



When I was growing up in Michigan, my grandmother would often stop by on weekends to visit our family of six. At some point, her twinkly blue eyes would connect with mine and she would say, “Michael, would you like to join your mother and me for some shopping?”

Even as a little kid, I enjoyed her tremendous sense of humor. She would say, “Now, why don’t you try to find your favorite chocolate chip cookies and ice cream and throw them in the basket!” She knew my weak spots.

Later, she had a huge impact on my priestly vocation. Shortly after my oldest brother, Tom, announced his engagement to his future wife, Ann, my grandmother said to me, “Michael, you will never make that announcement. You will be a priest someday.” How did she know?

I have had the privilege of knowing many holy and happy grandparents out there, and to shed more light on the gift of grandparents to a family, I thought sharing the perspective of one of them, Ina Shea of Stamford, Connecticut, could be helpful:

“From Psalms 128, may you see your children’s children — I am on a wonderful spiritual journey,” she told me. “And at this point in my life, God has granted me an incredible blessing of two beautiful granddaughters, ages four and one. Time spent loving them stops the hectic pace of today’s world and affords me time to ‘stop and smell the roses’ with their little hands tucked inside mine.”

She continued, “My grandchildren are growing up with technology infiltrating almost every aspect of their lives. My one-year-old knows that when you say, ‘Alexa’ (to summon the Amazon device) and then give a command, something wonderful happens. She looks to the area where the device sits on the kitchen counter and waits for the music to play or for the computer voice to give weather information or for the lights to turn on. Both little girls realize how important and vital the ever-present and powerful cell phone is. We, parents and grandparents alike, can become too focused on these devices.”

She went on to share these beautiful words:

My role as a grandparent is to bring the beauty of simplicity and love to their lives. The amazing and surprising part is that I can bridge the gap between the technology-driven world with God's kingdom here on earth. My time with my grandchildren is spent showing them God's world that He created for us to delight in. I am present for them in every moment that I spend with them.

We look at the leaves on the trees, study a bird sitting up high on a branch, watch a small garden snake slowly slither across the road. We read endless books, and ride the trolley around the city just for fun. Grandchildren remind you again and again of the wonder of this world and life.

God wants us to delight in His creation, and seeing it through the eyes of my little granddaughters intensifies this feeling of awe and hope. I see the look on my own daughter's face when my granddaughter and I recount our experiences together that only a grandparent can bring. It creates a bond that texting, TV, and social media cannot rival.

It is so vital for grandparents to remind their children and show their grandkids the love and appreciation for time spent together. I am so grateful to have lived to see my grandchildren and especially grateful that I get to see them often to love them and also care for them two days a week. The first time my granddaughter recited the "Hail Mary" all by herself filled me with intense joy and deep affection for Our Lord, who has gifted me with this grace to be a part of her life. (My daughter and her husband live just two miles from our home.)

Grandchildren have so many questions about life, and I am here, God willing (such a grandmotherly thing to say!), to try and answer those questions. I hope my faith, prayers and love will give them building blocks for their own spiritual journey. God has given me this sacred treasure of family, and I intend to cherish it with all my heart and energy.

Recently I wrote to my 90-year-old mom, thanking her from the heart for taking such good care of herself (mentally, physically and spiritually) to still be around for me and my siblings and for all of the nieces and nephews in our family.

Last summer, I was amazed to see my mom cooking pancakes in the morning, swimming in Lake Huron, and going for a walk on the beach with me in the afternoon — and then celebrating her birthday party later in the evening. After we finished singing "happy birthday," she did a little dance and made all of us laugh so hard it hurt.

May all of you "see your children's children," share with them our much-needed love and wisdom, and experience the joy of bringing them all a little closer to God.

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