

Pope acknowledges right-wing critics

by [Nicole Winfield](#) in the [October 20, 2021](#) issue



Pope Francis attends a meeting in Bratislava, Slovakia, on September 13. (AP Photo/Gregorio Borgia)

Pope Francis has acknowledged his increasingly vocal conservative critics, saying their “nasty comments” were the work of the devil.

Francis made the comments during a September 12 private meeting with Slovakian Jesuits soon after he arrived in the Slovak capital of Bratislava. A transcript of the encounter was published on September 21 by the Jesuit journal *La Civiltà Cattolica*, which often provides accounts of Francis’s closed-door meetings with his fellow Jesuits when he’s on the road.

Francis showed his dark sense of humor throughout the encounter, particularly when a priest asked him how he was feeling. The September 12–15 Hungary-Slovakia trip

was Francis's first international outing since undergoing surgery in July to remove a 13-inch chunk of his large intestine.

"Still alive," Francis quipped. "Even though some wanted me dead. I know there were even meetings among priests who thought the pope was in worse shape than what was being said. They were preparing the conclave.

"Patience! Thank God I'm well," he added.

The comment was a reflection of the intense interest in the pope's health— and the speculation about what would happen if he were to fail—that always accompanies a pontiff but is perhaps more acute with one who has attracted vocal opposition from part of the church. After Francis's ten-day hospital stay, Italian media began speculating that he might resign and pointed out the need for norms to regulate a second retired pope.

Francis has previously said that resigning "didn't even cross my mind."

Francis was also asked about how he deals with divisions and with people who view him with suspicion. It was a reference to Catholic conservatives who have long criticized his critiques of capitalism and his focus on the environment and migrants.

Their criticism turned to outrage in July when Francis cracked down on the celebration of the old Latin mass. In a reversal of Pope Benedict XVI, Francis reimposed restrictions on celebrating the old rite, saying the move was necessary because the Latin mass had become a source of division in the church and had been exploited on ideological grounds.

In Bratislava, Francis referred to the Latin mass outcry and noted that there was a "big Catholic television station that continually speaks poorly about the pope." He didn't name it but it could have been a reference to the EWTN media conglomerate, which has been critical of the papacy and in particular Francis's new restrictions on the old Latin mass.

"I personally might merit attacks and insults because I'm a sinner, but the church doesn't deserve this; it's the work of the devil," he said. "Sometimes I lose my patience, especially when they make judgments without entering into a real dialogue. You can't do anything with that."

But Francis said his reaction is simply to preach. “I just go forward without entering into their world of ideas and fantasies,” he said. —Associated Press