

WORLD & NATION

Pope recovers after successful surgery

By John Thavis
Catholic News Service

ROME — Doctors successfully removed Pope John Paul II's inflamed appendix and ruled out any more serious intestinal disorder for the 76-year-old pontiff.

The pope regained consciousness almost immediately after the 50-minute surgery Oct. 8 and "greeted and thanked everyone" on the medical staff, said Dr. Francesco Crucitti, who performed the operation at Rome's Gemelli hospital.

Crucitti said all of the pope's vital signs were normal during and following the surgery. He said the pope could be dismissed from the hospital in a week or so.

Crucitti said the operation confirmed what he and other doctors had diagnosed earlier this year: that the pope was suffering from recurrent episodes of appendix inflammation, which produced symptoms of fever and nausea.

"The regional examination allowed us to exclude, once again, the presence of other pathologies," he said. He said he could "categorically" rule out a tumor as a cause of the pope's recent flare-ups.

Crucitti expressed irritation with recent Italian newspaper reports suggesting that the pope had a more serious disease, such as cancer, which doctors were either concealing or failing to diagnose.

Crucitti said a textbook appendectomy was performed on the pontiff. Doctors found exactly what they expected to find: that the pope's appendix had been inflamed and had developed scar tissue. The doctors also removed some "adherences" in the area, scar tissue that sometimes develops following surgery. The pope has been operated upon twice in the intestinal area, after a 1981 shooting and in 1992 to remove a benign tumor.



Reuters/CNS
Pope John Paul II exits his car upon arrival at Rome's Gemelli Hospital Oct. 6 for surgery to have his appendix removed. Doctors described the Oct. 8 operation as successful. The pontiff is scheduled to remain in the hospital about a week.

The pope went through the operation well, and all his circulatory, respiratory, blood and metabolic functions remained within the norm during surgery, he said.

Papal spokesman Joaquin Navarro-Valls, speaking at a separate briefing at the Vatican, said the operation's success was expected at the Vatican — and it left people relieved.

"I think there's relief whenever a surgical operation confirms a previous diagnosis. But the Vatican had every trust in what the doctors had diagnosed. There was no surprise," he said.

The Vatican spokesman said the pope awoke at 3 a.m. the morning of surgery and spent some two hours alone in prayer in a private chapel next to his hospital room. At 5 a.m., he celebrated Mass with his personal secretary.

The pope began the pre-operation routine at about 7 a.m., and surgery was completed by 8:40 a.m. The pope had awakened by the time he reached his room and asked doctors how the surgery went, Navarro-Valls said.

In his briefing for reporters, Crucitti was also asked about the pope's nervous system disorder, which the Vatican has described as an "extrapyramidal" disturbance, a term that could include Parkinson's disease.

Crucitti said that disorder was a separate one being followed by other medical experts. He said it posed no problems for the pope's surgery or recovery.

The pope entered the hospital late Oct. 6 and spent the next day undergoing a series of routine pre-operation exams, all of which reassured doctors that the pope was ready for surgery. It was his sixth operation at the Gemelli hospital, which has arranged a special suite of rooms for the pope's exclusive use.

Court to rule in suicide case

By Patricia Zapor
Catholic News Service

Church leaders in the Diocese of Rochester and across the nation welcomed the U.S. Supreme Court announcement that it would decide whether the Constitution permits assisted suicide.

In orders issued Oct. 1, just before the start of the fall term, the court agreed to hear appeals of federal court rulings over assisted suicide laws from the states of New York and Washington.

The New York case, *Quill vs. Vacco*, revolves around the state's law prohibiting doctors from helping terminally ill patients kill themselves. Four doctors — including Rochester's Dr. Timothy Quill — challenged the law's constitutionality.

The cases have been followed closely by the U.S. Catholic Conference and church leaders in both states. The USCC, the Catholic Medical Association and seven current and former members of the U.S. Civil Rights Commission filed briefs with the court asking the Court to take the New York case.

The New York State Catholic Conference released a statement Oct. 1 terming the Supreme Court's decision to hear arguments on physician-assisted suicide "a sign of hope."

In the Diocese of Rochester, Suzanne Schmittman, consistent life ethic coordinator, released a statement Oct. 4 that noted the diocese would sponsor a forum on "Making End-of-Life Choices" at St. Bernard's Institute in Rochester on Dec. 4. Legal, ethical, pastoral and health experts will give talks at the forum, the statement said.

The Catholic Physicians Guild of the Diocese of Rochester also released a statement on Oct. 4. In the statement, Dr. Michael R. Aiello, guild president, urged the church to continue its defense of the poor, the disabled and other vulnerable groups who may be pressured into physician-assisted suicide because they are perceived to be burdensome.

The Washington and New York cases are likely to be scheduled for oral arguments at the Supreme Court before the end of 1996, with a ruling due by the end of the term next July.

This story contains additional reporting by Rob Cullivan.

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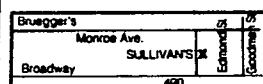
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