Vatican
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Pope Francis is assisted at the end of his general audience in leaving St. Peter's Square March 29 at the Vatican. The pope was hospitalized that afternoon with a respiratory infection but is gradually improving, the Vatican said March 30. (OSV News/Antoine Mekary)



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One day after entering the hospital for a respiratory infection, the Vatican said on March 30 that Pope Francis is gradually improving and that his planned hospital treatments will continue.

Matteo Bruni, director of the Holy See Press Office, said in a statement that the 86-year-old pope had rested well during the night and after breakfast he read newspapers and continued his work. Prior to lunch, Bruni said the pope prayed in a private chapel at Rome's Agostino Gemelli Polyclinic, where he received the Eucharist.

Despite the generally positive stated developments in the pope's condition, the Vatican has not commented publicly on whether or not Francis will be able to participate in the upcoming Holy Week celebrations at the Vatican in the lead-up to Easter. In what is the busiest and holiest week of the year for Catholics, the pope is currently scheduled to celebrate at least seven public liturgies over the next 10 days.

Francis was taken to the hospital on March 29 after his weekly general audience in St. Peter's Square for what the Vatican initially described as "previously planned tests." Later, the Vatican revealed that the pope had complained for several days of respiratory difficulties that required hospitalization. The Vatican also noted that COVID-19 had been ruled out.

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The unexpected treatment is the first time the pope has been hospitalized since his July 2021 surgery that removed a portion of his colon, after which he spent 10 days hospitalized in recovery.

Over the last year, Francis has struggled with mobility issues, often using a wheelchair or a cane to get around, and in a January interview said that despite a return of bulges in his intestinal wall, his health issues are under control.

In reaction to the news of the pope's illness, Archbishop Timothy Broglio, president of the U.S. bishops' conference, issued a statement encouraging prayers for the pontiff.

"On behalf of my brother bishops, I invite all the faithful to pause, if possible before the Blessed Sacrament, and pray for his speedy recovery," he wrote. "May our dear shepherd and all those in need of healing experience the comfort of Christ."

U.S. President Joe Biden, at a White House event on March 29, also said he had been informed of the pope's hospitalization and asked for extra prayers for the pope's health.

"I am touched by the many messages received in these hours and I express my gratitude for the closeness and prayer," stated a message on the pope's official Twitter account on March. 30.