

# Growing in faith in maturing years

Gift of these years is wisdom hidden in a lifetime of lived experience

BY SISTER MARY ROSE MARRIN, C.S.J.



**“The happiest older adults are those who have a confidant or close friend and those who offer the gift of friendship to others”**

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### Over the past century, the life span in our country has

increased by thirty years. No longer is retirement followed by “old age.” Today, there are six stages in the aging process beginning with the “nearly-old” (55 – 64) and moving towards the “hyper-old” (105+). Each stage has its own transitional challenges. The vocation of the older adult is to become a wise elder, one who reminds the world of what is really important in life.

The great gift of these years is the wisdom hidden in a lifetime of lived experience. Recently, a teenager told me of an assignment given to her in a religion class. She was to visit with an older adult and put questions to him/her: “How does your faith help you deal with transitions and personal loss? How does it prepare you for experiences of death and dying, including your own? What are the most important lessons your life has taught you? For what are you grateful?” Reflecting on such questions leads to insight and insight leads to wisdom. This is the work of maturing years.

Dealing with loss is the greatest psychological and spiritual challenge of these years. We are threatened with the loss of what is precious to us: our health, our loved ones, our independence, our memory—to name a few. The threat of loss can fill us with fear and the danger of making decisions based on fear. Decisions made in fear are never good decisions. Loss itself is always painful and thrusts us into the struggle of confronting painful feelings. Our willingness to enter this struggle and the gradual movement towards new life enables us to become witnesses of hope in a world of darkness.

One of the greatest temptations of our maturing years is the risk of becoming self-absorbed and self-centred. While our physical capacities and gifts may diminish, our spiritual gifts, nurtured by the Spirit over a lifetime, continue to flourish and develop. These are the gifts of patience, of resilience in the face of adversity, of understanding and compassion, of outreach and concern for others—and so many more. All these gifts are given to further the mission of Jesus enabling us to communicate to others the love that has been given to us. We become mentors, mentors of life revealing what is possible when one lives the vocation of maturing Christian faith.

The greatest support in meeting the challenges of aging is connection: connection with oneself and with one’s life story, connection with persons who care about us, connection with the wonders of creation, and connection with God. The happiest older adults are those who have a confidant or close friend and those who offer the gift of friendship to others.

“We firmly believe that the future of humanity rests with those who are strong enough to give coming generations reason for living and reason for hoping.” (Gaudium et Spes #31.) This is the vocation of the maturing years! ✠

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With her background in teaching, spiritual formation and parish ministry, Sister Mary Rose Marrin, of the Sisters of Saint Joseph in Toronto, presents programs on “Spiritual Growth in the Second Half of Life” for parishes and other groups throughout the Archdiocese of Toronto.