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Archbishop Lori: Francis reaches all, 'churched and unchurched'

by Joshua J. McElwee

Vatican City — Pope Francis has opened up new opportunities for the Catholic church around the world and has allowed for a "fresh sharing" of the faith, Baltimore Archbishop William Lori said.

Speaking in an *NCR* interview, Lori said Francis has a "distinctive" style.

"While he is doing some of the same things that pontiffs before him did, he does it with such simplicity and joy and naturalness that I think he's captured the imagination of people in the United States -- the churched and the unchurched alike," Lori said.

"I think what he's done is he's won for us the possibility of a fresh sharing of the Gospel, I think, a new openness to Christ and to the church."

Lori spoke April 26 via phone in Rome, a day before Francis canonized his predecessors John XXIII and John Paul II in front of some 500,000 pilgrims in St. Peter's Square. He gave his thoughts of that event during the interview, relating his memory serving as a secretary for the late Washington Cardinal James Hickey, who served as an expert at the Second Vatican Council and knew John XXIII.

Lori, who also serves as the chairman of the U.S. bishops' Ad Hoc Committee for Religious Liberty, also commented on reports of Francis' phone call to a woman in Argentina who is married to a divorced man and on the upcoming bishops' synod in October.

Following is Lori's interview with *NCR*, edited lightly for clarity.

NCR: What's exciting you most about the canonizations of John and John Paul?

Lori: I think it's just a wonderful thing that we're able to celebrate the sanctity and life and example of two holy fathers in my living memory.

John XXIII, who became pope when I was a child, he was -- his kindness and his joy, even then I could understand a little bit of.

And, of course, John Paul II, who became pope when I was ordained a priest just one year and exerted such a tremendous influence on the life of the church over his 27-year pontificate and, I think, helped us understand the council more profoundly, put us on the path to the new evangelization, and so many, many other things, as well.

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I know that you were Cardinal James Hickey's secretary for a long time. What do you think he would think of this?

Cardinal Hickey had, I think, the greatest love for John Paul II. John Paul II was so welcoming to bishops and cardinals when they came to Rome, and so many times, Cardinal Hickey was invited to the morning Mass with John Paul II, he preached the retreat -- the spiritual exercises for John Paul II -- in 1988, and I think felt a great spiritual closeness.

Also, Cardinal Hickey was a *peritus* [expert] at the Second Vatican Council and remembered meeting John XXIII when he accompanied Bishop Stephen Woznicki of Saginaw [Mich.] for an *ad limina* visit in 1960. And when Cardinal Hickey knelt down, or genuflected to kiss John XXIII's ring, he get a little bit tangled up in his robes, and John XXIII sort of picked him up and gave him a hug.

I think Cardinal Hickey had just a tremendous soft spot in his heart for John XXIII.

Pope Benedict concelebrated with Francis and other priests and bishops during Sunday's Mass for the canonizations. How do you see that?

Well, of course, it is unprecedented. But having said this is unprecedented, I also say that it is the sign of communion and continuity. It's a way of saying that although the styles of these four pontiffs vary tremendously, nonetheless they are each in their own way embracing the teaching of the Second Vatican Council and the mission of the new evangelization. I would say it is a sign of great ecclesial unity, and it is a tremendous example for the whole church.

There's been a lot of talk about this phone call the pope apparently made to this woman in Argentina, who is married to a divorced man. How did you hear the news about these reports about them possibly speaking about her taking Communion?

To tell you the truth, I think somebody told me over dinner one night. I guess I should have been reading the *National Catholic Reporter* and wasn't, but I missed it. And so I was like the only resident of Baltimore not to know of these things, and I think it's wonderful that the Holy Father makes calls to individuals, and that's why I always keep my cellphone on, but I don't think we actually know what was said in the course of the call. And so it would be hard to opine on the contents of the call.

What I do know is that the Holy Father has called for a synod, actually two synods, to discuss pastoral matters related to marriage. And I think that will be what reveals the mind of the Holy Father to us all.

How have you been thinking about the synod as you prepare for it? What have you thought of the reports of what Cardinal Walter Kasper said at the consistory or the process from now until October?

Well, I think it's going to be important for bishops around the world to take the *lineamenta* [a preparatory document for bishops' synods] very seriously and to contribute to and to comment upon the *lineamenta*, as I think we will be invited to do. And that would include continued consultation with those with whom we serve and those we serve.

One of the things, though, that struck me early on is first of all, the desire of married people in the pews to have their vocation, their state of life, dealt with in homilies and other forms of pastoral action. In other words, most of the people we're preaching to either are married or were married or are members of families, and so I think that we hear loud and clear the desire for more preaching about the vocation to married and family life.

And the other thing that was said is we'd like to hear more testimony from couples that are making a go of their marriages, that are happy, that are living this life. We'd like to hear their testimony much more than we regularly get to do.

It seems to be those two points should not be lost.

To hear people's testimony and to hear what they're experiencing in their lives?

Yes. And how they're living the vocation of marriage and family, and doing so successfully. Not only in the sense of having their marriages endure but also in the sense of living it as a truly Christian vocation and being formed by what Scripture and tradition says about marriage and family.

A lot has been said about what Pope Francis is doing for the church in the U.S. -- maybe not changes in doctrine, but a change in tone or a change to a more pastoral outlook. What are you seeing in Baltimore or in your role at the bishops' conference regarding what has changed or what hasn't, or what it feels like now to be a bishop in the U.S.?

First, I think that Pope Francis' style is distinctive. While he is doing some of the same things that pontiffs before him did, he does it with such simplicity and joy and naturalness that I think he's captured the imagination of people in the United States -- the church and the unchurched alike.

I think what he's done is he's won for us the possibility of a fresh sharing of the Gospel -- I think a new openness to Christ and to the church. One of the things that I was so happy to be a part of was an event we had in Baltimore called "The Francis Factor." And we had 3,000 people turn out for this -- Cardinal [Sean] O'Malley gave the main address, we had Fr. [Thomas] Rosica, we had Fr. Matt Malone of *America*, we had Helen Alvaré, and we had Kerry Robinson of the Roundtable.

What a great evening. And you could sense the great excitement in the room over Pope Francis, and the nice thing about it is it cut across the usual, stale old divides of left and right, liberal and conservative. I think Pope Francis wants us to talk to each other, and I think "The Francis Factor" was a moment when we experienced that with a lot of joy.

You experienced being able to talk with one another with a lot of joy?

I mean, first of all, to understand Pope Francis more profoundly and to all experience joy and happiness with Pope Francis. This kind of tends to open doors, and this is something that brings people together. And of course, we have to be together, united around the *kerygma* -- the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ -- if we are going to advance the ministry of the new evangelization. We have to be one so that the world may believe.

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