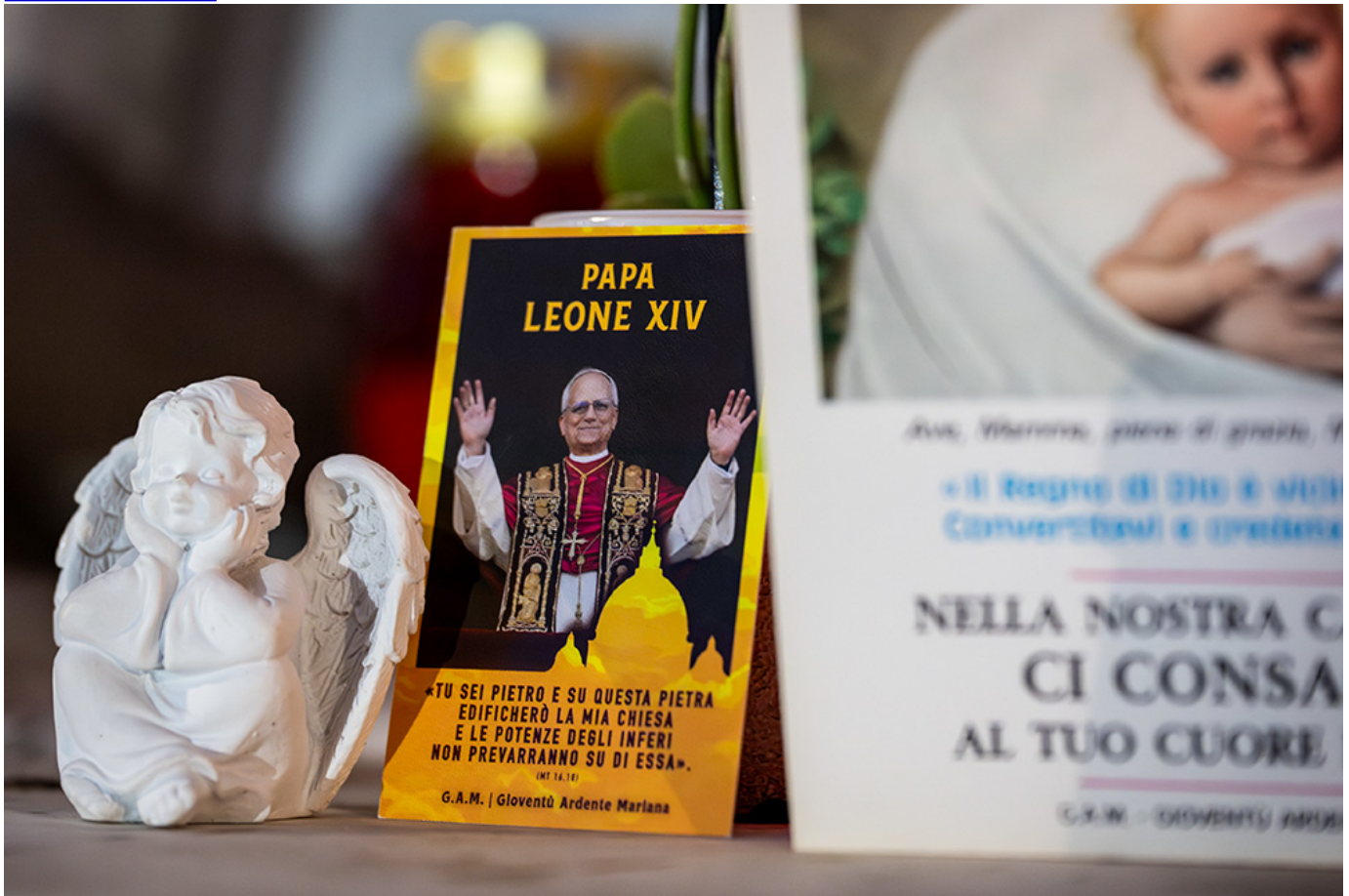


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Devotional items can be seen at the foot of a statue of St. John Paul II outside of Rome's Gemelli hospital where Pope Leo XIV underwent surgery to remove a nodule in his lung Oct. 13, 2026. (CNS/Cristian Gennari)



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Vatican City — October 13, 2026

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Pope Leo XIV was diagnosed with lung cancer after undergoing a successful lung operation on Tuesday, Oct. 13, issuing a seismic shock to the Catholic faithful and altering the image of his 17-month pontificate.

Doctors found a malignant tumor in Leo's right lung during the operation and successfully removed its lower lobe in an attempt to extract the entire tumor, the Vatican said. No information was given regarding further tests to determine how far the cancer had spread.

"The Holy Father was in the operating room for about 3 hours; the surgery itself lasted approximately 90 minutes. The procedure was successful, and there were no complications," the Vatican said in a statement.

Following a pontificate plagued by health concerns in its final years, Leo's diagnosis as a relatively young and sporty pope with no known history of smoking comes as a shock. His older brother, Louis, is also undergoing treatment for cancer, Italy's leading newspaper, *Corriere della Sera*, [reported](#) this week.

In announcing the cancer diagnosis, the Vatican has dramatically shifted in how it handles the health of popes. For years, the Vatican did not acknowledge the Parkinson's disease St. John Paul II was visibly suffering from toward the end of his life.

Leo's announcement that doctors had found a "well-localized" nodule, or small lump, in his lung and would undergo surgery to remove it shocked the world on Sunday.

Corriere della Sera [highlighted](#) the "transparent style" of the first U.S.-born pope by announcing his operation to the world.

Whereas Pope Francis' hospital visits were made public only after he was brought there, Leo entered the hospital on foot shortly after 1 p.m. local time on Tuesday, looking jovial as he greeted hospital staff and waved to well-wishers.

Changes in schedule and surprise in the Curia

Leo's operation was clearly unplanned. On the day of his operation, he had been scheduled to travel outside Rome to present a [sustainability award](#) on behalf of his undergraduate alma mater, Villanova University.

The pope also had to step away from a [highly anticipated meeting](#) of the world's senior bishops currently taking place at the Vatican to discuss his predecessor's somewhat controversial document on Catholic teaching around the family. Organizers announced that the synthesis report from that summit will not be published at its close on Wednesday evening, since the pope will review it after recovering from his operation.

But perhaps the greatest indicator of the sudden shock of the pope's operation is that Leo is not staying in the papal suite typically reserved for popes on the 10th floor of the Gemelli hospital, which is undergoing renovations, but rather in another suite on the same floor.

Cardinal Pietro Parolin, who is one of Leo's closest advisers as Vatican secretary of state, [told](#) reporters on Tuesday that "no one expected" the pope's announcement of his surgery, but that he had spoken with Leo the day before the operation and they spoke "very calmly."

Another papal adviser, Cardinal Marcelo Semerero, who leads the Vatican's office for determining sainthood, [told](#) La Repubblica that he "absolutely" did not expect the pope's announcement and "was surprised" by it, but he added that the world should follow "the tone in which he himself presented the matter" and not sensationalize it.

Questions over Latin America trip

Ahead of his hospitalization Leo cleared his schedule through Oct. 20 to allow for his recovery. But questions are now swirling around how the pope will handle his upcoming agenda, particularly a [demanding tour through Latin America](#) slotted for next month.

The pope is scheduled to travel to Uruguay, Argentina and Peru in a trip consisting of a dozen flights over 11 days.

On Monday, Cardinal Isao Kikuchi of Tokyo met with the pope and wrote in a Facebook post that the pope told him he "feels nothing wrong with his body" and that he wanted to have the operation as soon as possible in order to allow for his recovery ahead of his coming trip to Latin America.

Whether the trip remains viable after the pope's cancer diagnosis is now unknown, but Leo himself said upon announcing his surgery that he fully intended to travel to Peru.

This story has been updated since publication.

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