

TRUE CHARITY

## Everyone is praying for the Pope, but 'only' for his recovery.

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The Holy Father's health seems to be in serious danger. A new CT scan of his chest, carried out last Tuesday, showed bilateral pneumonia, which has forced the doctors to review the treatments and has considerably complicated the Pope's clinical picture,

which will certainly prolong his stay at the Gemelli Polyclinic and could mark a decline that may be irreversible, despite the assurances that the Pope is already preparing for the Easter celebrations.

**Faced with this situation,** it is natural and understandable that there are many appeals for prayers for Pope Francis; appeals that ask above all for the grace of his recovery. This is not surprising, of course: health and illness are truly in God's hands, and it is therefore right to turn to Him to ask for the healing of a sick person, as the Church's perennial practice teaches.

**But... and there is a but.** Given the Pope's clinical condition and his venerable age, it would be irresponsible and a sign of a merely worldly faith to stop at the request for healing. Because Jorge Mario Bergoglio, before being Pope Francis, is a man who seems to be approaching two decisive moments in human life: the final agony and the divine judgement. It is possible to receive from the good Lord the grace of healing, even several times in one's life, with or without medical intervention, but it is impossible to avoid death and, with it, God's judgement, which will determine our eternal state.

**For this reason, Christian charity demands** that, in addition to the health of the sick person, we ask the Lord for all the necessary graces to reject sin, to be purified and to be supported in the last great decisive battle in which the evil one plays his last hand. And it is not difficult to imagine with how much cunning, vehemence and "experience" he will do this. Greater graces are needed by all those who in this life have been entrusted with public responsibility, and even more so by the head of the universal Church, because his judgement will also include the way in which he has exercised this role and, as St Benedict points out with gravity in his Rule for the abbot: "Let him remember that in the terrible judgement which he will have to face before God, he will have to give an account not only of his teaching but also of the obedience of his disciples. Let him remember that the shepherd will be held responsible for all the faults of the flock that the father of the family was able to discover" (II, 6-7), if he did not "use all his diligence with a restless and unruly flock, trying in every way to correct their misconduct" (II, 8).

**One could say that Pope Francis is not dying:** he sleeps well, gets up for brief periods and brief meetings, eats breakfast, reads the newspaper, works a little; this may be true, but it is certainly not the case that he is suffering from an annoying and temporary bronchitis. A man of almost ninety, in these conditions, which have worsened since the beginning of the week, is objectively at risk of dying.

**The Press Office would also like news not only about the Pope's health,** but also about the Christian way he is living his illness and approaching the day of his final step. So far, all we know is that the Pope has received Holy Communion: there is no news of a priest celebrating Mass for him in his room or in the adjoining chapel, as was the case with John Paul II. Nor is there any news of the Pope receiving the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick. On the contrary, the press reported the very sad news that Francis had watched Mass on television last Sunday. Was there no thought of setting up a small portable altar for the hospitalised Pope and celebrating for him on the Lord's Day?

**It's not a question of minding one's own business.** In times like ours, when the priest is not called for fear that the sick person will realise that he is dying, and when even Christians do not remember the importance of the sacraments, especially confession, the anointing of the sick and the viaticum, and the corresponding sacramentals, such as prayer and the blessing of the sick, but also simply the exorcising oil, holy water, etc., it is a great work of evangelisation to remember how a Christian is called to prepare himself for death that seems imminent, even more so when this Christian is the head of the visible Church. And it is to be hoped that those who were once called "the comforts of religion" have actually reached the Pope, given the absence of Sunday Mass.

**So allow me then to suggest another prayer intention,** perhaps to St Michael the Archangel: that he may destroy any last-minute attempt to pass problematic decisions or sign documents that have so far lain dormant in the desk drawers of some ministry.