Opinion
Spirituality
Soul Seeing



Grampa Michael Leach shows off the "hair transplant" created by his twin grandchildren, Mae and Jackson Leach. He wore it all the way back home on the plane from Atlanta to New York. (Courtesy of Jeff Leach)

by Michael Leach

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Papa Francis has announced a World Day of Grandparents and the Elderly to celebrate their importance in our lives. The first celebration is on July 25, then every year on the fourth Sunday of July, the feast day of Sts. Joachim and Anne, Jesus' grandparents.

I love being a grandparent. What I love best is that you don't have to do anything. You don't have to teach or preach, or mold or scold them. Their parents will do that. All you have to do is "see how the flowers of the field grow" (Matthew 6:28), and behold them as they are, perfect children of God. "There is no adding to [them], or taking from [them]. God works so that people will be in awe of him" (Ecclesiastes 3:14). Being a grandparent is about being in awe. It's seeing our darlings as God sees them. It's knowing that they "are and will forever be exactly as [they] were created. Light and joy and peace abide in you because God put them there" (*A Course in Miracles*). They don't need fixing.

To know the truth of their being is to open the eye of their souls so they can see it themselves. What could be more beneficial? Not even a scholarship to the University of Notre Dame.

When we behold our grandchildren as God does, another alchemy of grace takes place. We see our adult children as they really are, too, flawless souls made in the image and likeness of love. "He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart" (Isaiah 40:11). Yet, how hard we strained to guide them on the right path, to teach them the faith we were taught, only better, to educate them in the rules of the game so they could navigate this insane world with confidence. We were afraid of making mistakes. We thought we had to be perfect parents so they could become good adults, even as we assured them, over and over, that they *were* good and that nobody's perfect!

Parents try so hard. I remember when our firstborn, Chris, was a baby crawling around the house and exploring his new world, a Daniel Boone in diapers, and I crawled right alongside him. If Chris got too close to an electrical outlet, I pulled him away by his chubby little feet. "No, no, danger, danger!" If he got too close to the stove, I said, "Hot, hot, careful, careful!" even if it was cold. Poor kid wouldn't open an oven or reach for a pot until he was in college. (Something like that anyway).

Thankfully, Chris was born with a good heart and never held it against me.

It's so much easier being a grandparent. You watch in awe, are ready to pounce, if need be, but rarely have to because you can tell that God is in control.

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Or course it's fun to be a parent, but it's *crazy fun* being a grandparent. Our younger son Jeff, who is a splendid father, lives in Atlanta with our grand twins Jackson and Mae, now 10. When I was down there a few years ago, the kids decided to put some hair on my bald head. They fashioned a wig out of strands of pink and purple yarn and scotch taped each piece to my scalp. Then they trimmed and shaped it until they were satisfied that Grampa Mike looked like a movie star. The whole operation took more than an hour. I was so impressed with the care they took, and the fun they had, that I promised to wear it all the way back home that afternoon, on the plane to New York and on to Connecticut. Wherever I went on that six-hour journey, people looked at me like I was a nutjob who didn't make the cut for a Marvel movie. My head smelled like a nasty old sweater. The flight attendants kept asking me if I was sure I didn't want a drink. Did the stares and chitchat behind my back bother me? No! I was doing it for Jackson and Mae. It was fun.

Being a grandparent isn't always fun. Sickness, death, divorce or addiction can turn a family upside down. Some grandparents have to be parents, too. We all know people who can't retire because they have to work to support their grandchildren, and sometimes adult children, who live with them. We don't have to watch Dr. Phil to appreciate how bone wearying this must be. It's easy to be a grandparent when you don't have to do anything but watch the children grow. It's pure fidelity to be a grandparent and parent both.

Perhaps the most difficult challenge, no matter what spitballs life throws at us, is to see ourselves as we see our grandchildren: as God's perfect child. It's easy to feel the hand of God in a baby who clutches our finger or to hear the voice of the Spirit in a 10-year-old laughing at our self-deprecatory humor. It's not as easy to accept the truth that we, too, are good. We all come into the world as passengers on a multi-millennia guilt trip, and it's our job as parents and grandparents to change the itinerary for future generations.

It's also effortless to love and appreciate the adult grandchild who visits us when we are sick and is comfortable spending spend time with us. Unless our parents and grandparents gave us an express ticket to the practice of kindness and gratitude, it's not easy to love or appreciate ourselves. We need reminders: We are still, always, no matter what, just as God created us. When Jesus said, "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect" (Matthew 5:48), I don't think he was commanding us to become something we are not. He was giving us a wake-up call to see and be what we already are. As thou seest so thou beest. Seeing and being are one.

On July 25, Catholics will celebrate the elderly who help give sight to the young. And we grandparents will express gratitude for the gift of our grandchildren. After all, they give us the same gift we give them: the joy in knowing that we are an unadulterated delight. All they have to do is look at us and we know: We are awesome. Even if we are bald — and especially when we have pink and purple hair.