Vatican
Vatican News
Well-wishers leave devotional items at the base of a statue of St. John Paul II outside Rome's

Well-wishers leave devotional items at the base of a statue of St. John Paul II outside Rome's Gemelli Hospital March 19. Pope Francis has been in the hospital since Feb. 14. (CNS/Pablo Esparza)



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Rome — March 19, 2025
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Pope Francis is no longer relying on overnight mechanical ventilation to help him breathe and his condition continues to improve, the Vatican said on March 19.

A Vatican statement released at 6:50 p.m. local time on Wednesday (March 19) also said that "progress in motor and respiratory physiotherapy continues." The pope's blood tests also continue to remain stable and he is without fever, the Vatican said.

This evening's update is the first medical report issued by the pope's medical team since March 15, when they noted that doctors had begun progressively reducing his mechanical oxygen supply during the night.

> 'Human fragility has the power to make us more lucid about what endures and what passes, what brings life and what kills.'
> —Pope Francis
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On March 16, the Vatican released the first photo of Francis since his hospitalization began on Feb. 14. In the photo, the pontiff sits in a wheelchair in front of the altar in the private chapel of his hospital suite. Francis also appears in the image without nasal tubes. The Vatican later confirmed that doctors are also weaning the pontiff off high-flow oxygen during the day, which the Vatican reiterated in its March 19 Vatican update.

With the pope in his fifth week at Rome's Gemelli Hospital, the Vatican has refused to speculate about a timeline for his release. On March 18, Buckingham Palace announced that Britain's King Charles III will be in Italy for a state visit in early April and that a meeting is scheduled with the pontiff. That is leading many in Rome to believe the pope intends to be back at work in the Vatican by then. With Holy Week on the horizon in mid-April — the busiest season on the liturgical calendar — it's uncertain if the pope will be able to participate in the celebrations.

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Despite a workload limited to light physical activities, the pope continues to write letters.

On March 18, the Italian daily paper Corriere della Serra published a letter from Francis where he said his hospitalization has heightened his awareness to the "absurdity of war."

"Human fragility has the power to make us more lucid about what endures and what passes, what brings life and what kills," Francis wrote.

At a March 19 Vatican Mass on the feast of St. Joseph — Father's Day in Italy — Filipino Cardinal Luis Tagle prayed for the continued recovery of Francis, whose inauguration Mass was 12 years ago today.

Meanwhile, inside the Roman hospital where Francis has now spent 34 days, the pontiff concelebrated Mass for the solemnity earlier today.

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.