



This picture, released by Vatican Media on Friday, Oct. 16, 2026, shows Pope Leo XIV, flanked by his personal secretary, Monsignor Edgard Iván Rimaycuna Inga, left, celebrating Mass at the Agostino Gemelli Polyclinic in Rome, where he is recovering after having cancer removed from his right lung. (AP/Vatican Media)

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Rome — October 16, 2026

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The Vatican on Friday released the first images of Pope Leo XIV since his lung cancer surgery, showing him celebrating Mass, as doctors said that tests confirmed the "continued improvement" in his recovery.

The photos show Leo standing up at the altar in green vestments celebrating Mass in a makeshift chapel that has been set up for him in Gemelli hospital. Vatican spokesman Matteo Bruni said Leo presided alone over the liturgy, distributing Communion to medical personnel and Vatican gendarmes present.

He also delivered a homily in which he thanked the hospital staff "for the work they do every day taking care of the sick in their fragility, and in a particular way what they had done for him," Bruni said.

Bruni confirmed Leo would deliver the traditional noontime Angelus prayer on Sunday, but it wasn't clear whether he would do it from the hospital or back at the Vatican.

The Vatican had originally estimated a weeklong hospital stay, and had cancelled his audiences through Tuesday. Bruni said the pope's doctors would decide if there were any changes expected to his discharge date.

"His post-operative recovery allows him to carry out his normal daily activities completely on his own," said a medical update signed by Leo's personal physician Dr. Luigi Carbone and the head of thoracic surgery at Gemelli, Dr. Stefano Margaritora.

The 71-year-old Leo had the lower lobe of his right lung removed Oct. 13 after doctors identified a suspected cancerous nodule. The surgery confirmed he had

adenocarcinoma, the most common type of lung cancer.

A signal of all systems go for trip

Even as questions swirled about the future of Leo's young pontificate, there were signs Friday that it was all systems go. The Vatican published the names of journalists accredited to fly on Leo's plane with him during his Nov. 6-17 trip to Uruguay, Argentina and Peru.

Leo's ability to make the trip has been in question since his diagnosis, and the Vatican can change the plans at any time. But the posting of the media list signaled that at least on an organizational level, the trip was going ahead.

In the nearer term, Vatican officials were gaming out possible scenarios for the Angelus on Sunday.

Vatican media personnel were seen at Gemelli laying cables for a possible live broadcast. Such appearances have often served as a welcome confirmation of a hospitalized pope's well-being.

But with Leo's homily Friday thanking hospital personnel who had cared for him, there might be little reason for him to stay if he was medically ready for discharge.

Secretary of state suggests 'adjustments'

The Vatican secretary of state, Cardinal Pietro Parolin, said Friday he understood Leo's recovery was going well, "so we're happy."

Parolin, who was considered a leading contender in the conclave that elected Leo and was recently passed over as dean of the College of Cardinals, surprised some by suggesting Thursday that Leo's pontificate itself might need to be "adjusted" as a result of the cancer.

Asked Friday what he meant, Parolin said "adjust on the basis of his health conditions," at least "with respect to this next trip," he said.

Doctors are still awaiting the results of tests to understand the precise molecular and genetic makeup of the cancer, whether it has spread beyond the lobe and

whether any further treatment is necessary.

Cancer patients send well-wishing notes to Leo

Meanwhile, the Vatican on Friday released photos of some get-well notes that had been sent to Leo from patients at Gemelli's pediatric oncology ward, located on the 10th floor, where popes past have often visited during their own hospitalizations.

One, from 7-year-old Angelo, told Leo that he had been on the 10th floor for 36 days. "My mother and I pray for you every night. Get well soon," he wrote, with little hearts at the bottom.

Giorgia, a university-aged student, wrote to Leo in his native English, saying she had long loved learning and practicing the language.

"When I heard on the news about you and your situation, I felt it a thousand times harder, because in some ways we're going through the same thing, and it made me feel closer to you," she wrote. "I pray to God that we both heal and I ask you to pray for me, too."

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