



The St. John Paul II statue is pictured in the main courtyard at Gemelli Hospital in Rome. (NCR photo/Camillo Barone)



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The day after Pope Francis' gasping, exhausting voice made its way around the world in a short 27-second [audio clip](#), Fr. Nunzio Currao knew he wanted to share it in the St. John Paul II Chapel at Gemelli Hospital in Rome, just four floors below the papal apartment where Francis has been hospitalized since Feb. 14 due to bilateral pneumonia.

As the leading spiritual assistant to the Gemelli medical and hospital staff of more than 6,000 employees, Currao has been organizing daily eucharistic adoration in the hospital chapel every day at 12 p.m. for the past two weeks, followed by Mass, which is attended by dozens of doctors, nurses and health care personnel.

"I'd like to start our gathering by having the pope's voice echo his thank you that resounded yesterday in St. Peter's Square," said Currao, after placing the Eucharist on the altar, stepping to the ambo and putting his phone on the microphone.

As Francis' breathless words of thanks resonated at full volume in the small chapel, a doctor put his head in his hands and visibly broke into tears. Two other health care workers, clutching their rosaries, looked at each other in dismay, their faces distraught and concerned.



Fr. Nunzio Currao, chaplain of Rome's Gemelli Hospital, leads a prayer service and eucharistic adoration in the hospital chapel on Feb. 27. (CNS/Lola Gomez)





Faithful and Gemelli personnel pray in the St. John Paul II Chapel at Gemelli Hospital during a eucharistic adoration service led by Fr. Nunzio Currao, on March 7. (NCR photo/Camillo Barone)



Faithful and Gemelli personnel pray in the St. John Paul II Chapel at Gemelli Hospital during a eucharistic adoration service led by Fr. Nunzio Currao, on March 7. (NCR photos/Camillo Barone)



Fr. Nunzio Currao, the leading spiritual assistant to the Gemelli medical and hospital staff of more than 6,000 employees, places his phone on the microphone and plays the audio clip where Pope Francis thanks Catholics worldwide for their prayers for him, on March 7. (NCR photo/Camillo Barone)





The statue of St. John Paul II at Gemelli Hospital is surrounded by dozens of candles, hanging rosaries and drawings or photographs of Pope Francis with messages of all sizes, shapes and colors, wishing him a speedy recovery. (NCR photo/Camillo Barone)



Rosaries hang from the base of the statue of St. John Paul II outside Rome's Gemelli Hospital March 10, where Pope Francis was admitted for double pneumonia Feb. 14. (OSV News/Reuters/Guglielmo Mangiapane)

"These are the pope's first [public] words since Feb. 14, three weeks ago today, that he has been here in our hospital. I wanted to play it over and over again to encourage everyone to continue praying, because little by little, day after day, progress is being made, and also because this is the pope's blessing," said Currao, prior to the eucharistic adoration meditations.

The priest also said of the pope's message: "He did so in his native language. What he did yesterday was very touching. We hope that as he gets better, he will have the strength to say more."

**[Related: Pope Francis sends first audio message since hospitalization, offering gratitude for prayers](#)**



After the most recent bulletin on the pope's health conditions said that Francis has been responding positively to the therapy for bilateral pneumonia, a Vatican official said that the goal is to next move the pope to Casa Santa Marta — Francis' private residence at the Vatican — to continue his recovery and to manage the pope's return and convalescence.

Gemelli doctors have [recently been reporting](#) more positive developments in the pope's health. A source at the Roman hospital who did not want to be identified confirmed that Francis could be potentially closer to his safe return back to the Vatican, but that his conditions remain "delicate" for the moment. There have been no respiratory crises for a week, and "this is already a slight improvement," the official told the National Catholic Reporter. In the meantime, oxygen is being administered "until evening at high flow rates through nasal cannulas and at night with mechanical ventilation through a mask."



The statue of St. John Paul II at Gemelli Hospital is surrounded by dozens of lit candles, hanging rosaries and drawings or photographs of Francis with messages of

all sizes, shapes and colors, wishing him a speedy recovery, mostly written by children from nearby elementary schools in the Roman neighborhood of Balduina, where Gemelli is located. (NCR photo/Camillo Barone)

Reading from the Gospel of Luke — an evangelist and physician — during the Eucharistic adoration, Currao recalled the story of Jesus healing the Roman centurion's servant. "We invoke this healing for all the sick throughout the world, for the sick in our hospital, in particular we pray for the health of Pope Francis," he said.

Francis continues to demonstrate his commitment to the most vulnerable, said Currao, noting that Cardinal Baldassare Reina, vicar general for the Diocese of Rome, announced that the pope [has donated](#) 1 million euros to the diocese to create 20 housing units for the poor. Francis also invited Rome's priests to donate a month's salary for the same purpose.

"Who is encouraging us to do this? Who has set a good example for us? The pope! This is wonderful ... the practical side of it. We talk a lot about the poor. This same solidarity is expressed today in our gathering in intercession for the Holy Father and all the sick, so that they may find comfort, strength and healing in the heart of Christ," Currao said.

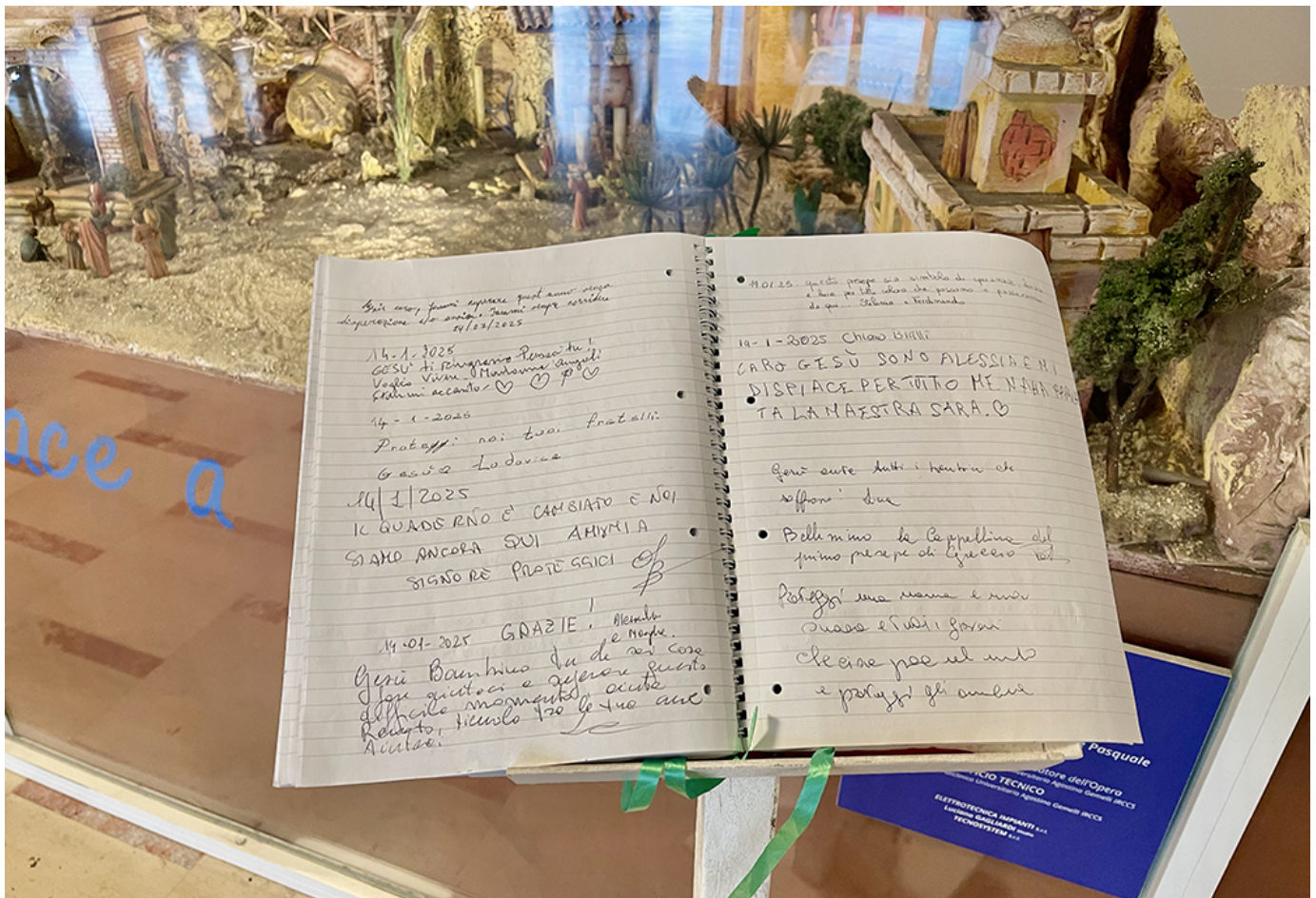
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Before concluding the adoration, he invited the congregation to entrust Francis to God's care. During the homily of the Mass, immediately after the adoration, Currao asked one last time for prayers of support for the pope.

"Let us pray that the pope, our beloved pastor, may continue to guide us with his wisdom and his fatherly love. He does so even now, as Jesus did when he was hanging on the cross invoking the mercy of God and forgiveness for his accusers and executioners," he said.

After the Mass, the doctors and nurses left the chapel and went back to their work. They politely declined to comment about what they have personally experienced while their hospital has been at the center of world news. One of them, who did not want to be identified, said that this moment has united the medical staff in prayer and hope more than ever before.





A few feet from the Gemelli chapel, a large register of more than 500 pages has been completely filled with messages and prayers for the pope. (NCR photo/Camillo Barone)

A few feet from the Gemelli chapel, not far from the hospital entrance, there is a large register of more than 500 pages that has been completely filled with dedications or prayer for the pope.

And in the courtyard just outside the hospital's entrance, dozens of people gather every day at 4:30 p.m. to pray in front of the statue of St. John Paul II, who was also hospitalized in the same papal apartment multiple times during his pontificate.

The statue of the former pope, who died in 2005 after battling Parkinson's disease, is surrounded by dozens of lit candles, hanging rosaries and drawings or photographs of Francis with messages of all sizes, shapes and colors wishing him a speedy recovery. The messages are mostly written by children from nearby elementary schools in the Roman neighborhood of Balduina, where Gemelli is located.



The statue of St. John Paul II at Gemelli Hospital (NCR photo/Camillo Barone)

"Today is already the ninth day that I have come to pray here. I like to think that not very far from here there is the pope offering his suffering for the church and for the poor and suffering of the whole world," said Sister Claudia, an 81-year-old Italian nun who lives 2 miles from Gemelli, pointing at the papal apartment's 10th-floor window above the hospital's courtyard.



She said she always wanted to walk from her congregation's institute to the hospital, even in the rain, so that she could pray the rosary in front of the statue of John Paul II on her way to and from the hospital.

Franca and Antonio, an Italian couple from southern Italy, decided to stop and pray the rosary for Francis after visiting a close friend who is battling stage 4 liver cancer. "We are praying for all the sick people in this hospital, and all the sick people in the world. We are all equal in the face of illness, and we all need courage and support," said Franca.

"The pope has always asked us to pray for him. We must do so."

**[Related: Doctors declare Pope Francis no longer in 'imminent danger'](#)**

*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](#).