Vatican
News



Pope Francis arrives in a wheelchair to attend an audience in the Paul VI Hall at The Vatican, May 5, 2022. (AP Photo/Alessandra Tarantino, File)

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VATICAN CITY — Pope Francis' willingness to work despite knee pain that has made walking nearly impossible shows other older adults that they have wisdom and experience to offer younger generations, a top Vatican cardinal said Tuesday.

Cardinal Kevin Farrell offered the assessment as he introduced Francis' message for World Day for Grandparents and the Elderly. In the message released Tuesday, the 85-year-old pope urged older people to consider advanced age a blessing.

Francis is struggling to cope with strained ligaments in his right knee that have greatly limited his mobility. Last week, he was seen in public for the first time using a wheelchair. He recently said he can no longer walk and must rest his knee on doctors' orders.

Farrell, 74, the head of the Vatican's office for laity and a trusted papal adviser, said that Francis' willingness to acknowledge and display his limitations while continuing to hold audiences could encourage others to continue contributing as they age.

"We should not hide the fact that with age comes a lessening of our ability to play an active part in the life of the world today," the Ireland-born American cardinal said. "He sends a message to all of us that we all have to carry on. We may have limitations in old age, but we carry on and we do our best."

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In addition to heading the laity office, Farrell serves as the camerlengo, the papally appointed official who runs the Vatican when a pope dies or retires until a conclave elects a new pontiff.

Francis' mobility problems have raised questions about his ability to manage upcoming trips. He is scheduled to go to Congo and South Sudan in early July and to Canada later that month.

The Lebanese government confirmed this week that a planned papal visit next month had been postponed because of Francis' health.

Francis instituted the day honoring elderly people to drive home his belief that younger generations should value older ones as a resource and not treat them as

part of modern "throwaway culture."

In his message, the pope noted that advanced age is a time of life that isn't understood even "by those of us who are already experiencing it."

"Even though it eventually comes with the passage of time, no one prepares us for old age, and at times it seems to take us by surprise," he wrote.

But Francis urged all his contemporaries to embrace their advanced ages as a gift and not to lament the diminishment of their strengths or sense of usefulness.

"Along with old age and white hairs, God continues to give us the gift of life and to keep us from being overcome by evil," he said. "Aging is not a condemnation, but a blessing!"

Francis closed out the message by noting that the war in Ukraine has brought another conflict to Europe as the generation that experienced World War II is dying out.

He prayed that all elderly people are made into "artisans of the revolution of tenderness, so that together we can set the world free from the specter of loneliness and the demon of war."