

Before Miracle, Woman Heard 'Be Not Afraid'

Suffering a potentially fatal swelling in the brain, Costa Rican grandmother Floribeth Mora says a voice spoke to her through a photograph of the late Pope John Paul II, miraculously curing her and sealing the late pontiff's sainthood.

The Vatican said on Friday Pope Francis had approved Mora's cure as the requisite second miracle for the sainthood of John Paul II, who led the Roman Catholic Church from 1978 to 2005.

Mora says she was diagnosed with an aneurysm in a cerebral artery on April 14, 2011 and sent home from the hospital with the warning she could be dead within a month, although the surgeon who made the diagnosis denies he gave such a warning.

According to Mora, she drifted off to sleep in the early hours of May 1, 2011 after watching a mass on television to mark the beatification of John Paul II, who died in 2005.

She says she prayed to the late pope to heal her, and when she awoke, her eyes fell on a picture of him she had on top of the television.

"I woke up when I heard a voice that said 'get up,'" Mora, now 50, said on Friday at the Roman Catholic Church's administrative offices in San Jose, showing the clipping. "I was alone in my room, I only had this clipping that was published around those dates to commemorate John Paul II's papacy."

"I had it in front of me and I heard a voice again that said 'get up' and I looked at his photo and saw his open arms and I heard a voice that said 'be not afraid' and I said 'Yes Lord,'" she added between tears, a golden rosary hanging

around her neck.

"I went to my husband and he asked me what I was doing and I just said 'I feel fine, I feel fine, I feel fine.'"

In a written statement distributed by the Church, Mora said she had been warned that she likely only had a short time to live.

"I was even warned that it would not be more than a month," she said.

The neurosurgeon who admitted and diagnosed Mora, however, denies he gave her a month to live. Alejandro Vargas says he forecast only a 2 percent chance Mora could bleed into her brain again within a year of her diagnosis, possibly killing her.

"She was sent home with medication that would reduce her blood pressure and was advised to improve her diet so as not to raise her cholesterol levels and thus decrease the chance of her having a second bleeding episode. She was sedated because the headaches were too sharp," he told Reuters. "We didn't send her home to be sedated and wait until she died in her sleep."

NO EXPLANATION

However, Vargas cannot explain how Mora's aneurysm disappeared.

"What we found remarkable, unbelievable really, was that by November there was absolutely no trace in her brain that she ever had an aneurysm," he said. "I had never seen this in my career."

Before he was beatified, the late John Paul had already been credited with asking God to cure a French nun of Parkinson's disease, the same malady he himself had suffered from.

Mora lives in a small house in the eastern province of Cartago, around 14 miles southeast of the capital, San Jose, with her husband, Carlos Arce, and their youngest child.

On the doorstep of their small, tidy house, she has erected a shrine to John Paul II.

A large printed image of the first Polish pope is decorated with colorful plastic flowers and Christmas lights. Resting on the pope's portrait is a piece of paper confirming the diagnosis of her aneurysm.

Not everyone accepts her accounts as a miracle, her husband said.

"We've faced a lot of non-believers these last two years," he said.

A few days ago, their youngest son showed his mother some posts on Facebook from people who didn't believe that what happened to her was an act of God.

"It's been very hard on her, those messages did nothing but make her cry," Arce said.