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A woman prays as a man reacts next to the statue of St. John Paul II outside Rome's Gemelli H

A woman prays as a man reacts next to the statue of St. John Paul II outside Rome's Gemelli Hospital Feb. 20, 2025, where Pope Francis suffered a respiratory crisis requiring he receive oxygen. (OSV News/Guglielmo Mangiapane, Reuters)



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Rome, Italy — February 22, 2025
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Pope Francis suffered a respiratory crisis that required he be placed on oxygen, the Vatican said on Saturday, as the pontiff remains in critical condition at Rome's Gemelli Hospital.

The application of high-flow oxygen was needed because Francis sustained a prolonged asthmatic respiratory crisis, the Vatican said on Feb. 22. Also, blood tests showed that Pope Francis has thrombocytopenia, a low blood platelet condition associated with anemia, which required that the pontiff receive blood transfusions.

"The Holy Father continues to be alert and spent the day in an armchair although in more pain than yesterday," the daily medical bulletin from the Vatican said.

Francis will not lead the Angelus prayer on Sunday, the Vatican said, and instead the text prepared by the Holy Father for will be published at noon, and the homily prepared by the pope for the Jubilee of Deacons also will be read for him.

Catholics worldwide have joined in prayer for his health.

In the Diocese of Rome, Cardinal Baldassare Reina urged parishes to hold an hour of silent adoration before Mass. In Pope Francis' native Argentina, Catholics gathered in Buenos Aires and other dioceses, with Archbishop Jorge García Cuerva offering prayers for the pope's recovery: "so that strengthened, you can continue to serve the church."

Residents of Villa 31, where Francis often served as Archbishop Jorge Mario Bergoglio, also prayed for him.

Fr.Fr. Gabriel Romanelli, parish priest of Holy Family Church in Gaza City

Fr. Gabriel Romanelli, seen here in Gaza in 2024, said the pope sounds tired in his daily calls. (OSV News/courtesy Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem)

Catholics across Asia, including China, and in Gaza, where the pope's support has been crucial during the ongoing conflict, have also united in prayer.

Despite his serious health condition, Pope Francis continues to reach out to those in Gaza, calling the Holy Family Parish's pastor, Fr. Gabriel Romanelli, to offer blessings.

Romanelli told Vatican News that while the pope sounds tired, he sent his gratitude to those praying for him.

"We heard his voice," Romanelli said. "It is true, he is more tired. He himself said, 'I have to take care of myself.'"

Also, on Feb. 16, "Pope Francis sent a written message to my cellphone," Father Romanelli said. Parishioners knew the pope would not call, but they did not expect the message, which thanked parishioners for their prayers and conveyed his blessing.

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At a briefing on Feb. 21, Dr. Sergio Alfieri, medical director at Rome's Gemelli hospital, said the holy father's condition has improved. Yet, Alfieri added, it is best for the pope to remain in the hospital to treat double pneumonia for at least another week "because if we send him back to Santa Marta he will start working again as before."

Alfieri and another doctor gave a glimpses of an 88-year-old patient who is physically fragile, but mentally alert, joking with staff and insisting on doing what work he can manage.

"He does everything we ask him to do. He never complains," Alfieri said at the Gemelli hospital briefing.

"This morning I went in and said, 'Good morning, Holy Father,' and he nodded and said, 'Good morning, holy son,' just to show you the Holy Father is absolutely present," Alfieri told reporters at the briefing Feb. 21.

"The pope cares about the church very much, so it is clear he put the church first while also allowing himself to be treated" for bronchitis and difficulty breathing while still in his Vatican residence, Santa Marta, said Dr. Luigi Carbone, vice director of the Vatican health service and part of Pope Francis' medical team.

Dr. Sergio Alfieri, director of medical and surgical sciences at Rome's Gemelli hospital,

Dr. Sergio Alfieri, medical director at Gemelli hospital, briefs reporters. (CNS/Pablo

Esparza)

When it was clear he needed more intensive treatment, the doctors said, Pope Francis agreed to be hospitalized. He has been in Gemelli since Feb. 14.

After a week of treatment, Alfieri said, the pope's condition is much better, but he still has spots of pneumonia in both lungs and a polymicrobial infection in his airways, meaning it is caused by a combination of bacteria, viruses and mycetes or fungi.

The doctors were asked if, when Pope Francis is allowed to return to the Vatican, they would "tie him to a chair," order him to cut his schedule, read fewer speeches and see fewer people.

"I don't think the pope would allow himself to be tied to a chair," Alfieri responded.

"Absolutely not," Carbone added. "Knowing the temperament of the Holy Father, he's not someone who gives up."

Filipino Catholics attend a Holy Hour to pray for Pope Francis' health, at the Manila Cathedral

Filipino Catholics attend a Holy Hour to pray for Pope Francis' health at the Manila Cathedral Feb. 21, 2025. (OSV News/Eloisa Lopez, Reuters)

This story appears in the **Pope Francis' health crisis** feature series. View the full series.