

**Testimony by Pierre Durieux  
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Last month the OCH team were received by Pope John Paul II. Let's go back to this brief and poignant historical meeting.

The man in white is here, as the song by Pierre Bachelet goes, except the man in white is now in a wheel chair. For a long while now, he's no longer like that young bishop from Rome who stepped lightly through the gates of the Prince's park in 1980. He no longer resembles the journalist's description of him, who at the time, called him "God's sportsman", the Pope who swam and skied. He certainly doesn't look like the statues of those triumphant pontiffs, proud, so assured and sometimes so conquering.

He arrives simply. He's pushed in on his pontifical chair on wheels. He doesn't speak to us. He looks at us. He scrutinizes us and observes us. It's the rules of the Vatican protocol; we can't speak to him for long. Marie H el ene Mathieu, founder of the OCH, expresses her gratitude to him for having granted this visit and recalls each persons' prayer, in particular those said by people with a disability who often pray for him. For this man, a word, even a single word seems difficult, and probably demands considerable effort. The only word that crosses his lips was a very clear "thank you". Like a disabled person who isn't able to express himself verbally in any easy manner, he uses gestures. He gently stroked Marie-H el ene Mathieu's check, and then he went away, as he had come, without making a sound.

As Jean Vanier said "through his physical weakness the Pope is revealing a mystery: he is the living symbol of the presence of God in weakness. Even more than through his words, it's through his vulnerable body that his is teaching us about the value of human life." Yes, he is one of us, a man to the end. Fragile, like we all are. He is Pope to the end. In the same way that Jesus was still the Christ, and perhaps even more so, on the cross. For people with a disability, he embodies hope, because, as he wrote to us: "you cannot reduce a person to the value of his aptitudes and his place in the economy, a person is God's creature, animated by Him for that person himself and not for what he does", these words are even stronger as they are pronounced by a man who is so obviously disabled himself. Just like people with a disability, he doesn't do just as he likes. Like them, he has to learn to live, in the limits of his own fragility; he's learning the trade of being a man, as well as being a priest, a bishop and a pope. History may well recall the historical pope, the human rights pope, life's servant, the politician, the theologian, the philosopher, the sportsman, the martyr and the tireless pilgrim. Let's hope history doesn't forget the pope, who is an icon of fragility, in whom the power of God and the breath of life are displayed.