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Francis may write first encyclical on poverty, sign Benedict's on faith

Joshua J. McElwee | May. 24, 2013 NCR Today
Pope Francis

Pope Francis may write his first encyclical, a high and authoritative letter from the leader of the world's 1.2 billion Catholics, on poverty, several Italian media outlets are reporting.

Additionally, the new pontiff may give his signature to an encyclical being completed on faith by the retired Pope Benedict XVI.

While new popes have been known to complete encyclicals begun by their predecessors, Italian Bishop Luigi Martella has said the retired pope is still working on the document, which Francis has then agreed to sign and promulgate.

Martella, who is bishop of the southeastern Italian city of Molfetta, says he was told [1] by Pope Francis of the plans for the two documents on a recent visit with the pontiff, who has been meeting the Italian bishops in groups over recent days for their traditional *ad limina* visits.

In a column in his diocesan newspaper this week, Martella said the pope ?wanted to let him in on a secret, almost like a revelation."

"Benedict XVI is finishing off his encyclical on faith and Francis will be putting his signature on it,? the bishop wrote. ?He intends to write his own encyclical on poverty soon: ?*Beati paupers*!?

Encyclicals are traditionally titled in Latin for the first words or phrase they begin with. *Beati paupers* would translate to "Blessed are the poor," in perhaps a reference to the Beatitudes, the set of Jesus' teachings that appear in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke.

"Blessed are the poor in spirit," states one, "for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven."

Previous to announcement of his retirement in February, Pope Benedict had designated the year 2013 as the Year of Faith and had said he planned to release an encyclical on the topic -- the last in a series on faith, hope, and charity.

Francis' supposed choice for encyclical topic could be seen by some as fulfilling part of his role as the first pope to take the name Francis after the 13th century Italian saint, who renounced worldly wealth and wore a simple brown tunic with rope for a belt and walked either barefoot or with sandles.

Additionally, the new pope has several times sharply critiqued the modern economic system, telling the Pontifical Council for Migrants Friday that "we live in a world where money commands."

"We live in a world, in a culture, where money worship reigns," the pope continued [2].

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