

He once said, “Neither theological knowledge nor social action alone is enough to keep us in love with Christ unless both are proceeded by a personal encounter with Him. Theological insights are gained not only from between two covers of a book, but from two bent knees before an altar. The Holy Hour becomes like an oxygen tank to revive the breath of the Holy Spirit in the midst of the foul and fetid atmosphere of the world.”

In June 2012, Pope Benedict XVI affirmed that Sheen had lived a life of heroic virtue and holiness and gave him the title Venerable.

On March 6, 2014, the board of medical experts who advise the Congregation for the Causes of the Saints unanimously approved a reported miracle attributed to his intercession. The miracle was reported by Bonnie Engstrom who delivered a stillborn baby on September 16, 2010. The intercession of Fulton Sheen was requested in prayer, and after just over an hour, the baby’s heart began to beat—as the doctors were about to call a time of death. The baby was named James Fulton.

On June 17, 2014, the seven-member theological commission that advises the congregation unanimously agreed with the medical team’s finding. On Nov. 18, 2019, Pope Francis called for Sheen to be beatified on Dec. 21, 2019. However, on Dec. 3, 2019, Peoria’s bishop announced that the Vatican had indefinitely postponed the beatification ceremony, in response to a request submitted by some U.S. bishops who are connected to an investigation of how the Diocese of Rochester was run while Sheen was assigned there. Many hope that a decision will be made to move Sheen’s Cause for Canonization forward soon.

Archbishop Fulton Sheen’s tomb is located in the side chapel of the Cathedral of St. Mary of the Immaculate Conception in Peoria, Illinois.

Socials with the Saints

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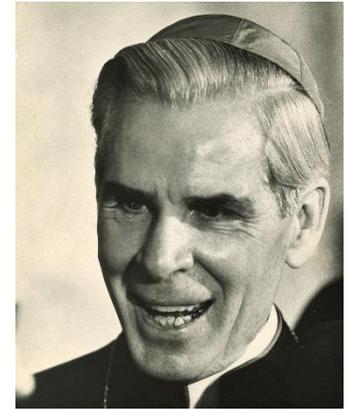
- Sources incl.: 1. Matthew Kelly, *365 Days of Inspiration: The Wisdom of Fulton Sheen*
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4. Bonnie L. Engstrom, *61 Minutes to A Miracle: Fulton Sheen and A True Story of the Impossible* 5. Thomas C. Reeves. “Fulton J. Sheen, Catholic Champion.”
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Venerable Fulton J. Sheen

Born: May 8, 1895

Died: December 9, 1979

On May 8, 1895, Peter John Sheen was born to Newton and Delia Sheen in the town of El Paso, Illinois. On the family farm, Peter would become the eldest of four boys.



The Sheens were devout Catholics. Delia dedicated Peter to the Blessed Virgin Mary after his baptism; a consecration which he would choose to renew at his First Holy Communion. The Sheen children attended parochial school, and benefited from a daily family Rosary. At the age of eight, Peter became an altar server for their parish. Once while serving Mass, he accidentally dropped and broke a vessel. Instead of shaming him, the presider, Bishop John Spalding, told the young boy that he would become like him one day.

As a man, Sheen later reflected, “Broken things are precious. We eat broken bread because we share in the depth of our Lord and His broken life. Broken flowers give perfume. Broken incense is used in adoration. A broken ship saved Paul and many other passengers on their way to Rome. Sometimes the only way the good Lord can get into some hearts is to break them.”

Peter became known in childhood by his mother’s maiden name, Fulton. His naturally thin physique made farm work very difficult, and his neighbors observed he’d make a terrible farmer. He was, however, intelligent, well-spoken, a strong debater in school, and his community recognized in him a vocation to the priesthood—to which he was ordained on September 20, 1919. He later admitted that studying for the priesthood may well have been motivated in part by his terror of trudging behind a plough for the rest of his life. While in the seminary, Sheen had ulcers, and a section of his intestines was removed.⁸

He dedicated himself to a robust education, including earning a Doctor of Philosophy degree from Louvain University in Belgium, where he became the first American ever to be invited to pursue a “super doctorate,” the *agrega en Philosophie*. Sheen earned the honor in 1925.

Testing his obedience, Sheen's bishop assigned him to a poor parish in Peoria, Illinois. He then spent over twenty years teaching at Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C. Early on, Sheen formulated a rule for himself: a minimum of six hours of preparation for every one hour of class lecture.⁸ In 1934, Pope Pius XI recognized his contributions to the Church by giving him the title of Monsignor.

As a teacher, Sheen began writing books and articles. He was invited to present on the NBC radio program called *The Catholic Hour*, produced by the National Council of Catholic Men. This transformed him into a popular preacher who traveled the U.S. and Western Europe, including an annual appearance at St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York City.

New York's bishop, Francis Cardinal Spellman, developed a strong bond with Sheen, and named him the head of the American arm of the Society for the Propagation of the Faith, which raises funds for missionary activity. Soon afterwards, in 1951, Sheen was consecrated a bishop and assigned as an auxiliary for the Archdiocese of New York.

At that time, the Archdiocese had decided to enter television, and chose Sheen as an obvious personality to represent the faith. His half-hour program first aired on a small, local network. Sheen worked on each presentation for many hours, delivering them in Italian and French to clarify his thoughts before presenting on-camera. His charisma garnered national attention in *Time* and *Life* magazines.

The program *Life Is Worth Living* began its second season on the ABC Network. Over its five-year run, it attracted over 30 million viewers, most of whom were non-Catholic. Sheen won an Emmy Award for "Most Outstanding Television Personality."

In the early 1950s, Bishop Sheen and Cardinal Spellman engaged in a bitter feud, largely over the dispersal of funds for the Society of the Propagation of the Faith. They ended their disagreement in a private audience before Pius XII, who sided with Sheen. Spellman terminated Sheen's television series and made him an outcast in the archdiocese.

Bishop Sheen participated in the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), including close work with then-Father Joseph Ratzinger, who was a theological expert on the commission for mission, and who later became Pope Benedict XVI. In a 2012 interview with Vatican Radio, the Pope

recalled how "Fulton Sheen ... would fascinate us in the evenings with his talks." In the fall of 1966, Sheen was named the Bishop of Rochester. His work to apply the Council's teachings garnered mixed reviews. *The Fulton Sheen Program*, the bishop's second TV show, ran 1961 to 1968, and was modeled closely after his first series. He continued teaching and preaching until his 1969 resignation from active ministry, which he declared was not a retirement. He was appointed a titular archbishop of Newport, Wales. Sheen led retreats and remained active in prayer and the life of the Church in New York.

Archbishop Sheen often referred to himself as a grandson of Ireland, since his grandparents had escaped to the U.S. during the Potato Famine. He appreciated Irish humor, and had a lifelong sweet tooth—favoring chocolates and ice cream. His most common struggle was working long hours. In the last decade of his life, he suffered from heart disease.

A highlight in Sheen's life came on Oct. 2, 1979, when Pope John Paul II during his visit to St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York City embraced the weakened archbishop with the words, "You have written and spoken well of the Lord Jesus Christ. You are a loyal son of the Church."

²One of the most striking aspects of Sheen's spiritual life is his daily Eucharistic Adoration hour, which he committed to for over 60 years of his priesthood. It was a little girl's faith in the Eucharist that inspired him, after he heard the story of a girl living in Communist China, when soldiers broke into a Catholic church, and arrested her pastor. The Communists opened the tabernacle and threw the Hosts on the floor, while stealing the Sacred Vessels. The imprisoned priest witnessed all of this, but what he also witnessed was a little Chinese girl, around 6-8 years old, (her name is unknown but she's referred to as "Li" or "Little Li" in one version of the story) who snuck past the guards every night for about a month. She knelt down, made an act of Adoration, gave herself Holy Communion by pressing her tongue to the floor, and she did this once a night until the night where she consumed the last piece of Host, and a soldier heard her and killed her with the butt of his rifle. After hearing this story, the little Chinese martyr was an inspiration to Sheen for the rest of his life.

Many people who worked closely with him over the years attested he never failed to keep his holy hour from the day of his priestly ordination until his death on the floor of his private chapel in Our Lord's presence on Dec. 9, 1979.