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The health of the Holy Father has declined

The Pope's situation is stable but his condition remains grave. The biological indications are unsettled, and the blood pressure erratic. He continues to be "lucid, fully conscious, and very serene," according to the Vatican spokesman, Joaquin Navarro-Valls.

04/03/2005

The director of the Holy See Press Office, Joaquin Navarro-Valls, has added new details about the Pope's health in response to several questions.

"From the first moment the Holy Father has been informed about the gravity of his condition. He decided to remain in the apartment in the Vatican, where complete medical assistance is guaranteed. Yesterday evening, his condition became stable temporarily, but worsened thereafter."

"The Holy Father's condition is being closely monitored. He is always conscious. He received Viaticum [Holy Communion] yesterday evening at 7:17. This morning at 6 he celebrated Holy Mass from his bed. As you know he is attended by his personal physician, Dr. Renato Buzzonetti, by two specialists in resuscitation, a cardiologist, and an

ear, nose, and throat specialist, as well as two nurses."

Navarro-Valls, a physician himself, stressed that the Pope is always conscious. "After Mass this morning, about 7:15, he realized that today is Friday, the day he normally makes the Way of the Cross, and asked that the fourteen stations be read to him. He followed the reading attentively, blessing himself at each station.

"A little after that, he asked to pray the liturgy of the hours [breviary], and specified that the third hour be read to him.

"This morning I saw that he received some of his assistants: Cardinal Angelo Sodano, secretary of state; Archbishop Leonardo Sandri, his assistant; Cardinal Camillo Ruini, vicar for Rome; Cardinal Edmund Szoka, president of the pontifical commission for Vatican City; Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, dean of

the College of Cardinals; Archbishop Giovanni Lajolo, secretary for the relations with states; and Archbishop Paolo Sardi, assistant chamberlain.

"The Pope's situation is stable, but his condition remains grave. The biological indications are unsettled, and the blood pressure erratic. He continues to be lucid, fully conscious, and, as I said before, very serene.

"A short time ago, he asked that passages of Holy Scripture be read to him, and he followed attentively."

Navarro-Valls later said that the Holy See Press Office would be open all night.

When asked why the Pope had not been hospitalized, the Press Director responded: "When he was told of the gravity of his condition, the Pope asked if it were strictly necessary for him to go to the hospital. When he was told No, that in his apartment all

the necessary assistance was available, he decided to remain there."

Then a journalist wanted to know what Navarro-Valls himself thought about the situation. "My feelings are of no interest," he responded. "It is certainly something we haven't seen in these past 26 years. To see the Pope in this condition--lucid and extraordinarily serene, but having difficulty breathing--is something new."

Cardinal Ruini Celebrates Mass for the Pope in St. John Lateran

Cardinal Camillo Ruini, vicar of His Holiness for the diocese of Rome and president of the Italian Episcopal Conference, made the following announcement earlier today: "Due to the worsening condition of the Holy Father, I invite all Romans and all Italians to intensify their prayers for him. We wish to be near him in this

hour with that same loving closeness with which John Paul II has accompanied us in these nearly 27 years.

"This evening at 7 we will celebrate Mass for the Pope in the basilica of St. John Lateran. I ask all parish communities, all religious in Rome, to pray for the Holy Father in churches and at home with their families."

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