

# Pope enters hospital for intestinal problem

By John Thavis  
Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY — Suffering from an intestinal problem that could require surgery, Pope John Paul II entered a Rome hospital July 12 for a series of medical tests.

Departing from centuries of Vatican reserve regarding papal health, the 72-year-old pontiff made the surprise announcement himself during a Sunday Angelus blessing.

"I wish now to say something personal. This evening I will go to the Gemelli Polyclinic for some diagnostic tests. I ask you to pray for me, so that the Lord will be close to me with his help and support," the pope told the crowd gathered beneath his apartment window. He expressed his "complete trust" in the protection of Mary.

Vatican spokesman Joaquin Navarro-Valls said the pope had been suffering from an "intestinal dysfunction" and a small amount of pain for a few days. Some tests, including X-rays, had already been performed at the Vatican, he said.

Asked why the pope was being treated in the surgery ward of the clinic, the spokesman said: "At this point the doctors do not exclude the possibility of a (surgical) intervention if the diagnostic hypothesis is confirmed."

An informed Vatican source said some form of surgery was likely.

Vatican Secretary of State Cardinal Angelo Sodano, who accompanied Pope John Paul to the hospital and visited with him after the first batch of tests the next day, said the pontiff was in good spirits and very calm.

"As always, he is a man of great faith, placed in the hands of providence. And we are sure he will overcome this trial," Cardinal Sodano said.

Ecuadoran Ambassador Andres Cardenas Monge was one of the last non-Vatican officials to see the pope before his hospitalization. He reported that the pontiff appeared tired and that his breathing was labored.

"I found him really a bit tired. He was friendly with his extraordinary charisma, but I found him really tired," Cardenas Monge told RAI, the Italian state television network.

Cardenas Monge said he noticed that when the pope was autographing a photograph, he seemed to be breathing with some difficulty.

The medical tests, including a CAT scan (computerized axial tomography), blood tests, endoscopy and an electrocardiogram, were expected to take 48 hours, with treatment to follow.

Navarro-Valls said the problem seemed unrelated to the pope's June visit to Angola. He said doctors were convinced the pope was not suffering from a viral or bacterial infection, but from some other disorder.

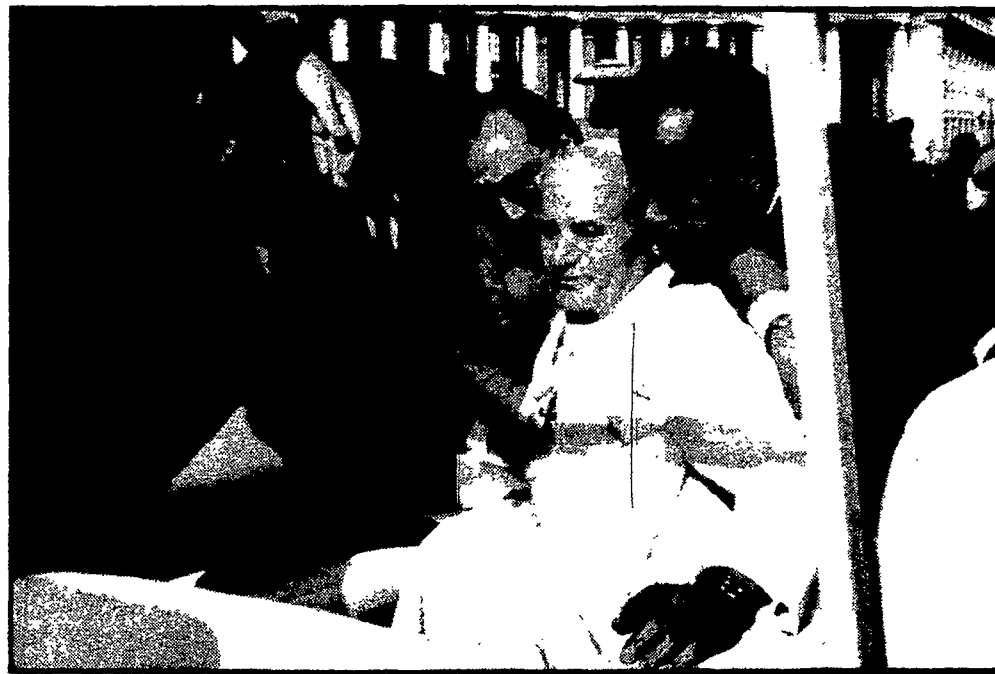
He also said it was unlikely that the problem was related to the intestinal wounds the pope suffered in an assassination attempt in 1981. The surgeon currently overseeing the pope's care at Gemelli, Dr. Francesco Crucitti, is the same doctor who treated his bullet wounds 11 years ago.

Dr. Corrado Manni, the pope's anesthesiologist after the 1981 shooting, told Italian state radio that a connection between the pope's present problem and the 1981 shooting was extremely improbable.

The pope's dramatic July 11 announcement concluded a busy work day for the pope and caught most Vatican observers by surprise. Earlier that day, the Holy Father met with Swiss bishops, approved several sainthood causes, greeted the Lithuanian ambassador and announced a trip to the Baltic states for 1993.

At his Angelus blessing July 12, the pope appeared relaxed, wishing his audience a happy vacation and suggesting they should "get out of Rome" for a holiday.

Before leaving that afternoon for the clinic, he greeted curial officials in a Vatican courtyard and bantered with his household staff of nuns. He joked



File photo

A Vatican spokesman said it is unlikely that the pope's illness is related to wounds he suffered during the 1981 assassination attempt.

that if they really wanted to know what was wrong with him, they would have to ask his press spokesman.

The pope's arrival at the Gemelli clinic seemed in many ways like one of his typical Sunday parish outings. The smiling pontiff, dressed in traditional white robe and skull cap, stepped out of his limousine and greeted scores of applauding well-wishers who had gathered outside the hospital entrance and patients who looked down from their windows. He walked into the building slowly but unaided, accompanied by Cardinal Sodano.

The pope was staying in the same 10th-floor rooms that he used in 1981, a small apartment that included working space for himself and a personal secretary, Polish Monsignor Stanislaw Dziwisz. The pope spent a total of 76 days there in two separate recoveries from the gunshot wounds and a subsequent viral infection.

The pope had been expected to leave the Vatican July 15 for his annual two-week holiday in the Italian Alps. Navarro-Valls said the pope's vacation would have to be postponed, but that he hoped the pontiff could make the trip as soon as possible.

Get-well wishes began pouring into the Vatican immediately after the pope's announcement. Among the first were messages from Italian Presi-

dent Oscar Scalfaro and Prime Minister Giuliano Amato.

Thomas Melady, U.S. ambassador to the Holy See, said July 13 that he had forwarded a report on the pope's hospitalization to Washington and was awaiting a response.

"In the meantime we're all praying for him," Melady said.

In the pope's native Poland, prayers were offered at evening Masses.

"All Poles are ready to pray. But we're reacting with calm and trust in the Lord, because we don't want to be overdramatic," said Archbishop Bronislaw Dabrowski, secretary general of the Polish bishops' conference.

"We're praying harder for the Holy Father. But the opinion here is that, at a certain age, a person should be seen by a doctor," he said.

The Polish community in Rome scheduled a Mass for St. Peter's Basilica on July 15.

Cardinal Camillo Ruini, papal vicar of Rome, asked Rome's parishes, convents and monasteries to offer special prayers for the pontiff.

The pope had at times appeared tired in recent months, but kept up his full schedule of official meetings, working lunches and liturgical ceremonies. During his recent trip to Africa, he moved slowly through a relatively easy schedule. Though he sometimes looked drawn, aides said he remained in generally good health.

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