

# Bearing witness to life involves sharing Jesus's Good News, Archbishop Lori says

By Mark Zimmermann

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WASHINGTON – Bearing witness to life involves living and sharing the Good News of Jesus, and reflecting Christ's love to those around us, Baltimore Archbishop William E. Lori said in an April 1 talk at The Catholic University of America.

Speaking to students, university staff and guests, Archbishop Lori connected what Blessed John Paul II called "The Gospel of Life" with the New Evangelization, saying that when Catholics understand the God-given dignity of life in all its stages, they are called to joyfully witness to their faith and share it with their friends and family, and, on a wider scale, through new means such as social media.

"We need one another, we need the Church, we need the Lord if our witness to the Gospel of Life is to bear fruit, to change minds and hearts," said Archbishop Lori.

Baltimore's archbishop, Supreme Chaplain of the Knights of Columbus, spoke on "Being Proactively Pro-Life in Today's Society." His talk was sponsored by the university's chapter of the Knights of Columbus, which has 150 members.

Noting that he will be attending the April 27 canonization of Blessed John Paul II "along with 4 million other people," Archbishop Lori said, "Pope John Paul II really exerted enormous influence on my priestly life and ministry, and in particular, he more than any other helped me to see what it truly means to be pro-life."

Archbishop Lori noted that Blessed John Paul II purposely titled his 1995 encyclical "The Gospel of Life," because our faith's insights on God's gift of life and love "flow from the very heart of the Gospel," from the story of our being created in God's image, and from the story of Jesus assuming our humanity and redeeming us by his life, death and resurrection. And from that understanding, the future saint called on people to prevail over our world's "culture of death" by fostering a "culture of life" and promoting the dignity of human life in all its stages, from conception to natural death, Archbishop Lori said.

"He (John Paul II) wanted to tell us that gift of human life and dignity is good news – good news that the world wants to hear. It is good news for the voiceless, the vulnerable and poor. It is good news for the disabled and chronically ill. It is good

news for every person who faces his mortality," Baltimore's archbishop said.

Pope Francis and Pope Benedict have likewise called on Catholics to bear witness to life, he added, noting how Pope Francis has warned of a "throwaway culture" that threatens vulnerable human life. Pope Francis, he said, has emphasized that witness must take place in "the context of Christ and his love for us," which flows from Pope Benedict's point that Christians' lives are changed "as the result of an encounter with the person of Christ."

Archbishop Lori warned people to beware of labels and slogans, which often are deceptive when it comes to life issues. He noted that the group formerly known as the Hemlock Society now calls itself "Compassion and Choices," but that group only promotes the choice of taking "one's own life with or without the help of a physician." Baltimore's archbishop also pointed out that the term "pro-choice... cloaks that we're dealing not merely with a choice but a child."

Our culture also wrongly labels people who defend human life and religious liberty and oppose redefining marriage as rigid, bigots and zealots, said Archbishop Lori, the chairman of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Ad Hoc Committee for Religious Liberty who has helped lead the Church's opposition to the HHS mandate that would force Catholic institutions to violate the teachings of their faith by providing employee health insurance coverage for abortion-inducing drugs, contraceptives and sterilization procedures.

Pointing out the interconnected threats to the defense of life and religious freedom, he said, "With constrictions on religious liberty, there is a growing danger that even those who conscientiously oppose abortion on moral and religious grounds, will be implicated in providing for abortions through health care insurance plans or in the use of their tax dollars."

Those who struggle to promote life, traditional marriage and religious freedom should not let culture speak for them or define them - they should stand up "as an emergent movement in our culture that is eminently reasonable, rooted in faith, young and joyful, a movement determined to make a profound difference in our culture in the years ahead," Archbishop Lori said.

He praised the joyful and inspiring witness to life offered by a growing number of youth and young adults every year at the Rally for Life and March for Life in Washington, which he said resemble the enthusiasm and spirit of faith in the pope's World Youth Day gatherings. He encouraged young Catholics to look to Mary for strength and guidance as they bear witness to Christ and his Gospel of Life, and he concluded his talk by saying, "Thank you for your devotion to the Gospel, to the cause of life, to human dignity. You give us all so much hope for the future!"

After the talk, Lauren Scharmer, a CUA senior from Minnesota studying social work and theology, said, "Spreading the culture of life always starts with an encounter

with the person of Jesus. This (talk) serves as a reminder that what we are doing is his work, and we're not doing it alone."

Nicholas Shields, the grand knight of Catholic University's chapter of the Knights of Columbus, whose group cosponsored the talk with CUA's Catholic Daughters of the Americas and its Students for Life group, said, "I hope the take-away for most people is, we need to look at the teachings of our popes and bishops, especially John Paul II's 'Gospel of Life.' We need to really take that to heart, and go forth and evangelize."

Rather than thinking of the March for Life as a one-day event, people need to celebrate the culture of life every day, Shields said.

Angela Fragale, a CUA freshman from the Bronx studying international business, said her foundation for respecting life was built there at the university, by the encouragement and example of other students. "The March for Life, it took a lot for me to take that step and go," she said.

The message of Archbishop Lori's talk especially resonated with Peggy Stevick, a freshman nursing major at Catholic University who is a member of St. Mary of the Mills Parish in Laurel and a graduate of Seton Keough High School in Baltimore.

Growing up in a family of six children, Stevick said she attended the March for Life from the time she was pushed along the route in a stroller. Her respect for life, and her choice of a career in nursing, has been especially inspired by the example of her 25-year-old brother Ben, who has Down syndrome.

"Looking at him, I can't look at life and see anything but pure joy," she said, adding that as a nurse, she hopes to bear witness to "the miracle of life" in all its stages, from serving newborns to helping those near death.

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