Vatican

Francis, the comic strip



Pope Francis salutes the crowd as he arrives for the Angelus noon prayer from the window of his studio overlooking St.Peter's Square, at the Vatican July 18. (AP/Alessandra Tarantino)

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Two weeks after surgery that removed a portion of his colon, Pope Francis on July 18 resumed his weekly appearances from a Vatican window to bless the faithful in St. Peter's Square.

Francis, 84, sounded cheerful but somewhat winded at one point while speaking for 14 minutes.

Exactly a week earlier, Francis had delivered the blessing from a hospital balcony and expressed deep gratitude to medical staff caring for him. The pontiff underwent bowel surgery on July 4 to remove a portion of his colon after intestinal narrowing.

While not mentioning his own ongoing convalescence, Francis in his remarks stressed the value of taking a break. He recommended "rest, contemplation and compassion. Let's take advantage of summertime for this."

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After giving his blessing, Francis cited some somber current events. He expressed closeness to those "hit by catastrophic floods," which claimed at least 180 lives, in Germany, Belgium and the Netherlands. "May the Lord welcome the deceased and comfort the family members,'' the pope said.

He also lamented violence in South Africa, where more than 200 people died in chaos and violence sparked by the imprisonment of a former president. Francis noted South Africans have already been suffering economic and health difficulties caused by the pandemic. He said he was making a heartfelt appeal for efforts for peace and so that assistance reaches the needy.

"May the desire that has guided the people of South Africa to be reborn in harmony among all its children not be forgotten,'' Francis said.

Among the cheering public in St. Peter's Square were around 100 Cuban residents of Rome who displayed a banner urging support for protesters in their homeland.

"I am near to the dear Cuban people in these difficult moments, especially to the families who are suffering more,'' Francis said.

He added: "I pray that the Lord help them to build an ever more just and fraternal society in peace, dialogue and solidarity."

A week earlier, protests began in Cuba against food and medicine shortages and power outages, with some calling for political change in the Caribbean country, which has been governed by the Communist Party for around six decades.



Members of Italian Cuban community show flags during Pope Francis' Angelus noon prayer from the window of his studio overlooking St. Peter's Square, at the Vatican July 18. The pope cited unrest in Cuba, expressing a prayer so that Cubans have a "more just and fraternal society." (AP/Alessandra Tarantino)

oward the end of his remarks from a window of the Apostolic Palace, adlibbing at times and after interrupting himself once to cough, Francis sounded a bit winded. But he ended with a strong, cheery invitation to the crowd as he always does to pray for him and to "have a good lunch."

The crowd of several hundred clapped loudly. Some held national flags and at least one homemade banner, with a red heart and "I Love You" in Italian written on it.

After 10 days in the major Catholic hospital in Rome, Francis returned to his home in Vatican City on July 14.

Except for the July 18 noon appointment to offer his blessing to faithful gathered in St. Peter's Square, the pontiff has no other public appearances scheduled for the rest of July. Even before his surgery was announced, the Vatican had said that his weekly general audiences on Wednesdays wouldn't take place during July. That's in keeping with past years of his papacy, which allow him a bit of a summer break.

Hours before heading to the hospital for surgery, Francis announced that he would visit Hungary and Slovakia in mid-September.