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„Let me go away...” – the last teaching of Pope.
Meditations of the hospitium medical doctor

The first anniversary of the death of John Paul II, the time of ordering and conversion, the time of mourning and evaluation of personal losses has passed. For many of us the death of Pope was an essential event like the loss of someone very close. The deep sorrow was especially associated with the first period: the time of the funeral, crowd meetings at the places connected with Pope. Today, one year later we want to focus on the events, which we were witnesses of, we want to describe the after-effects of the teaching, Pope gave us with his life and especially with His dying.

In the conversation with Andre Frossard, Pope is saying about His embarrassment in contacts with those, who suffer. “I know from my own experiences, especially from my youth, that human suffering mainly embarrassed me. For some time it was difficult for me to approach suffering people, because I was full of remorse that they suffer not me. Further more I was embarrassed because whatever I could say would be empty words. There is something very true in the sentence that someone in comfort would not understand someone in distress. The statement can be also put other way round: the one suffering may not understand the healthy one, especially may not understand the fact that the latter may suffer because of the suffering of the former... suffering men themselves helped me. Meeting them gradually and after all finally convinced me that some very special and surprising relationship exists between their suffering as a fact and their awareness of their suffering. Confession of the ill man in terminal conditions: “Dear Priest! You do not even know how happy I am”, was the top experience in this domain. I did not even ask why? I did understand without any words what must have happened in his soul, how complicated that phenomenon was and WHO could have performed that. Since than I have often met the suffering men, I have often traced that phenomenon recognizing its different stages and modifications“ [1]. One can hardly skip the comment on the words of Pope , who experienced himself the death of His mother, when he

was 9 years old, the death of His brother – young medical doctor, who died in the age of 26, the death of His beloved father during German occupation. Loneliness, the feeling of great loss must have had impact on the relationship between young Wojtyła and the outside world, must have shaped His sensitivity and ability of compassion and empathy of which He was later known as the Head of Catholic Church. Our experiences with redundant suffering men, always influence our own lives. The unique set of our own life experiences shape our ability to live in spite of our emotional losses.

The family, school and religious environment of Wadowice and later Cracow were definitively a huge deposit for the Pope's future. His personal suffering and multiple stays in the hospitals were the next steps in His emotional development. The key to understanding Pope's teaching about suffering, was the moment of the assassination attempt on the 13th 1981. Everything what happened than may be perceived either as the series of particular events in the terms of passing time or in the terms of faith as the system of signs referring to the Fatima prophecy.

Pope's stay in the Gemelli Hospital was the first of many hospital retreats [2]. The Gemelli Hospital used to be called the third Vatican (after the Pope's residence and Castel Gandolfo). These are some most important dates referring to the Pope's stays in the hospital:

- 13.05.1981 the assassination attempt and the stay in the hospital till 03.06.1981
- 20.06.-14.08.1981 cytomegalovirus infection , 05.08.1991 colonostomia closure,
- 09.1991 the beginning of Parkinson's disease,
- 15.07.1992 resection of adenoma of the colon,
- 11.11.1993 treatment of the dislocated shoulder (plaster cast for some weeks),
- 28.04.1994 fracture of the femur (endoprosthesis),
- 08.09.1996 apendectomy,
- 02.2003 degeneration of the right knee (next endoprosthesis),
- 01.-10.02.2005 flue, laryngospasmus, treatment on the intensive care ward,
- 24.02.-13.03.2005 tracheotomy, rehabilitation, impaired verbal contacts
- 31.03.2005 septic shock, urosepsis, nutrition problems.

The second stay in the hospital was the most typical for the Pope's understanding of suffering and illness. Facing the fact of living with colonostomia, Pope asked for the consillium of medical professors and demanded the closure of the stomia in the opposition to the doctors' opinion. Pope claimed that in the relationship between the patient and the doctor the latter can

not be the oracle. All decisions must be established with the mutual permission, where the doctor is the one who has got medical knowledge and the patient is the one who knows himself with all his limitations and individual experiences. The patient must fight for being a subject not an object of the process of treatment. Doctors are not the only responsible for this situation as the matter of inner life is the matter of the suffering man, however, they should be aware of all that effort and dangers, that the human being in distress must face. The problem of humanity of an individual can be recognized in every domain of the social life and appears to be the most important issue of our contemporary world and philosophy. Pope claimed He was strong enough to undergo the next operation (closure of the stomia) [1].

Professor Stomma (the microbiologist), was impressed and moved with the Pope's speech. John Paul II finished with words: 'I have fought for the human rights all my life and today I am that human being I am fighting for.' After all, the closure of the stomia was performed and on the 15th of August 1981 John Paul II was present on the Peter's square. The described event proves that Pope was always able to fight for the right of saving and presenting His own opinions. On the other hand, we should be aware that Pope was informed properly enough (the wide medical knowledge of all serious consequences) that He could have taken conscious part in the process of treatment. I would also like to recall the situation when Pope refused the prosthesis of His knee after painful experiences with the prosthesis of His hip. We were all following press reports during the last week before Pope's death. Thanks to mass media in some way we were able to take part in His agony. There were some who claimed John Paul II should have resigned from the post and did not take the risk of indiscretion and impassive camera recording; by them the Pope's appearance was perceived in terms of esthetics. However the anthropologist J. Galarowicz recognized the problem in the different category. The times of disease, infirmity and old age are coming. We admired Pope's power of spirit, His deep faith and ability to pray, wisdom and love, the power of will, perseverance and His titanic work. John Paul II appeared as a witness of the spiritual beauty in the suffering, old and ill body [3]. I must admit that there were moments I shared the opinion of those, who claimed in terms of esthetics Pope should have stayed with His infirmity hidden like other suffering and ill men. It took me some time to understand that Pope's showing up in public to the very last days, was His last lesson. Would His teaching that every human being deserves a respect, be that true and convincing? Pope's testimony appeared to be civilizational breakthrough in the culture which tries to blot out our minds of the old age and the death.

Who is not anxious about ability of getting old with dignity? John Paul II showed us it is possible.

Pope claimed that the rejection of the dying human being (more and more common in the contemporary society) had many complex causes [4]. **In terms of cultural and social life**, suffering and death appear to be something senseless. In the culture in which everything is conformed to desire for prosperity and well-being, death is “disturbing” and is a source of difficult questions, which can be avoided when the death is painless and quickened. **In philosophical and ideological terms**, theory that a man is a creator of his own life refers to absolute autonomy of a human being. Followers of this vision even praise suicide and euthanasia as means of either affirmation or auto-destruction of one’s ego. Further more **in terms of welfare and medical achievements**, there is a tendency to decrease the sophisticated medical care of terminal patients and to limit it to sanitary help within institutions where individual and humanistic approach is not possible. Patients are often deprived of contacts with family and relatives and become objects of advanced technique, which deprives them also of their dignity. The influence of “the utilitarian ethics”, in which desire for effectiveness and productivity are ones of the most important rules in the developed society, causes the situation in which suffering and dying man demanding long-lasting and expensive care, appears to be a wasting time and money burden.

“No man is entitled to decide whether to live or to die. The only One is the Creator, the One in Whom we live, move, exist (...). Hence the moral stance arises which order us to be against suicide and euthanasia and on the hand to be against ‘persistent therapy’, which do not serve neither the life nor human dignity”.

Furthermore Pope teaches, it is necessary to have compassion for brothers’ suffering, not to pass by indifferently, to serve them and show love by specific gestures, to care about the health of whole human being [5]. The society can be assessed by its attitude to the suffering and dying men. One must not pass by, but must take some of the suffering man ‘s burden. Every human life is the gift from the God and we are obliged to save and respect it, even than when it is matched with physical weakness and limitations [6].

Pope’s teachings put stress on affirmation of human dignity regardless of cultural, physical, financial and geographical circumstances. During every pastoral trip, Pope showed up and prayed with ill, rejected men calling them the deposit of the mankind – the precious value per se. Pope says that we should stop and try to find that fundamental relationship between human beings: ourselves and suffering men. We have to bow before brothers and sisters, who

are just weak and helpless, deprived of something that we can have and be happy about every day. Pope keeps on repeating that we should not avoid meeting with suffering men, on the contrary we should try to face them and treat such contacts as a special lesson and the way of going through our own fears of suffering and mortality [7]. Is the contemporary world willing to listen to the weakening and senile voice of dying Pope? Paradoxically yes. Young people are fascinated with His transparent and coherent life and moral code. The most important in politics and business tend to meet a Man , who is not afraid of difficult problems of human existence in the contemporary world. Pope says the world of human suffering calls for the world of human love [8]. This is the universal message relating to every domain of human activity. Professor H. Kočka-Kenz (archeologist) described: when John Paul II could not speak , He communicated in the non-verbal way with gestures and facial expression. To the very end Pope did not lose His spiritual power, He remained a man of a great mind and a great heart. He had matured and developed to His death. In the medieval ages old men were a valuable part of the society. That was modern culture, that denied the last stage of our life and let hospitals and other institutions to take care of old suffering men. John Paul II remained about social bonds, respect for all suffering and ill men. Pope proved that our attitude to the loss of physical efficiency can be our the testimony [9]. Pope was a master of prayer. As a young priest and later as a bishop He could always find enough time for everyday meeting with the God. His contemplation and prayer in the cathedral in the Wawel Castle, in the flash of hundreds of reporters' cameras, was the most exceptional moments of prayer in public.

“In my mind I travel with my pastoral trip everyday to hospitals and sanitary institutions, where people in different age and of different social background exist. I would like to meet all those suffering and ill men, their relatives, doctors and nurses. These places are like the sanctuary of Passover mystery. Even a man , who is the least reflective, starts to think of his life, causes of evil, suffering and death” [10].

The last Pope's teaching started in February 2005. As a consequence of flue complications and immune deficiency, John Paul II was initially intubated and later He required tracheostomy. When Pope came to consciousness after general anaesthesia, He asked with fear writing on a sheet of paper: “What did they do to me?” and added with humility: “Totus Tuus” [2]. Pope did not give up; He trained the voice intensively to achieve the possibility of verbal contacts again. His teachings were read by hierarchs: for example Cardinal Soprano. The last Pope's appearance took place on the 30th of March 2005. We all saw Pope's face full of pain and infirmity while trying to give His pastoral teaching [11]. It was the last station of

His Via Crucis. High fever and septic shock appeared on the 31st of March. Pope refused to be taken to the Gemelli Hospital and decided to stay at home. “That is really enough; all my carers understand that I have got right to give my life, not to keep it and You are the One to decide...”. Pope wanted to stay among His friends; with doctors’ and nurses’ help Pope wanted to keep right to decide. He asked not to take His consciousness away; he wanted to be aware of everything happening to the very end. It is a common procedure to give sedation to terminal patients to avoid the feeling of fear of agony. “ Do not separate me from my God, the Creator, do not separate me from the One, who is a symbol of a good shepherd”. Pope emphasized the value of every single moment to the last hours of one’s life.

At about 15:30 CEST, John Paul II spoke his final words, "Let me go to the house of the Father", to his aides in his native Polish and fell into a coma about four hours later. He died in his private apartment, at 21:37 on the second of April.

A crowd of over two million within Vatican City, over one billion Catholics world-wide, and many non-Catholics mourned John Paul II. The Poles were particularly devastated by his death. J. Poniewierski writes: “John Paul II was my real master. He taught me how to live by His teachings and by the way He lived (...) Theology of the body is inscribed in Pope’s life: the way He rested, He suffered, He died. John Paul II was a complete human being; He knew that a man was the unity of the soul and the body” [12].

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