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A woman and child stand in front of an image of Pope Francis outside the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico City Feb. 23, 2025, after people attended a Mass to pray for the pontiff's health. (OSV News/Reuters/Luis Cortes)

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The archbishop of Buenos Aires, Argentina, expressed love and support for Pope Francis and said the fervent prayers of the faithful can become the pure air the pontiff needs as he battles double pneumonia for the second week in a hospital room in Rome.

"I read something very beautiful, that the presence, the life, the pontificate of [Jorge] Bergoglio, Pope Francis, is a breath of fresh air. It is a breath of air for a world suffocated by violence, suffocated by selfishness, suffocated by exclusion," Archbishop Jorge García Cuervas said in a Feb. 24 Mass in Buenos Aires to pray for the pope's health. "Maybe that's why, now, he's the one who needs a little oxygen, needs us to make our prayers that breath of fresh air that reaches his lungs so that he can recover his health. Beloved Francisco, we are with you."

From Buenos Aires to Mexico City, religious and nonreligious figures in Latin America have expressed closeness to the Argentine pope after his Feb. 14 hospitalization prompted worries and speculation about the end of his life and papacy.

"He is a man who represents a great deal to humanity, even beyond the Catholic religion," said Mexico's President Claudia Sheinbaum, wishing him a speedy recovery Feb. 24.

The Episcopal Conference of Mexico called for three days of prayer for his health, including rosaries, holy hours and Mass attendance, Feb. 24-27. Cuba's bishops gathered at the Shrine of Our Lady of El Cobre, their patron, to pray for the pontiff. Costa Rica's bishops also issued a statement of "affection and gratitude," to the pope.

"You can count on our prayers and those of all the Costa Rican people, who love you and are with you in spirit," the message says.

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"He is loved by many, many, many people," Auxiliary Bishop Lizardo Estrada of Cuzco, Peru, told National Catholic Reporter Feb. 26, saying much of Latin America is with the pope in spirit.

"It saddens me that some don't like him. But the pope is Peter and that's why we have to be 'cum Petro et sub Petro' — with Peter and under Peter. This is a moment of unity. We have to pray for him at this moment and continue to draw closer to him via spiritual closeness," said Estrada, who is secretary-general of the Episcopal Conference of Latin America and the Caribbean (CELAM).

Online comments, including some from Catholics in the U.S., have wished for his death, something Mexico's Sheinbaum addressed while praising the pope.

"What is terrible is that they call themselves Christians," she said. "You should not wish anyone ill, even if they are your adversary."

In his native country, he has faced critiques that he didn't deserve, said García Cuerva, the current head of the pope's former archdiocese.

"Argentines didn't allow Bergoglio to become Francisco. We always dragged him into the mire of our sterile discussions. We have dragged him into our quarrels, wondering whether or not he was smiling at the incumbent president in the photo [op]," García Cuerva said in his Feb. 24 homily. "We wanted to teach him, almost with audacity, what it means to be pope, as if we had the manual for it. And yet he loved us, and yet he loves us, and holds us in his heart. That is the mark of a loving father."

Archbishop Jorge Ignacio García Cuerva of Buenos Aires, Argentina, celebrates an outdoor Mass in Plaza Constitucion Feb. 24, 2025, to pray for the health and speedy recovery of Pope Francis. (OSV News/Reuters/Martin Cossarini)

In Honduras, Sr. María Suyapa Cacho Álvarez, of the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul, told NCR Feb. 26 that she had seen some of the commentary, "including of our brothers and sisters in the same Catholic Church," that expressed ill will toward the pope. But she said she hasn't stopped praying for him and for God's will to be done.

"I don't feel sad, because what I feel is great hope that the Holy Father will recover, that God will let us have a few more days with him," said Cacho, who served as a facilitator at the synod on synodality.

But even if he were to die soon, she said she wants him to take part in "that beauty" with God, knowing that from heaven, he will continue to intercede for the church, for which he has done so much, she said.

"Yes, there is a little uncertainty: What will happen?" she said. "But what God has done, no one is capable of destroying it."

The Mexico City Archdiocese urged people of faith to stop speculating and pray, reminding them of something Pope Francis said in 2021: "Every time a pope is sick, the breeze, or hurricane, of a conclave begins."

"As faithful believers, we know that our most powerful weapon is prayer," the archdiocese said. "In delicate moments, it is best to focus on this and not delve into speculation or rumors or anticipate events. In times of difficulty, the unity of the Church becomes even stronger when we raise our prayers with faith and hope, trusting in the will of God and in his infinite mercy."

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