participates in it.

The next trap of the aging period is the attitude of envy and grudge against younger generations. I am sure that you need a great generosity and equally great courage to look without jealousy and resentment upon the young generation, that is successful and fully enjoy life. "Only in the voluntary and deep inner harmony on the passing of what is appropriate for the previous stage of life, you can enjoy the process of growing old without fear and discontent" [12]. There is such a risk, that often people advanced in years are not aware of new opportunities and new horizons opening up. They do not see that they look with regret at the young and with the deeply rooted grudge. This danger of envy and grief is especially great in our Western civilization, which attaches such great importance to the privileges of the youth. It should be noted that in contemporary Asian

cultures, for example in Japan or in China we can find the continuation of traditional values and customs, which have a history of respect for the elderly - the old man is perceived as a wise man. In case of China the fact of the isolation of this country from the "corrupt, ideologically hostile West" is not without significance. However, when it comes to Japan we are facing one of the most technologically developing country, but at the same time maintaining its centuries-old tradition. In this culture, this phase of life enjoys full acceptance and even glorification and respect.

Additionally, modern mass media seem to increasingly take over the function of education once reserved for mature and experienced people. Progress is made so quickly that an old person can no longer keep up with the younger. Even the young people have to extend their knowledge, so the old man in practice has no longer anything to tell them. Where the older generation could actually serve with a valuable assistance, namely in these areas which require wisdom acquired along with experience the young do not feel the need to listen to advice of the elderly, and those in such situation very quickly lose confidence. They live their lives in bitter resignation, envy and resentment. Sometimes even they feel the malicious joy of visible failures of younger generation. Although this will not help, however, they cannot refrain from mocking comments: "and didn't I say" if a youthful idea fails [13].

There are also in this experience of the time of autumn little pieces of joy lived with a feeling of sincere gratitude. The marriage couples, who happily lived their subsequent anniversaries enjoy each day as if it were a great gift, another surprise in this journey. Surprising is the concern, understanding and patience, which they offer to each other and at the same time there is in these gestures a touching spontaneity and

freshness. I think that almost everyone has such experience and such images in memory. "Maybe the future in in young hands, but now hands of the old guard the fundamental values" [14].

Unfortunately, we live in the times of worship of youth, beauty, and fitness. At a time when emerging wrinkles are the reason for worries and plastic surgery is one of the best growing fields of medicine. In the times when you can rarely meet an actor or media person, who proudly shows their faces seamed with natural wrinkles. In the times in which we are taught to see ourselves as a poor imitation of the photographed stars, instead of seeing photographs of stars as a poor imitation of people, us... Every day, television and the press bombards us with tips how to effectively combat the signs of old age... combat like fighting against flu or symptoms of cold. And firms producing skin cosmetics outdo one another in the production of various preparations "for being young", and they do all this to prove to themselves and to others that we can stop the time... to create the illusion of the reign over time and in this way to break free from the ubiquitous fear of death...

We often associate death only with passing of time, and yet so many people are alive in the memories of others... after death... But how to take care of the memory of our descendants, when all our energy is focused on restraining the present... on restraining the youth...

On the other hand, studies have reported that in most industrialized countries in the group of older people, over 75 years old the highest suicide rate among all age groups is noted. The number of cases of depression is also rising alarmingly. Older people feel lonely in this modern order, they feel that they do not keep up... with ever faster changing reality and... They themselves make decision about passing away 15. To understand the mentality of an old

man one should also enter this so called „river“, which of course is not possible. For an old man the only problem is the consciousness that old age is a kind of non-existence, suspension. Gradually an old man becomes aware of the fact that maybe one day he will not be needed either at work or in the family or even in society. Awareness of the loss of physical and mental abilities strengthens the fear of exclusion and uselessness with the same conviction that he slowly becomes ballast and burden for his nearest and dearest. You should bear in mind, however, "that from the earliest times until our days in human culture there appear pessimistic answers, which reduce the life to the earthly dimension only. Even in the Old Testament some verses of the Book of Ecclesiastes tell about old age as the run-down building, which is fully and finally destroyed by death (cf. 12.1 -7). But in the light of these pessimistic answers even clearer shape takes a hopeful vision, radiating from the whole Revelation, and especially from the Gospel: « So the Lord isn't the God of the dead, but of the living. » (Lk 20,38). The Apostle Paul attests that God, who gives life to the dead (cf. Rom 4,17), will restore life to our mortal bodies (cf. Rom. 8.11 "I am the one who raises the dead to life! Everyone who has faith in me will live, even if they die. And everyone who lives because of faith in me will never really die." » (Jn 11,25-26). " [16]. This fragment of the already quoted letter to the Sisters and Brothers in the elderly of John Paul II, reading of which gives us a clear answer that at every age man has to struggle with the problems of the given stage of life. God, however, is the one that strengthens and makes it possible that even the greatest pessimism can be overcome with joy of unification with the Creator.

Coming back to the "real life" images, there appears a question whether we wonder how many older people we see in modern shopping

malls? There are not many..., and if they appear, they are only in the company of the young, that know how to get to the parking lot or to pay for parking the car... Only a small percentage of older people are able to keep up with the speed of change in the computer science and modern technology.

And do we remember those times of living in multigenerational families, where a grandfather was the wisdom, authority in family and a grandmother was connected with a friendly smile, with availability, warmth of heart and the smell of fresh cake...?

We live in the times in which we are told into believing, that the life of the elderly is of no value, and the age barrier determines the availability to life.

I wonder... why? We agree on the fact that the cult of the multigenerational families with grandparents as seniors falls into oblivion..., and old age is connected only with sclerosis and difficulties in moving? Yet, this is not the only truth and I myself do not find reason for which "we would not have to show respect to an old man, to whom healthy traditions of many cultures on all continents attach such great importance? Over the centuries for nations living in the areas covered by the Bible influence the point of reference has been respecting the commandment of the Decalogue: «Honour thy father and mother». The full and consistent adherence to it is not only the source of children's love towards parents, but it also highlights the strong bond between the generations. Where this commandment is accepted and truly preserved, old people do not have to fear that they will be considered as useless and troublesome burden " [16].

So why do we still unquestioningly yield to the fashion promoted by the media and we give our consent to human exterior, beauty, figure,

clothes to become the highest value in life? I wonder if today in the age of the fall of the moral authorities it is possible to break through with the cult of old age and respect to it... if we can raise the rank of old age, to make it become a value for young people...? The fourth commandment gives us a hint that you should also respect the generations who have lived before us, generations creating the nation's identity and the ties between generations, thanks to which we can talk about the existence of entire communities. To worship old people means to meet the threefold obligation: accept their presence, help them and appreciate their qualities [16]. This is not new in customs and we should remember that in certain environments it is a natural way of conduct consistent with the eternal law. Unfortunately, as I mentioned, in the countries more economically developed we note another trend - the elderly grow old with the fear that they would completely cease to be respected. At this point you have to realize, that the feature of truly human civilization is the respect and love for the old people, so that they can be conscious of being — despite the weakening forces - the living part of the society. Cicero wrote that "the burden is lighter for that one who feels respected and loved by the young».

The most optimistic however, is the fact that though man feels the effects of growing old of the body his mind can be open to eternity all the time and the result of it is the fact that soul can still be young. The soul experiences permanent youth especially firmly when he is calmed by the internal testimony of pure heart and when at the same time experiences loving care and gratitude on the part of the loved ones. We all bear in mind the example of old people who can be an example of vitality of spirit for us. Each meeting with such a man is a great joy and learning of his experience and his wisdom.

Society must fully appreciate old people who are rightly called "living libraries" of wisdom, guards of priceless human and spiritual heritage. While it is true that in the physical dimension they usually need help they can also be a support for the young who take their first steps in life and look for their ways.

All of us: professors, priests, doctors, nurses, parents, teachers, educators, we all together can build a new public awareness - awareness of what value old age is... Old age understood as wisdom capital of our nation, internal spiritual guide, living link with the past, as mentor for the young people... because modern man lost in the world of thousand meanings sometimes has to wait many years and even generations to understand what is important to him. In the Book of Wisdom of Sirach we read such instruction: « Listen when old people tell you what they learned from their ancestors. » (8.9); «Spend time with older people and stay close to those who are wise. » (6,34), because «Wisdom and understanding are just right for the old and honourable.» (25.5).

We can take special care of the people who already phase out of the activity, who fight against the weakening forces, against passing of the dying body and show with courage the beautiful face of old age not as the passing of things and thoughts but as the duration of the history, wisdom of experience and authority. We must also reconcile ourselves with the possibility of suffering. While the suffering is a very difficult feeling, the elimination of it cannot be the only criterion for our actions. The mere fact of suffering and pain can be the result of both negative and positive changes. The scale which specifies that diagnosis should always be the good of man. The struggle against suffering for all costs is not the solution; we should rather know the reason of it and then determine whether to eliminate it or to accept it. Such

approach towards suffering will ensure the healthy development for man.

Here I see a special role for the Church and the media, which can build with great care a new image of old age and quoting Shakespeare: "beauty is in the eyes of the beholder" teach young people to see the beauty and dignity of the human person in old age. They should also take care of the education of older people, who often cannot find themselves in modern, very demanding world. Teach them the correct communication with the young generation-show them how one can positively influence; with a smile, good advice or an example to follow, how to guard against the will to criticize a son and against unfair judgment of a daughter or daughter-in-law and teach them to accept mistakes of the young people... how to build bridges of the agreement.

The question is - is it worthwhile...? It is worthwhile, because we never know what can be the cause of awakening of conscience in people. Sometimes it is a conversation with another man; with elderly father or mother, the sermon in the Church or just the presence in it, and sometimes the film watched like "The Untouchables" from 2011, the French production directed by Olivier Nakache and Eric Toledano. The story based on true facts. Story on one hand, full of drama and suffering because of the disability suffered, but on the other hand showing, that it is always worth to believe, fight and love till the end. It can also be a book read...it is the chance to hear this voice.... With our respect for parents, patients... the elderly, with great concern about their fates we give evidence of love, support and affection, not pity.

One of the famous contemporary writers - Paulo Coelho in a book titled "The Fifth Mountain" wrote...

“From whichever side you look, it appears different, though it is the same mountain.

Thus it is with all of creation: many faces of the same God.”

Old age is one of the faces of God... and sometimes takes the face of the Pope John Paul II blessed nowadays, sometimes the face of Professor Religa, and sometimes the face of ordinary man, who knows how to love and suffer, and... One day it will be our face... because we are all the face of the same God...

And one of the famous contemporary writers Jean Guitton wrote...”

“The suffering that is born and do not close us in ourselves, becomes a source of life and light” [17]. Suffering is therefore often a beautiful way of understanding life in its most beautiful form. It provides life in the truth and the magnitude of the light coming from the Cross of Christ. Suffering is an integral and indispensable part of our existence, do not let us get away from it at any cost and at the same time let us see the suffering of others to help with our presence and compassion in the act of love and kindness.

Resumo

Oni povas konstati, ke la plej optimisma estas la fakto, ke la homo malgraŭ tio, ke sentas efikojn de maljuneco de sia korpo lia penskapablo povas esti senĉese malfermita je eterneco, kio kaŭzas senĉesan junan animon. Ni ĉiuj ; profesoroj, pastroj, kuracistoj, flegistinoj, gepatroj, instruistoj, edukantoj, ĉiuj kune kun povas konstrui novan socian konscion, kiel valora estas maljuneco. Maljuneco komprenata kiel saĝkapitalo de nia nacio, interna gvidanto, vivanta kuniganto kun pasinteco, kiel indikanto por junaj homo... ĉar forperdita en nuntempa mondo kun miloj de signifoj moderna homo de tempo al tempo devas atendi multajn jarojn, eĉ generaciojn, por ke kompreni kio estas la plej grava por li... Malgraŭ tio, ke maljunaj homoj ofte bezonas fizikan helpon de junaj personoj, tamen maljunuloj povas helpi junulojn, kiuj komencas sian vivon de plenkreskuloj kaj serĉas sian vojon. Konstruo de pontoj de interkopreniĝo inter la juna kaj maljuna generacioj.

Ŝlosilvortoj: homo, maljuneco, sufero, doloro, tempo, malsano, sperto

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