

Interview with Pope Francis inspires and invigorates

By Archbishop William E. Lori

There's no doubt about it. Pope Francis has captured the attention of the church and the world. And he is doing this not only by a simplicity and humility that has earned him the nickname, "the world's parish priest," but also by taking the church back to the basics.

Through his humble actions and kind words, the pope is reminding all Catholics – including us bishops – that our first priority is and must always be to know and love God the Father who has revealed his love through his Son Jesus Christ, a love that is communicated to us through the Holy Spirit. When we have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and experience his love, we begin to radiate that love and to see living the Gospel and keeping the Commandments as a grateful response to that love and not a burden.

The Holy Father's personal simplicity, zeal for the Gospel, and pastoral love are backed up by a life of sustained daily prayer, especially meditation on Scripture, coupled with a warm devotion to Mary, the Mother of God. He has been described by one commentator as a "radically converted Christian" who seeks to have his own life completely shaped by the Gospel. And he wants nothing other than to share that Gospel with everyone, including those alienated from the church and wounded by the dominant culture.

To see this, we need look no further than the interview he did for "America" this past week.

"I see clearly that the thing the church needs most today is the ability to heal wounds and to warm the hearts of the faithful; it needs nearness, proximity. I see the church as a field hospital after battle. It is useless to ask a seriously injured person if he has high cholesterol and about the level of his blood sugars! You have to heal his wounds. Then we can talk about everything else," the pope said in the wide-ranging interview which I invite everyone to read in its entirety.

The pope's invigorating and inspiring message is as old as Christianity itself. However, this pope's unique approach to his ministry has signaled a new tone and given fresh hope to many, including those active in the faith and those no longer participating in the life of the church. He has pressed the "reset button" for the Catholic Church, reminding us that before we can grow in our faith we need to return to our Gospel roots and to be sure not to leave anyone behind.

I have found inspiration in his words as with my co-workers I seek for our own

church, the Archdiocese of Baltimore, to be a church that radiates God's love through our parishes, schools and charitable institutions, especially in these times when the primary task of the church is to re-propose the Gospel for the people of our times. The Holy Father's words and example offer both guidance and inspiration as we seek to renew the evangelizing mission of our parishes, schools and charitable outreach.

"Instead of being just a church that welcomes and receives by keeping the doors open, let us try also to be a church that finds new roads, that is able to step outside itself and go to those who do not attend Mass, to those who have quit or are indifferent," the pope said in the interview.

The church faces many challenges, to be sure. For example, threats to the very freedoms that allow us to live Gospel lives outside our churches and in the wider community cannot be ignored. But, with a foundation of love, a pastoral tone and the evangelizing spirit of Pope Francis, we can address these challenges and live lives of disciples, people of Christ and for Christ. The pope is not presenting an either/or proposition. Instead, he is re-proposing the Gospel so that we may live in the world as the Lord's disciples and members of his body, the church.

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