Vatican

Vatican News



Pope Francis leaves the Agostino Gemelli University Polyclinic in Rome, Friday, June 16, 2023, nine days after undergoing abdominal surgery. The 86-year-old pope was admitted to Gemelli hospital on June 7 for surgery to repair a hernia in his abdominal wall and remove intestinal scar tissue that had caused intestinal blockages. (AP Photo/Andrew Medichini)

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Rome — June 16, 2023

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Pope Francis on June 16 was discharged from the Rome hospital where he had abdominal surgery nine days earlier to repair a hernia and remove painful scarring, with his surgeon saying the pontiff is now "better than before" the hospitalization.

Francis, 86, left through Gemelli Polyclinic's main exit in a wheelchair, smiling and waving and saying "thanks" to a crowd of well-wishers, then stood up so he could get into the small Vatican car awaiting him. In the brief distance before he could reach the white Fiat 500, reporters thrust microphones practically at his face, and the pontiff seemed to bat them away, good-naturedly.

"The pope is well. He's better than before,'' Dr. Sergio Alfieri, the surgeon who did the three-hour operation on June 7 told reporters after he said goodbye to Francis as the pontiff got into the car.

Following the surgery, Francis will be a "strong pope,'' said Alfieri, who along with the crowd surged toward the exiting pontiff.

Instead of going straight back to the Vatican, Francis stopped to pray for 10 minutes before an icon of the Virgin Mary at the famous St. Mary Major Basilica, where he often stops by after trips abroad to give thanks. Francis stayed in his wheelchair as he prayed. He also went there to pray after his discharge on April 2 from the same hospital following treatment for bronchitis.

Several people in the crowd outside wept as he left and headed for the Holy See hotel, where he lives on Vatican City grounds.

Hours after the surgery, Alfieri said that the scarring, which had resulted from previous abdominal surgeries, had been increasingly causing the pope pain. There was also risk of an intestinal blockage, if adhesions, or scar tissue, weren't removed, according to the doctors.

No complications occurred during the surgery or while the pope was convalescing in Gemelli’s 10th-floor apartment reserved exclusively for hospitalization of pontiffs, according to the pope's medical staff.

Right after the surgery, the Vatican said all of the pope's audiences would be canceled through June 18. Among the high-profile appointments Francis is expected to have next week at the Vatican are audiences with the presidents of Cuba and Brazil, although the meetings haven't been officially announced yet by the Vatican.

Commitments that have officially been announced include pilgrimages to Portugal in early August for a Catholic youth jamboree and a trip to Mongolia beginning on Aug. 31, a first-ever visit by a pontiff to that Asian country.

In just under two years, Francis had been hospitalized three times at Gemelli Polyclinic. In July 2021, he underwent surgery to remove a 33-centimeter (13-inch) section of his bowel removed because of narrowing of his intestinal. That, as well as abdominal surgeries years back in his native Argentina before he became pontiff, had contributed to the painful scarring, according to Alfieri. Then in early spring of this year, Francis was back in the hospital to receive intravenous antibiotic treatment for bronchitis, an illness Francis later said caused him pain and fever.

As a young man in his native Argentina, Francis had a portion of one lung removed following infection.

The latest hospitalization came just as Francis seemed to be walking better, with the aid of a cane, following months of often using a wheelchair because of a painful knee problem. He also has suffered from sciatica, a painful inflammation of a nerve that runs down from back to leg.

Alfieri has said that the pontiff, in choosing to have the surgery in June, made his calculations that he would bounce back in time for the August trip to Portugal.

On Friday, the surgeon seem to indicate that the pontiff, after the latest hospitalization, will adequately pace himself as he resumes his appointment-packed days at the Vatican.

"He'll listen more to us," in terms of stamina, Alfieri said.

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