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POPE LEO ANGELUS POST SURGERY

Pope Leo XIV leads the Angelus prayer from a window of the Apostolic Palace, following his discharge from hospital after surgery for lung cancer, at the Vatican, Oct. 18, 2026. (OSV News photo/Yara Nardi, Reuters)

Colleen Barry

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Trisha Thompson

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Associated Press

View Author Profile

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Pope Leo XIV thanked thousands of faithful in St. Peter's Square on Sunday for their prayers while he was hospitalized for an operation to remove a malignant tumor, and said he plans to gradually return to his usual duties.

The crowd erupted in cheers when the pontiff showed himself in the window overlooking the square, where a week ago on the same occasion of the traditional Angelus blessing he revealed that a nodule had been located on his lung, and that it would be surgically removed.

’’Now that this delicate phase is behind me, I will gradually resume my activities, always with God’s help and your prayers," Leo said, his voice sounding strong four days after the lower lobe of his right lung was removed.

The pontiff said the experience of the last week “has made me feel especially close to those facing illness and infirmity.” He told the faithful that he had ‘’truly felt your support,'' and expressed ‘’particular gratitude to the doctors, nurses and all the staff at Gemelli hospital'' where he was treated.

The pope paused for a moment and waved to the crowd before retreating into his apartment in the Apostolic Palace.

A delegation from Africa in Rome for a congress danced and ululated after the pope’s blessing.

‘’He was always in our prayers when he was sick, and we are happy to see him today,″ said Alain Kalembu of the Democratic Republic of Congo. ″This is an expression of our joy.″

The 71-year-old pontiff had the lower lobe of his right lung removed on Tuesday in the first major health event of his 17-month pontificate. The surgery confirmed he had adenocarcinoma, the most common type of lung cancer.

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He told a reporter in English that he was doing ‘’much better’’ as he drove away from Rome’s Gemelli hospital to return to the Vatican, after a shorter hospital stay than had initially been anticipated.

“I don’t believe it, because he was just operated on the other day,” Cosimo Mastrocinque, a retired factory worker visiting the Vatican from the southern region of Puglia, said. “It is a miracle that he recovered already.”



Faithful gather in St. Peter's Square at the Vatican for the traditional noon blessing after praying the Angelus with Pope Leo XIV, Sunday, Oct. 18, 2026, a day after he returned from the hospital, where he had lung cancer removed on Tuesday. (APGregorio Borgia)

American tourists were especially eager to pray alongside the first pope born in the United States. Marla Marsala of Michigan was supposed to attend a Mass with the pope last week that was canceled due to his hospitalization.

‘’I am just happy that we are praying with him today instead of for him, like we were before,’’ Marsala said. "It was a tough week for all of the people who love him, which are many. He seems like a very strong soul. So I think he will pull through and fight it, and succeed and keep doing the wonderful work he is doing.''

Claire Holland from Jacksonville, Florida, said she felt “very blessed” to be present for the pope’s return to his flock.

“I’m so happy that he has recovered so quickly. I think there have been millions and millions of prayers. And he is a strong, determined man, and I am so happy that he is feeling well enough to do this,” Holland said.

Leo's next major engagement is an ambitious Nov. 6-17 trip to Uruguay, Argentina and Peru, including a dozen flights and two helicopter rides to high altitudes. His surgeon, Dr. Stefano Margaritora, told Vatican News on Saturday that "there are no clinical reasons why it should not take place.”

“The Holy Father has put his heart and soul into his recovery,” Margaritora told Vatican News, adding that he expected the pope to recover fully from surgery “in another 10 days or so.”

Histological testing of the tumor and related lymph nodes was underway. The results, along with details of the tumor’s molecular and genetic makeup, will help doctors determine whether the pope needs additional treatment. Options include chemotherapy, a combination of chemotherapy and immunotherapy, or targeted oral therapy based on the tumor’s genetic characteristics.