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A person holds a picture of Pope Francis and a rosary during a prayer service in St. Peter's Square at the Vatican on Feb. 25, as Pope Francis continued his hospitalization. March 5 marks the 88-year-old pontiff's 20th day in hospital. (OSV News/Reuters/Dylan Martinez)



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Rome — March 5, 2025
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Pope Francis' medical team has increased the pontiff's respiratory physiotherapy and active motor therapy as his doctors seek to ramp up his recovery from double pneumonia, the Vatican said on March 5.

"The Holy Father also remained stationary today without presenting episodes of respiratory failure," said a Vatican statement released at 7:25 p.m. local time.

The medical bulletin also noted that the pontiff spent the day in an armchair and engaged in work activities. The pope's "active motor therapy" (or physiotherapy) is aimed to assist the pontiff's movements after spending much of the last three weeks in a hospital bed.

As has been the case since the beginning of his hospitalization, the pontiff's prognosis "remains guarded," meaning he is not yet out of danger.

The pope has alternated between a mechanical ventilator and high-flow oxygen therapy over the last 72 hours and a similar course of treatment is expected over the next 24 hours.

Today (March 5) marks the 88-year-old pontiff's 20th day in hospital and the positive developments come right at the start of Lent, a time in which Catholics around the

world are called to prayer, fasting and charitable works in the lead up to Easter.



Cardinal Angelo De Donatis, head of the Apostolic Penitentiary, reads the homily Pope Francis prepared for the celebration of Ash Wednesday Mass at the Basilica of Santa Sabina, March 5 in Rome. The pope, who is hospitalized, delegated the cardinal to preside at the liturgy. (CNS/Lola Gomez)

Six miles away from Rome's Gemelli Hospital, the Vatican's Ash Wednesday service proceeded as planned at the Basilica of Santa Sabina.

At the start of the Mass, Cardinal Aneglo De Donatis — who served as the pope's delegate — acknowledged Francis' absence and encouraged Catholics to join in prayer for the ailing pontiff.

Related: Pope's Ash Wednesday absence looms large as Lent begins at the Vatican

"We feel deeply united with him in this moment, and we thank him for the offering of his prayer and his sufferings for the good of the entire church and the whole world,"

said De Donatis.

On a day in the church calendar where Catholics are reminded "from dust we were created, and to dust we shall return," the somber ceremony only seemed to be further punctuated by having a hospitalized pontiff unable to take part in the liturgy.

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Even so, the Vatican said on March 5 that the pope was able to participate in a private rite of blessing of the Holy Ashes, which he received, along with the Eucharist. The pope also phoned Fr. Gabriel Romanelli, the parish priest of the Holy Family church in Gaza, which he has called almost nightly since the start of Israel's siege of the Gaza Strip.

A rosary prayer service will take place tonight in St. Peter's Square for the pope's health and recovery, as it has now for the last nine evenings. Italian Cardinal Marcello Semeraro, prefect of the Dicastery for the Causes of Saints, will preside at the service.

In a new interview, Polish Cardinal Konrad Krajewski — who led the March 2 rosary service — said the nightly vigils will continue "until the pope returns to the Vatican."

The National Catholic Reporter's Rome Bureau is made possible in part by the generosity of Joan and Bob McGrath.

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