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With Juliana in Sickness and in Health

Thirteen years after his wife's hemorrhagic stroke, Jorge (São Paulo, Brazil) recalls the moments of the incident and how he rediscovered the meaning of his matrimonial commitment. From 5-7 April 2025, the Church celebrates the Jubilee of the Sick and Health Care Workers.

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My wife Juliana lay there motionless, unconscious on a stretcher in the emergency room. It was already the early hours of Saturday, 7 August 2010. We had just come home after the beautiful wedding of a family friend. After the celebration, back at the house, she started to feel dizzy. That was the first sign of the hemorrhagic stroke that would send us rushing to the hospital. It was the beginning of a long night.

Juliana was 56 years old, the mother of seven children and (at the time) grandmother of three, with a fourth grandchild on the way. Although neither my parents nor my in-laws were Christians when they emigrated from Japan to Brazil, over time, through different paths of Providence, they gradually drew closer to the faith. My wife and I are supernumeraries of Opus Dei, and the spiritual guidance we have received since our university years

has been essential in helping to sustain our human fragility — which was suddenly and starkly laid bare.

44 days between life and death

In the cold, early morning hours, I was drinking coffee in the hospital cafeteria with our eldest son, Marcelo. We tried to think what to do. We decided to call Japan to inform one of our children; the one living furthest from home. Three days later, he joined us in this trial that the Lord, for reasons known only to Him, had allowed.

That same night, Juliana was taken into surgery to remove the cerebral clot. The operation lasted a long four hours. We didn't know what to expect post-op, but we prepared ourselves with prayer. I remember very clearly how we went as a family to the Shrine of Our Lady of Fatima in São Paulo to pray the Rosary together.

I don't think anyone is ever really prepared for a situation like that. Everything changed in an instant. We began a daily routine of hospital visits, making the most of our (very limited) time, since we could only have two visitors a day. My children took turns, and it was touching to see how each was willing to give up their turn for another, while always unanimously keeping one spot reserved for me.

We prayed a lot and asked many others to pray as well, and we saw how our lives began to change.

Juliana spent 44 days in the ICU, hovering between life and death. With every visit or conversation with the doctor, with every tiny improvement, our hope for her recovery was renewed. We prayed constantly and asked many others to join us in prayer, and through it all we witnessed a transformation in

our lives. Our family grew even closer: united, cooperative, and strong. I was deeply moved by the messages of encouragement and solidarity we received, filled with faith and prayer. Juliana received those spiritual gifts with gratitude, and we knew of many people who went to Lourdes, Fatima, the Holy Land and Rome to pray for her healing.

A reminder in the ring on my finger

One night, after several weeks immersed in this ordeal, I was driving alone to the hospital after giving a lecture at the university where I teach. Juliana had just undergone another surgery. All of a sudden, these words came to my mind: “In sickness and in health, to love and to honour you all the days of my life.” I had said those words solemnly 31 years earlier. Of course,

I hadn't forgotten them over the years, but in that moment I finally understood their full meaning. "In sickness" didn't just refer to a cold or a passing illness; it now took on a much deeper significance. It meant those long days when she lay unconscious, between life and death, and we tried to help her as best we could. And the reminder of that promise had been there all along… on the ring on my finger!

Today, thirteen and a half years after that stroke, with almost 44 years of a very happy marriage behind us, Juliana is still wheelchair-bound. Living these years in this way is certainly more heroic for her than for me. But she has not lost her joy. She continues to receive formation and affection in the Work, which helps her offer her discomfort to God for many intentions.

She has long been convinced that her maternal mission now consists in sanctifying herself through her illness, and in praying for her children (who are now scattered across Brazil, the United States, Sweden and Italy), her nine grandchildren, and many others who ask for her prayers. One added joy for her has been seeing just how many people prayed for her; even today, I am often asked how Juliana is doing, and people assure me of their prayers. And so, thanks to God and to many people, we continue to renew every day that promise we made: to remain united, in sickness and in health, all the days of our lives.

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