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Pope Francis attends the weekly general audience at the Vatican, Wednesday, Nov. 29, 2023. (AP Photo/Gregorio Borgia)

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Pope Francis presided at his weekly audience with the public at the Vatican, but he said that he's still unwell and asked an aide to read his remarks for him on Nov. 29, a day after canceling an overseas trip.

Francis, who will turn 87 on Dec. 17 and had part of one lung removed as a young man, coughed near the end of the hourlong audience in a Vatican auditorium as he made some final comments, then stood up from his chair on the stage to give his blessing.

With a soft voice, barely above a whisper, Francis told the public that "since I am not well," his reading of his speech wouldn't sound "pretty." He then handed the printed speech to the aide.

But Francis did speak at the end of the audience, voicing his contentment over the truce in fighting between Israel and Hamas, and saying he hopes it continues "so that all the hostages are released and access necessary to permit humanitarian aid" to reach Gaza is provided.

"They lack bread, water, the people are suffering,'' Francis said.

On Tuesday, the Vatican announced that doctors had asked the pope, who has a lung inflammation causing breathing problems, to skip a three-day trip to a U.N. climate conference, known as COP28, in Dubai. The trip would have begun on Dec. 1 and have seen the pontiff return to Rome on Dec. 3.

The Holy See's announcement of the canceled trip also said that his medical condition had improved, but noted that the pope had the flu and "inflammation of the respiratory airways."

The pontiff, who has made caring for the environment a priority of his papacy, wants in some way to participate in the discussions in the United Arab Emirates, according to the Holy See. It was unclear if Francis might read his address to the climate conference by videoconference or take part in some other form.

The Vatican said the pope had acquiesced to the doctors' request "with great regret."

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Before the pope came onstage for the weekly audience, he met with members of Celtic, a soccer team from Glasgow, Scotland, which has strong Catholic roots.

"Excuse me, but with this cold, I cannot speak much, but I am better than yesterday,'' Francis told team members.

While he let a priest read his remarks, at the end, the pope praised the "beauty of playing together." The pontiff, an avid soccer fan from Argentina, told the players that he would greet them one by one.

"It doesn't matter if we have won or haven't won," Francis told the team, which was eliminated Tuesday night from the Champions League, Europe's elite soccer competition, after losing 2-0 to a Rome team, Lazio.

Toward the end of the Nov. 29 audience, circus performers came on stage to entertain the pope with an acrobatic act. Francis looked amused as he watched the performers, including acrobats and a juggler. He posed with the group for a photo.

"I want to say thanks for this moment of joy,'' Francis said, adding that the circus expresses the human dimension of "simple joy," and asking the audience to applaud.

Francis was hospitalized earlier this year for three days for intravenous treatment with antibiotics of what the Vatican then said was bronchitis.

The Vatican said the pontiff in his current illness was receiving antibiotics intravenously. In a televised appearance on Nov. 26, a cannula for intravenous use was visible on his right hand. A CT scan, performed at a Rome hospital on Nov. 25, had ruled out pneumonia, according to the Vatican.