

## **AGONY – LIVE**

*Every day he's in our face: a suffering pope, tottering, trembling, and barely managing to mumble sounds, let alone words. Shown worldwide, the Pope has chosen to impose this picture on us himself; for it's easy to imagine his numerous uneasy advisors preferring to avoid showcasing the leader of the Church as such a physically debilitated old man.*

*We cannot bear to see this, particularly as our dominant social values favour unending youth, obsessive beauty, impressive efficiency; in effect hiding such physical deterioration and heralding of death. By having us endure this upsetting spectacle, you can see the staging, John Paul II tells us what words can no longer express: suffering and death are inseparable from life and we cannot escape them without denying our own humanity.*

*The violence with which some people, by media broadcast, denounce what they call a freak show – we heard a radio commentator wish the Pope would stop being on display – clearly shows unwillingness to be disturbed, a convenient euphemism that hides fear. This fear infects the heritage of a society of contestants ready to do anything to be physically perfect; sure they're right and dreaming of being stars, that is, icons of themselves.*

*Suffering isn't nice. The physical deterioration of old age can be a shipwreck, to paraphrase General De Gaulle, and death is a defeat. Better to escape it. They understand very well all those who abandon their aged relatives who are no longer good for anything and who, above all, stopped serving them. Such old people are abandoned to their ghetto homes where those who sporadically visit them most often do so out of guilt and require a day to get over the emotion stirred up by death's antechamber. In letting the cameras of the world see him, the Pope substitutes himself for all those we prefer not to see, among them, those men and women who, at the end of their life, wilted away in the crushing heat in France last summer while their own children cooled off at the beach unconcerned about their mother or father trapped in a sweltering fifth-floor apartment in a building without elevators while Paris, as agitated as it is anonymous, climbed to 40°C.*

*The Pope also displays his physical suffering under the gaze of those – and they are legion – who are too sensitive, too fragile, too emotional to go to the hospital to be by the bedside of close family. What about those others, mostly women by the way, who consider it a duty to visit the sick, thereby running roughshod over their own sensitivities? Obviously, our tolerance of illness is limited today because it is seen as a loss, a defect, a breakdown, and not as an element of health itself. Many see the body as a machine one polishes, repairs, trains, and which, therefore, must work.*

*As for death, it has become meaningless. Believers integrate it into their vision of life, but faith no longer explains or reassures as it used to. We have reduced the time for exposing the dead, mourning is no longer visible in how we dress, and the time for sadness is often cut short by the impatience of the entourage to forget or rather to pretend to forget. The Pope, disturber of consciences, forces us to witness his slow descent towards death, a death that no one will take away from him.*

*Like those flamboyant artists, the Pope hopes to die with his boots on, on stage, in view of the whole world, in communion with those who suffer in isolation and abandoned. He portrays the*

*ugliness of disease, and in so doing; he transfigures it. There is a mixture of faith and pride in his action that commands respect. And so, this pope that one might criticize for his moral stances, for example, remains an exceptional being who has waged his battle, both spiritual and temporal, and transformed the world.*

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## HERE IS A HEARTFELT REQUEST FOR PRAYERS!

### *“Kindly pray for the Pope.”*

I was profoundly moved at knowing that His Holiness is specifically requesting that we pray for him in the knowledge that his time among us is limited.

By word of mouth, letter, or email, gratitude is a powerful tool in calling for prayer for him. Say an "Our Father" for Pope John Paul II, which will dispose your heart, like his, to knowing and doing the Father's will. In addition, forward this request to as many people around the world as is possible. Please don't forget to include him in your prayers, as well as forwarding this request.

- ⊕ Pope John Paul made this request around Easter as he was praying the Angelus before the pilgrims in St. Peter's Square. He says that only through prayer will he be given strength from those who prayed. We are in solidarity with one another; as one part of the body is with all the other parts. Let us help the Pope, whose prayers have helped so many of us.
- ⊕ If you can muster the generosity and love within you, you may also pray the Rosary or part of the Rosary for Pope John Paul and his intentions. Let this be an opportunity for you to discover why the Rosary has for years been his favorite prayer. At each of the decades, meditate on one of the mysteries in Jesus' life, asking the Lord to show you how your life is connected to His.
- ⊕ With the Rosary, allow Mary to help you contemplate the face of Jesus her Son, the Christ, our Lord and Savior.
- ⊕ Please send this to all your relatives and friends.
- ⊕ With your cooperation, in just a few days, millions of human beings will have offered their prayers for John Paul II, and by the same token, offered their prayers to God. Let us never forget the power of prayer.

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*“Cast all your worries upon Him, because He cares for you.”*  
*1 Peter 5:7*