Centenary Celebration of World Mission Sunday 2026

Homily of Bishop John Barres, Bishop of Rockville Centre, Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Pontifical Mission Societies USA, Vice Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Catholic University of America

St. Agnes Cathedral, Diocese of Rockville Centre

(Long Island, New York)

October 18, 2026

Today, in union with our global missionary Holy Father Pope Leo XIV, we celebrate the 100th anniversary of Pope Pius XI establishing World Mission Sunday and we celebrate the global missionary spirit and dedication of the Pontifical Mission Societies.[1]

How much has changed in one hundred years! How much growth has occurred!

Consider for a moment the extraordinary fruits of a century of missionary prayer, sacrifice, and generosity.

In 1925, the Church's mission territories counted approximately 9.6 million Catholics, 627 parishes, and fewer than 10,000 priests.

Today, those territories are home to more than 346 million Catholics, over 41,000 parishes and more than 100,000 priests. That represents a thirty-sixfold increase in

[1] In his October 18, 2026, *Message for the 100th World Mission Day 2026*, our Holy Father Pope Leo XIV writes: "In this regard, I would like to thank the Pontifical Mission Societies for their service to missionary cooperation, which I experienced with gratitude during my ministry in Peru. These Societies — Propagation of the Faith, Holy Childhood, Saint Peter the Apostle, Saint Peter the Apostle and Pontifical Missionary Union — continue to nurture and form missionary awareness for the faithful of all ages, and to promote a network of prayer and charity that connects communities throughout the world. Here, it is worth noting that the founder of the Society of the Propagation of the Faith, Blessed Pauline Marie Jaricot, established the Living Rosary two hundred years ago. Even today it continues to bring together many of the faithful throughout the world to pray for every spiritual and missionary need. It is also worth remembering that, following a proposal from the Society of the Propagation of the Faith, Pius XI established World Mission Day in 1926. The annual offerings collected on this day are distributed by the Society, on behalf of the Pope, to support the various needs of the Church's mission. The four Societies, therefore, as a whole and each in its own specificity, still play a valuable role for the entire Church. They are a living sign of unity and ecclesial missionary communion. I invite everyone to work with them in a spirit of gratitude."

the Catholic population. Today, roughly four out of every ten Catholic baptisms worldwide take place in mission territories, which are also home to nearly half of the Church's seminarians.

These are not merely statistics. They represent millions of souls encountering Jesus Christ through Baptism, receiving the sacraments, and answering the call to priestly and religious vocations. They are living testimony to what the Holy Spirit accomplishes through the missionary communion of the Church.

As we celebrate this mighty work of the Holy Spirit, with grateful hearts, we continue to rejoice in the September 24, 2026, beatification of Blessed Archbishop Fulton Sheen.

Blessed Fulton always taught us about our baptismal call to holiness and mission, our baptismal call to connect our daily evangelization and mission as Catholics to Catholic worldwide mission on every continent.

The second collection today, taken here and in churches around the globe, is for World Mission Sunday and benefits the global missionary work of the Pontifical Mission Societies.

In honor of the beatification of Blessed Fulton Sheen and on the 100th anniversary, this would be a great year to set a Diocese of Rockville Centre record on the World Mission Sunday collection.

Thank you all for your important and sacrificial support of this collection and your support of Catholic global worldwide mission.

If we were to choose one gospel verse that characterized the life and ecclesial mission of Blessed Fulton Sheen, it would certainly be the missionary mandate of Matthew 28 we just heard: “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age.”

As we rejoice and continue to give thanks for this great moment of American and global Catholic Church history and celebrate the spirit of worldwide Catholic

mission[2] that Blessed Fulton Sheen lived so courageously and so compellingly, we ask that Blessed Sheen intercede for a new creative Pentecost for global worldwide Catholic mission.

Bishop Sheen's message to us while he was living and his message to the 21st century is really quite simple yet profound.

The evangelization of our parishes cannot be separated from the evangelization of continents.

Parish evangelization inspires global Catholic worldwide mission and Catholic global worldwide mission inspires parish evangelization.

When Catholics on Long Island and throughout the world pray, sacrifice, and carry Crosses for Catholic mission on every continent, we evangelize much more effectively our spouses, our children, our families, our parishes, our secular networks, workplaces and forums.

The heart of every baptized evangelizing Catholic must be as large as the world!

As you know, I am personally very invested in the Beatification of Bishop Sheen and this 100th anniversary of World Mission Sunday and the World Mission Sunday second collection.

The reason is simple.

I was baptized by Bishop Sheen on October 2, 1960, at St. Augustine's parish in Larchmont, New York at the time that my convert Protestant minister father, Oliver Barres, was working for the Bishop as a writer for the Propagation of the Faith in New York City.

I can only imagine Bishop Sheen's riveting voice saying, *"I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."* as he poured water over my head in the presence of my parents, godparents, four older sisters, and family friends.

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[2] See Bishop John Barres' article, "Embracing the Missionary Call," in *Mission: A Magazine for the Pontifical Mission Societies*, in the Fall 2024 issue. Bishop Barres pays tribute to Bishop Sheen's global missiology in the context of reviewing fundamental Catholic teaching on the missions.

Providentially, Bishop Sheen was not only baptizing me but, in a certain sense, sending me out as a future Successor of the Apostles and Diocesan Bishop on global Catholic worldwide mission.

And if you are a Catholic Bishop who was actually baptized by Bishop Sheen, you have a particular and humble responsibility to be a Spirit-driven instrument of the Catholic evangelization of Long Island, metro New York and the entire world.

By God's providence, at this moment of Bishop Sheen's beatification, I now serve as the Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Pontifical Mission Societies in the United States and the Vice Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Catholic University of America. Bishop Sheen was a great champion of both the Pontifical Mission Societies and the Catholic University of America.

On Saturday, September 26, 2026, I was the celebrant and homilist at a beatification Mass of Thanksgiving at St. Mary's Church in El Paso, Illinois, where Bishop Sheen was baptized on May 12, 1895.

Bishop Louis Tylka, the Bishop of Peoria, concelebrated the Mass with me. There were only about 35-50 people at the Mass but Bishop Tylka and I both felt something very powerful and cosmic was happening.

After all, Bishop Sheen himself was cosmic!

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 by 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!

On this historic World Mission Sunday, we have another special reason to give thanks to God. Just yesterday, on the eve of this centennial celebration, our Holy Father Pope Leo XIV was cleared to leave Rome's Gemelli Hospital following surgery on his lung. We give thanks for his recovery, for the doctors and medical

professionals who have cared for him, and for the gift of his life and ministry to the universal Church. How providential that this first pope in modern history to have served for years as a missionary should return to the Vatican on the eve of World Mission Sunday!

In his special video message for this centenary, Pope Leo tells us that the prayers offered for the missions helped prepare his own heart to answer Christ's call as an Augustinian missionary, and that the prayers and sacrifices of the faithful later sustained his missionary ministry in Peru.

Today, as we celebrate the extraordinary fruits of a century of missionary solidarity, let us unite our prayers in thanksgiving for our Holy Father, asking the Lord to grant him continued healing, renewed strength and many fruitful years of missionary leadership of the Church.

And let's remember on this World Mission Sunday that Pope Leo XIV is calling us to "missionary conversion."[3]

He is calling us personally, but he is calling our Catholic parishes, our Catholic schools, our Catholic universities, our Catholic hospitals, and the witness of our Catholic laity in the secular public square to "missionary conversion"[4] and full fidelity to the liberating truths of our Catholic Faith.

Blessed Fulton Sheen has some powerful insights on personal conversion and the Church's ongoing missionary conversion in history.

In his classic work, *Peace of Soul*, he writes:

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[3] See Pope Leo XIV, *Address to Participants in the General Assembly of the Pontifical Mission Societies*, June 1, 2026: "My dear brothers and sisters, the Second Vatican Council insisted that the "Church on earth is by her very nature missionary since, according to the plan of the Father, it has her origin in the mission of the Son and the Holy Spirit" (*Ad Gentes*, 2). Mindful of this, I invite you all to appreciate the urgency of embracing an **ongoing missionary conversion** and to look together for ways of being a missionary Church for the healing of our world, so fraught with tensions, conflicts and wars. In this important task, the work of the Pontifical Mission Societies remains essential. Let us therefore continue our missionary journey with joy and renewed zeal. In all that we do for the work of evangelization, may we always place Jesus Christ at the center, embracing the beautiful Gospel principle expressed by John the Baptist: "He must increase, but I must decrease" (*Jn* 3:30). Entrusting all of you, your collaborators, benefactors and all who share in this vital missionary work to the maternal intercession of the Mother of God, Mary - Queen of Missions - and that of all the missionary saints, I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing." (Emphasis added.)

"Every conversion starts with a crisis: with a moment or a situation involving some kind of suffering, physical, moral, or spiritual; with a dialectic, a tension, a pull, a duality, or a conflict. This crisis is accompanied, on the one hand, by a profound sense of one's own helplessness and, on the other hand, by an equally certain conviction that God alone can supply what the individual lacks…The soul becomes the battlefield of a civil war during a conversion…Not until the tug of war begins, with the soul on one end of the rope and God on the other, does true duality appear as the condition of conversion. This crisis in the soul is the miniature and cameo of the great historical crisis of the City of God and the City of Man…What matters is struggle between the soul and God, with the all-powerful God never destroying human freedom. This is the greatest drama of existence."[5]

On this World Mission Sunday and in honor of Blessed Fulton Sheen and his intercession for each one of us and for the global mission of the Church, let's allow the Holy Spirit to lead us to deeper personal conversion and holiness.

Let's allow the Tongues of Flame and the driving winds of the Holy Spirit to purify and deepen the "missionary conversion" of every dimension of the Church's daily life in this 21st century.

And let's remember our Lord's words in Matthew 28: "And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age."

With Pope Leo, we pray: "Mary, Queen of Missions, accompany our work of evangelization in every corner of the earth: make us instruments of peace, and grant that the whole world may recognize in Christ the light that saves. Amen."[6]

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[5] Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen, *Peace of Soul*, (Garden City, NY: Garden City Books, 1951), 232-233.
[6] Pope Leo XIV's October 18, 2026, *Message for the 100th World Mission Day 2026.*