

Archive

Pope Struggles to Speak at Easter Blessing

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Pope John Paul did not disappoint the Roman Catholic faithful on Easter Sunday. He came to his window to bless the Vatican pilgrims, but was unable to speak to the thousands crowding Saint Peter's Square. The pope appeared at his study window as promised, but did not speak. He tried to say something but made only some sound.

The 84-year-old pope looked pained at not being able to address the pilgrims. He has been a great communicator and a very visible pope and is clearly suffering at his inability to speak.

Aides had prepared a microphone for him, but the pope was only able to make the sign of the cross.

Many of those present cried in Saint Peter's Square. It was the most emotional Easter in the pope's long 26-year papacy.

John Paul's Easter message was read by the Vatican's secretary of State, Cardinal Angelo Sodano.

"Dear Brothers and sisters", the cardinal said, "I have the honor of reading Pope John Paul's Urbi et Orbi message."

The pope followed the text as it was read.

In the message, the pope called for peace for the countries of the Middle East and Africa, where he said, so much blood continues to be shed.

He also called for solidarity towards those in the world suffering and dying from poverty and hunger, decimated by fatal epidemics or devastated by immense

natural disasters.

Earlier, Easter mass was celebrated without the pope for the first time.

Thousands turned out all the same to mark the most joyful day in the Christian calendar, the day Jesus rose from the dead

The sun came out during mass that began under threatening gray clouds. Bright flowers decorated Saint Peter's Square.

Cardinal Sodano stood in for the pope who is still too weak to preside over a long ceremony. During the mass, a prayer read in Portuguese urged life and new energy for the pope.

The 84-year-old pontiff has not been strong enough to take part in any of the services of this Holy Week leading up to Easter. Many people have started to realize a new phase has begun in Pope John Paul's papacy.

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The Vatican says Pope John Paul II is pained that he is not able to lead the Roman Catholic Church's Easter observances for the first time in the 26 years he has served as pontiff. The Vatican newspaper, Osservatore Romano, reports the pope's disappointment Saturday. He has been weakened by Parkinson's disease and surgery a month ago to insert a breathing tube in his throat. A top Vatican cardinal, Joseph Ratzinger, took the pope's place...

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Pope Appears at His Window before Worshippers on Easter Sunday, Gives Silent Blessing

On Sunday Christians of the Roman Catholic and Protestant traditions celebrated Easter, the central holiday of their faith. But Pope John Paul II for the first time was absent from some of the celebrations. The revered leader of the Roman Catholic Church for more than 25 years, John Paul II has been hospitalized twice for the flu and a tracheotomy over the past several weeks. He also suffers from Parkinson's disease. Despite his very frail health, the...

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Easter Celebrations Peaceful in Holy Land

It was a peaceful Easter in the Holy Land, where a lull in violence brought the largest turnout of pilgrims since Israeli-Palestinian fighting erupted four-and-a-half years ago. Easter celebrations began at dawn, as thousands of Christian worshippers converged on Jerusalem's holy places. Pilgrims from around the world gathered for an Easter sunrise service at the Garden tomb in Jerusalem. They sang hymns of the resurrection in a stunning...



By **Robert Berger**
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Britain's Catholic Leader Says Pope Calm in Face of Death

Britain's senior Roman Catholic leader, Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O'Connor, says Pope John Paul II has decided not to return to the hospital and will await death at the Vatican. Cardinal Murphy-O'Connor is appealing for Catholics and non-Catholics alike to pray for John Paul as

he, in the cardinal's words, "very bravely meets his last hours and days." Cardinal Murphy-O'Connor says he has learned from church authorities that the pope intends to remain...