Vatican



Pope Francis prays before the icon of Mary, "Salus Populi Romani," in the Basilica of St. Mary Major in Rome April 1, after being released from Rome's Gemelli hospital, where he was treated for bronchitis. The Vatican said he entrusted to Mary the children he met in the hospital, all the sick and those mourning the loss of loved ones. (CNS photo/Holy See Press Office)

Cindy Wooden

View Author Profile

Catholic News Service

View Author Profile

Join the Conversation

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. Learn more

Rome — April 1, 2023
Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

"I'm still alive," Pope Francis joked to reporters who asked how he was doing as he left Rome's Gemelli hospital April 1.

The 86-year-old pope, who had been hospitalized since March 29 for treatment of bronchitis, stopped his car and got out to greet well-wishers and reporters waiting outside the hospital.

He embraced a sobbing mother, whose daughter had died the night before. He reached out to the father, too, and holding their hands, he prayed with them. The pope then traced a cross on the forehead of each of them and gave them both a kiss on the cheek.

Reporters present said he also signed the cast of a boy who said he broke his arm playing soccer.

Before returning to the Vatican, the pope stopped to pray at the Basilica of St. Mary Major, a stop he makes before and after every trip abroad and a stop he also made in July 2021 after undergoing colon surgery at the Gemelli.

"Pausing before the icon of Mary, 'Salus Populi Romani,' he prayerfully entrusted to her the children he met yesterday in the hospital's pediatric oncology and children's neurosurgery wards, all the sick and those suffering from illness and the loss of their loved ones," the Vatican press office said.

Advertisement

When greeting the reporters outside the hospital, Pope Francis told them, "I know some of you spent the night here — that's too much. But thank you, thank you for your work of keeping people informed."

A reporter for CNN asked the pope if he was frightened March 29 when he experienced difficulty breathing, which was the explanation the Vatican gave for why he went to the hospital.

The pope shook his head and said the question reminded him of something "an old man, older than me, told me in a similar situation: 'Father, I have not seen death, but I've seen it coming and it's ugly.'"

The CNN correspondent also noted that the pope did not spend his whole time in the hospital resting, but visited children in the cancer ward and even baptized an infant who was at the hospital for tests.

"But that's the most beautiful thing, you know," he responded. "I'm a priest. The most beautiful thing is being a priest."

While in the hospital, the pope was treated with intravenous antibiotics for his bronchitis; the Vatican said he tested negative for COVID-19.

Confirming what Matteo Bruni, head of the Vatican press office, had said, Pope Francis told reporters he would be at Palm Sunday Mass April 2 in St. Peter's Square.

He also told the reporters to get some sleep before the Holy Week liturgies begin.

A version of this story appeared in the **April 14-27, 2023** print issue under the headline: Pope leaves hospital, joking, 'I'm still alive'.