Vatican
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A statue of St. John Paul II is seen in the courtyard of Rome's Gemelli Hospital March 30, 2023

A statue of St. John Paul II is seen in the courtyard of Rome's Gemelli Hospital March 30, 2023, where Pope Francis was admitted March 29 due to concerns over breathing difficulties. He was diagnosed with a "respiratory infection," according to the Vatican. A March 30 update from the Vatican said the pope was "steadily improving" and continuing his planned course of treatment. (OSV News/Reuters/Remo Casilli)



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Editor's note: *This story was updated with additional information June 7 at 1:15 p.m. Central time.*

Pope Francis on June 7 successfully underwent a three-hour intestinal surgery that the Vatican described as taking place without complications.

At a brief press conference following the operation, the pope's surgeon, Dr. Sergio Alfieri, told reporters that the 86-year-old pope was alert and joking with medics.

"When is the third one?" the pope reportedly asked Alfieri, who is director of the digestive surgery unit at Rome's Gemelli hospital and who previously operated on Francis in July 2021.

Alfieri went on to describe the nature of the operation as successful, saying that the medical team — which included the care of four surgeons, five anesthesiologists and the supervision of two additional doctors — was able to remove adhesions from the previous operation and that an incarcerated incisional hernia was repaired by an abdominal wall with the aid of a prosthetic mesh.

"The pope has no other illnesses," Alfieri said, rejecting the characterization of the pontiff's operation as an emergency, saying the pope decided when the operation would take place. The surgeon was also adamant that the pope's 2021 operation to remove a portion of his colon was not related to cancer.

Francis entered the Roman hospital just before noon on June 7 for the previously unannounced surgery after making a surprise visit there the day before, on June 6, for what the Vatican described as clinical tests.

The Holy See Press Office announced the surgery earlier in the day in a communique that was released after the pope's weekly audience, stating that the pontiff is expected him to remain in the hospital for several days. The Vatican has currently canceled all of the pope's scheduled activities until June 18.

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This marks the third time Francis has been hospitalized overnight during his ten-year pontificate.

In July 2021, Francis underwent intestinal surgery where he had half of his colon removed due to a condition known as "stenotic diverticulitis," which leads to inflammation inside the intestine. At the time, Francis spent 11 days in Rome's Gemelli hospital before returning to the Vatican.

During a January 2023 interview with The Associated Press, the pope revealed that the bulges in his intestinal wall had returned, though at the time he did not mention the possibility of a follow-up operation.

Despite a brief three-night hospitalization in April for bronchitis, the pope's primary health difficulties over the last year have stemmed from limited mobility, primarily related to a bone fracture in his knee. Last year, he said he did not want to have the knee operated on due to the side-effects he experienced from anesthesia during his July 2021 hospitalization.

During his continued convalescence, Francis is expected to remain in a special 10th floor suite at the hospital, specifically built for popes.