

On being an Ancient Person

When Zellers occupied the Orangeville Mall, there was embodied in the store a restaurant which I am sure is sorely missed by many people, for it was a safe place to go for lunch. Not expensive. A comfort-food sort of place with friendly waitresses who remembered how many of the regulars took their coffee. Decent (organic, fair trade) coffee.

However, on the menu, for folks over 55, there was a 'seniors' lunch' which sold the same sort of food generally offered to children and added the option of jello or rice pudding as dessert for only a dollar. I wondered what they thought happened to people once they achieve the mighty age of 55: did they believe that at 55, everyone forgets every fine meal he/she has ever eaten? Or the joy of a good glass of wine? Did they truly think that, at the huge age of 55, one reverts to basics, expecting only the most elementary culinary experience?

In recent news, it seems that there are now more persons aged 65 and over than there are persons under age 15. Panic all round. My daughter once told me that when a young woman goes to a doctor for a normal check-up, she is asked, quite directly, about when she plans to have children. Catholics are pressured from every direction to be fruitful and multiply, never mind the catastrophic growth in the global human population. Pope Francis still needs to get that right.

It is important to remember that the alternative to getting older is to die while younger. Somewhere along the line, we began to conquer the Fountain of Youth with plastic surgery, potions, creams, injections, mental exercises, in some small measure better food, for sure, more clever health care. Lots of us are living easily to 100 and more.

How far will the Boomers insist on cultural changes to suit their frames of reference? Would we need to start re-recording old favourite songs? 'Will you still need me, will you still feed me when I'm 94?'

But beware of this Amazing Aging (my coin!). Now that assisted euthanasia is becoming all the rage, next could be: put the old dog down? grandpa might as well go with him, they were so close and the old man is 110, for heaven's sake; he can hardly make it to the bathroom in time in the mornings. That was the first sign that the old dog was done? when he could barely get out to the grass first thing.

Before the next 20 years are over, all those already very senior 65 and plus are 85 and plus, drooling down their chins, asking the same damned questions over and over, the young 'uns, 35 and under, who, of course, may still be fewer than the 85-plus, but much, much stronger? well, they will be passing laws about it being okay to 'offer' assisted euthanasia to those over, let's say, 110 years old.

Well, come on! The Bible only allows for three score and 10, or 70 for those of you who don't get that 300-year-old language. Seventy is expected; seventy good, healthy, brain functioning years. After that, what's left except life in some 'assisted living' home? Visits from grandchildren (and who can count the 'greats?'), all so polite, wiping their noses on your dressing gown, thinking how funny you smell.

After a while, you have smiled and kissed them, listened to their increasingly inarticulate stories as your brain becomes less and less receptive to the babbling of children.

Then off to the dining room where? can you still feed yourself? the staff spoon in the 'home cooked' bilge they prepare for you, topping it off with Jell-O or rice pudding!

That's a life?

Could there be some sort of compromise fashioned between the Biblical time limit to our lives of a mere 70 years and the 20/21st Centuries gift of manufactured longevity? As the world becomes more and more crowded, maybe there will be a voluntary 'Exit' scheme.

Just think about it. Music playing: Beatles, Mozart, David Bowie? the Intended's choice? a window with a lovely view? nature, city, ocean? family and friends gathered together with flowers, stories, tears behind the brave smiles. And in the midst of all this wonder, with someone reading poetry in the background or soulful prayers, is the Intended who has or has not (depending on level of competence) agreed and consented to these proceedings, joyful in the assembly of familiar faces (if recognition is still possible) laying or sitting in the most comfortable of cots or chairs.

And the End comes by way of Slipping into Eternal Sleep.

Does this sound like some dire science fiction novel? Or just a matter of enough chatter and new laws?

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