Votive Mass of the Saints in Thanksgiving for the September 24, 2026 Beatification of Blessed Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen

26th Sunday of Ordinary Time A

Homily of Bishop Barres

St. Agnes Cathedral

September 27, 2026

I returned late last night from the Beatification of Blessed Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen in Saint Louis and a Mass of Thanksgiving with Bishop Louis Tylka at St. Mary's Church in El Paso, Illinois, the Church where Blessed Fulton was baptized as a baby.

I wanted to share with you some of the very powerful stories I experienced personally in Saint Louis and Peoria in light of St. Paul's letter to the Philippians and the 21st chapter of the Gospel of Matthew.

So here goes:

I had some very powerful conversations with young people.

Story 1: An eighth grade young man from the Diocese of Peoria explained to me in detail Blessed Fulton Sheen's philosophy of the Eucharistic Holy Hour – that when we spend time in silence before the Blessed Sacrament Real Presence of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist – great rays of Sonshine flow over us to lead and guide our lives and to launch us on mission. Honestly, this eighth grader explained it better than I could and so he inspired and evangelized a Successor of the Apostles from Long Island! Middle school students here today – remember this young man and remember Saint Carlo Acutis! You can be great Catholic evangelizers and Blessed Archbishop Fulton Sheen will help you if you ask him to!

Story 2: Two winning young men, Seniors in High School from Arkansas, came up to me in the St. Louis Dome hallway and started telling me about how Blessed Fulton Sheen had impacted their lives and how they would discern their next steps in life with his intercession. They beamed when I told them that I had been baptized by

Archbishop Sheen on October 2, 1960. Then, they asked me to sign on the inside back covers of their copies of the Liturgy of the Hours – the psalms that they pray every day -- my name. But as I signed, I joined the signatures of about 15 priests. Why? Because these young men from Arkansas pray daily for these priests (and all priests) and now this Bishop from Long Island! Just as I engraved my signature on that breviary with a black pen so the witness of these two young men from Arkansas on fire with the missionary spirit of Blessed Fulton Sheen will always be engraved on my heart.

Story 3: Mark and Gretchen Heinlein are outstanding Catholic journalists at *Our Sunday Visitor.* I had the chance to have some time with them and their three children first at the Inaugural Bishop Sheen Awards dinner on Friday night and then in front of the tomb and relics of Blessed Sheen early Saturday morning.

Their family plays Bishop Sheen Jeopardy and have mastered the details of Bishop Sheen's biography through that family game.

So I asked their precocious 9 year old son Joseph a Final Jeopardy question: "Which American Bishop was baptized by Blessed Fulton Sheen?"

Like lightening, he responded: "Bishop John Barres."

We all laughed out loud and then I said without missing a beat: "I nominate the Heinlein family for a Bishop Sheen award for extraordinary Catholic family spirit, formation and catechesis!"

Then Michael the Dad said that nine year Joseph had memorized the final part of Archbishop Sheen's famous and prophetic ***Quo Vadis America*** speech!

Of course, I had to hear it and Joseph delivered it flawlessly and with dramatic aplomb! This is one year after Joseph received his first communion!

Remember this is a nine year old boy – who listens to this *Quo Vadis America* podcast over and over again!

To our children here today – you too can be on fire with our Catholic faith and inspire people of every age including your 66 year old Bishop with your love for Jesus and the Church!

I then ran into the Heinleins early Saturday morning in front of the tomb of Blessed Sheen. The body of Blessed Sheen is in the side Altar and there is a large visible relic of his lower jawbone behind the altar in honor of his eloquence. The Heinleins were very reverent around the tomb and a bit cautious. I asked them for their family Iphone so that I could take a picture of them around the relic. Any family that has a nine year old who has memorized the end of Bishop Sheen's *Quo Vadis* speech must have that photo. I wanted the Heinleins to have that photographic family memory as a point of reference and inspiration for the years ahead.

A few other memories:

Story 4: I want to thank the people who arranged the seating chart at the Bishop Sheen Awards dinner. They placed me in Table 11 next to a gentleman named Tyler Thompson. Tyler, along with Dallas Jenkins and Ryan Swanson are the writers of *The Chosen* and at one point when Jonathan Roumie was on stage, he gave this heartfelt tribute to Tyler for the beautiful Gospel inspired words he had written and that Jonathan as Jesus had delivered. It was powerful to hear and witness the exchange and the bond and trust between two Spirit driven artists!

Story 5: Just yesterday morning, I was the celebrant and homilist at a Beatification Mass of Thanksgiving at St. Mary's Church in El Paso, Illinois. I was asked because St. Mary's is where Bishop Sheen was baptized as a baby on May 12, 1895 and, of course, I was baptized as a baby by Bishop Sheen on October 2, 1960 at St. Augustine's Church in Larchmont, New York.

Bishop Louis Tylka, the Bishop of Peoria, concelebrated the Mass. There were only about 35-50 people at the Mass but Bishop Tylka and I both felt something very powerful and cosmic was happening. You could feel it in the air – the relationship between the Sacrament of Baptism and global Catholic worldwide mission in the life of Blessed Fulton Sheen and in our lives, in our moment of 21st century history.

I had to stop for a full minute during my homily because I was so moved about what was happening.

Then Bishop Tylka got up to speak at the end of the Mass. He had to stop for a moment because he was so deeply moved to announce the establishment of Blessed Fulton Sheen parish right at the Church of his Baptism, the first parish in the United States and in the World to be named for the Blessed!

One theme expressed throughout the Beatification Masses and events was Blessed Sheen's love for the Cross expressed so powerfully in St. Paul's Letter to the Philippians: [Our Lord] "emptied himself, taking the form of a slave…he humbled himself, becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."

Blessed Sheen carried the Cross of Christ with deep Catholic Faith. Sometimes he stumbled the way we stumbled. Sometimes he wanted to run away from the Cross the way that we run away. But deep down existentially, he understood that the Cross was the path to holiness in this life and the path to Heaven.

Blessed Sheen writes: "Unless there is a Good Friday in our lives, there will never be an Easter Sunday; unless there is a cross, there will never be an empty tomb; unless there is the torn flesh, there will never be the glorified body. The crown of thorns is the condition of the halo of light, and every resurrection presupposes a death, as every death is the antecedent of resurrection. Unless we die to the world, we shall never live to Christ; unless we lose our life, we shall never save it. The whole cross is easier to carry than half of it; it is only its splinters and its shadows which frighten…The symbol of love as Christ understands it, is the cross with its arms outstretched even unto eternity to embrace all souls within its grasp."[1]

In Matthew 21, the Lord presents us with two sons with two very imperfect responses to their father. Their father says: Go to work in my Vineyard today! One son diplomatically and insincerely says yes and never actually goes. The other son rebelliously and immediately says no but then reconsiders later and goes to work in the Vineyard.

Two sons. Two imperfect responses that have been playing out in family life for centuries!

Bishop Sheen urges us to make an examination of conscience in regard to our response to God's love and God's will in our lives.

He writes: "Few of us really know ourselves, and few ever want to know. We imagine ourselves to be very different from what we are. We wear a mask in public but seldom take it off when we are alone. Hence we think that our critics *always* misjudge us. We believe our friends are right when they praise us, and wrong when

[1] Bishop Sheen, *The Life of All Living: The Philosophy of Life*, (Garden City, NY: Garden City Books, 1951), 148-150.

they criticize us. Most of our acquaintances could tell us faults about ourselves which we would deny most vociferously, and yet they might be only too true."[2]

So with the inspiration of Matthew 21 and Blessed Fulton Sheen, let's begin again and let the Kingdom of God be first in our lives.

Let's say yes with our lips and yes with our actions and make that ***Yes*** a Hymn to the Glory of God.

Our Lady, Queen of Contemplatives and Queen of Missionaries, pray for us!

Blessed Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen, pray for us and intercede for us!

[2] Bishop Sheen, *Love One Another*, (New York: P.J. Kenedy and Sons, 1944), 79.