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In this image released by Vatican Media, Pope Francis arrives in a wheelchair at the end of a Mass in St. Peter's Square at the Vatican, Sunday, April 6, 2025, part of the Jubilee of the sick and the health workers. (Vatican Media via AP)



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Pope Francis made a brief surprise appearance at the end of a Mass in St. Peter's Square on Sunday, marking his first public event following his 38-day hospitalization for double pneumonia.

"Happy Sunday everyone," said the smiling pontiff. "Thanks a lot."

The pontiff made the unannounced appearance at a special Jubilee Year Mass for the sick, health care workers and those who care for the sick. Francis waved as the surprised crowd stood and applauded as he was wheeled to the front of the altar in St. Peter's Square.

The April 6 appearance was his first time the pontiff has been seen publicly at the Vatican since Feb. 9 and follows a 38-day hospitalization for double pneumonia where he twice nearly lost his life.

Francis was discharged on March 23 and has been mandated to spend two months convalescing at the Vatican guest house where he resides.

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While the pope's voice was strained, it sounded stronger than when he briefly greeted crowds from Rome's Gemelli Hospital on the day of his release.

The crowds roared as the 88-year-old pontiff was brought out into the sun-drenched square for his surprise return today. Francis, who continues to receive oxygen, was wearing nasal tubes for the occasion.



Pope Francis at the end of a mass in St. Peter's Square at the Vatican, Sunday, April 6, 2025, part of the Jubilee of the sick and the health workers. (AP photo/Andrew Medichini)

According the Vatican, prior to arriving in the square, Francis went to confession in St. Peter's Basilica and passed through the Holy Door for the Jubilee Year.

The pope is currently undergoing physical and motor therapy and his doctors have recently estimated that he will have a 90%-100% recovery following his convalescence.

The pope's traditional Sunday blessing and the homily were read by Archbishop Rino Fisichella, organizer of the Holy Year that is expected to bring some 30 million pilgrims to Rome. In the homily and blessing read for him, Francis referred to his experience with illness and addressed the sick who were attending the service.



Pope Francis makes a surprise appearance in St. Peter's Square at the Vatican on April 6, 2025. He arrived at the end of a special Jubilee Mass for the sick and workers who care for the sick. (AP/Andrew Medichini)

"In this moment of my life I share a lot: the experience of infirmity, feeling weak, depending on the others for many things, needing support," Francis said. "It is not easy, but it is a school in which we learn every day to love and to let ourselves be loved, without demanding and without rejecting, without regretting, without despairing, grateful to God and to our brothers for the good that we receieve, trusting for what is still to come."



Pope Francis is cheered by faithful at the end of a mass in St. Peter's Square at The Vatican. Sunday, April 6, 2025, part of the Jubilee of the sick and the health workers. (AP/Andrew Medichini)

Francis also urged the faithful not to push the fragile from their lives "as unfortunately a certain mentality does today. Let's not ostracize pain from our surroundings. Let's instead make it an opportunity to grow together, to cultivate hope."

In the traditional Sunday blessing, he offered prayers for doctors, nurses and health care workers "who are not always helped to work in inadequate conditions, at times the victims of aggression. Their mission is not easy and must be supported and respected."

In his written message to accompany the Angelus, published by the Vatican after the Mass, Pope Francis reflected on his personal experience of illness.

With time against him, Pope Francis enters a new phase of his papacy

"During my hospitalization, even now in my convalescence I feel the 'finger of God' and experience his caring touch," he wrote. "On the day of the Jubilee of the sick and the world of health care, I ask the Lord that this touch of his love may reach those who suffer and encourage those who care for them."

He expressed deep gratitude for health professionals, "who are not always helped to work in adequate conditions and are sometimes even victims of aggression," calling for resources to be "invested in treatment and research, so that health systems are inclusive and attentive to the most fragile and the poorest."



Pope Francis, seen in this image released by Vatican Media, passes through the Holy Door in St. Peter's Basilica on Sunday, April 6, 2025, part of the Jubilee of the sick and the health workers. (Vatican Media via AP)

Francis encouraged doctors and nurses to receive every patient as an opportunity to renew their sense of humanity. “The sickbed can become a holy place,” he said, “where charity burns away indifference and gratitude nourishes hope," Francis said.

Pope Francis greets the faithful in St. Peter's Square at the end of the closing Mass for the Jub

Pope Francis greets the faithful in St. Peter's Square at the end of the closing Mass for the Jubilee of the Sick and Health Care Workers at the Vatican April 6, 2025. (CNS/Pablo Esparza)

Resist the temptation, the pontiff said, to marginalize and forget those who are elderly, ill, or weighed down by the hardships of life. “Let us not banish suffering from our surroundings,” he said. “Let us not exclude those who are frail.” Instead, we must allow God’s love - poured into our hearts - to transform even suffering into a space of communion and growth.

The pope also renewed his appeal for peace in the world, urging the international community to act with urgency in places devastated by war.

"May the weapons be silenced and dialogue resumed; may all the hostages be freed and aid brought to the population," he said, naming Ukraine, Gaza, Sudan, South Sudan, Congo, Myanmar and Haiti among the suffering regions.

The Associated Press and OSV News contributed to this article.

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