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People join in reciting the rosary for Pope Francis in St. Peter's Square at the Vatican Feb. 24,

The faithful join in reciting the rosary for Pope Francis in St. Peter's Square at the Vatican Feb. 24. (OSV News/Guglielmo Mangiapane)

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Vatican City — February 25, 2025
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A light drizzle finally let up as hundreds of faithful headed to St. Peter's Square to pray the rosary for Pope Francis on the 11th day of his hospitalization for double pneumonia.

The wet black cobblestones shone from the bright lights illuminating the fountains and the front of the square where Pope Francis normally sits for his Wednesday general audiences. An image of Mater Ecclesiae -- Mary, Mother of the Church -- adorned with greenery and white and pink flowers took center stage.

About 27 cardinals living in Rome and dozens of members of the Roman Curia sat to the side as Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Vatican secretary of state, knelt before the image, leading a recitation of the rosary Feb. 24 at 9 p.m.

He first greeted those gathered by saying, "For 2,000 years Christians have been praying for the pope when in danger or infirm."

"Since the Holy Father Francis has been hospitalized at Gemelli hospital, intense prayer has been raised to the Lord by individual faithful and Christian communities around the world," he said. Starting with this evening, "we also want to join in this prayer publicly here in his home with the recitation of the holy rosary."

Cardinals pray for Pope Francis in St. Peter's Square at the Vatican Feb. 24, 2025

Cardinals join Cardinal Pietro Parolin praying for Francis. (CNS/Pablo Esparza)

Entrusting the 88-year-old pope "to the powerful intercession of most holy Mary," the cardinal said, "may she, our caring mother, sustain him in this time of illness and trial, and help him to recover his health soon."

Among the many Vatican officials was Korean Cardinal Lazarus You Heung-sik, prefect of the Dicastery for Clergy. He told reporters before the event that the moment of prayer was important because "you always pray for those who are not well."

"The pope belongs to all of us," he said, adding that even those who could not be in Rome were also praying at the same time. "In Korea, where it is eight hours ahead, they are praying with us."

Father Antonio Tunecas, a priest from Angola studying in Rome, said that the prayer service was a way "to be a family of the universal church, united with Pope Francis, united in prayer," asking God, "in his goodness, to offer good health" to the pope and that "his will be done."

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More than 50 Catholics from Wisconsin were in Rome for their Holy Year pilgrimage and they had been looking forward to seeing the pope at his Feb. 26 general audience, which has been canceled. Father Jordan Berghouse was leading the group from the parishes of St. James, St. Peter and St. Theresa.

"It's really sad. We were hoping to see him in person," Theresa Quedroro told CNS. "He is peace, love and joy."

The group has been following their busy itinerary nonetheless and they have been praying the rosary each day wherever they are: "on a bus, in a church, at the hotel" and on other nights in St. Peter's Square.

Sara Schmitz, Kellen Otte and Aliana Perez were in Rome as part of a study abroad program with the University of St. Thomas in St. Paul, Minnesota.

They had only been in Rome two weeks, and they said they loved hearing so many languages being spoken among the crowd and being part of such a big event in the heart of the universal church.

Cardinal Parolin leads rosary for Francis

Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Vatican secretary of state, leads the rosary for Pope Francis in St. Peter's Square on Feb. 24, 2025. (CNS/Pablo Esparza)

"It's really cool to come all together and to pray for the pope," Schmitz said.

They did not expect, however, to be interviewed by a TV crew from NBC for a segment that will be seen by 7 million people.

"You don't want this to be happening," referring to the pope being ill in the hospital, "but it feels we are here at a very important time. We hope he does better," Schmitz said.

Dioceses worldwide were also joining in praying the rosary for the pope and everyone facing illness.

Pope Francis has been an inpatient at Rome's Gemelli hospital since Feb. 14; his doctors diagnosed double pneumonia.

The Italian bishops' conference has called for increased prayers for the rest of the time the pope remains at the hospital and is coordinating a series of special Masses to involve and unite all the churches in Italy.

The hospital began a series of "spiritual initiatives" at their facilities Feb. 24: the rosary will be recited every afternoon in the courtyard outside the hospital beneath the suite of rooms reserved for the pope on the 10th floor; and Mass preceded by

Eucharistic adoration will be held starting at noon each day in the hospital chapel.

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