

By Monica Yehle

Love for the Church and Mission

Archbishop Sheen's priestly service

A letter to the New York national office of the Society for the Propagation of the Faith from Malaysia had but one message -- an affirmation of the ongoing inspiration of the late Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen.

"I have just finished reading *Treasure in Clay*," noted the letter's writer, a retired schoolteacher. The reference was to the autobiography of Archbishop Sheen, former national director of the Propagation of the Faith (1950 to 1966). "I pray the Holy Spirit will reveal to me if there is any treasure in me."

Without question, the priestly ministry of Archbishop Sheen -- through his teaching at the Catholic University of America, decades on television and radio, and time leading the U.S. Church's worldwide missionary outreach -- influenced thousands.

"I can never remember a time in my life when I did not want to be a priest," he penned in that same autobiography. Today, 30 years after his death, as his cause for canonization moves forward (see "Saintly Status"), a look at his life reveals that he treasured most the Church and her Missions.

'A Loyal Son'

"You have written and spoken well of the Lord Jesus. You are a loyal son of the Church." Such was the message the late Pope John Paul II offered Archbishop Sheen in St. Patrick's Cathedral on Oct. 2, 1979; just two months later, on Dec. 9, Archbishop Sheen went home to the Lord.

During his lifetime, he was most definitely a man of the Church. In his writings -- some 70 books and numerous newspaper columns, articles and letters -- and through the television and radio media, he touched many as he transmitted the teachings of the Church.

Retired Auxiliary Bishop Ignatius C. Wang of San Francisco studied for three years after his ordination at St. Peter's College in Rome. He remembers Archbishop Sheen's yearly visit to that Propagation of the Faith college. A native of China, Bishop Wang said that those visits would "fill him with much hope."

"He would always tell us mission priests that we were the Church of tomorrow," he recalled.

"There was so much hope in that message."

"A priest never touches reality until he touches a soul," Archbishop Sheen said. His converts numbered in the hundreds, ranging from the ordinary to the extraordinary. Among the more

famous were Congresswoman Clare Boothe Luce and Heywood Campbell Broun, newspaper columnist, author, and one of the founders of the American Newspaper Guild. Once asked how many converts there actually were, Archbishop Sheen replied: "I have never counted them. I am always afraid that if I did count them, I might think I made them, instead of the Lord."

Msgr. Andrew Connell, former archdiocesan director for the Propagation of the Faith in Boston, Mass., recalled the Good Friday when Archbishop Sheen preached the seven last words of Christ before a record crowd in that city.

"He wanted nothing on the stage but a large crucifix and a kneeler," Monsignor Connell said, remembering the archbishop's words: "I will only kneel; I will not sit. Our Lord did not relax on the Cross." The service lasted more than three hours. The night before, Msgr. Connell was told, Archbishop Sheen stayed up all night in adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, in prayer. (See also "Archbishop Sheen's Hour.")

At Archbishop Sheen's funeral Mass in St. Patrick's Cathedral, the man who succeeded him as national director of the Propagation of the Faith, the late Archbishop Edward T. O'Meara, eulogized his predecessor and his friend.

"A voice is silent in the midst of the Church and in our land, the like of which will not be heard again in our day," he said. "The vocation of Fulton Sheen is consummated; he has responded with one final 'yes' to the call of God."

Pushing Back the Classroom Walls

Archbishop Sheen -- asleep on a concrete floor.

It was on a visit to Uganda, East Africa, when Archbishop Sheen stayed in a small center where priests would come after being out in the Missions for a long period of time. That particular night, there were so many missionaries coming and going that he found himself a spot on the floor near the front door. And slept.

"About four o'clock I was awakened by one of the priests leaving," he wrote in his autobiography. "He carried a large sack on his back. 'Father, where are you going?' I inquired. 'I don't know,' he said. 'When will you be back?' 'In about six months.' He was on his way to establish a new missionary station." Archbishop Sheen saw him off from his "bed" on the center's floor.

It was in 1950 that Pope Pius XII asked this priest from Peoria to fill the office of national director of the Propagation of the Faith. For a quarter of a century before that, he had been a preacher, a teacher, a lecturer, an instructor of converts. He inspired men and women he was instructing about Christ and the Church; he spent hours behind a microphone. But with that 1950

appointment, Archbishop Sheen said, he would be "opening the narrow door of a classroom to the world."

He narrated films on the Missions to help people see "in action" the missionary work that so needed their participation. He shared with readers of the magazine he founded, MISSION, still published today, moving letters that came from missionaries. He visited mission lands all over the world, and when at home, kept the great needs he saw never far from his mind. Each afternoon, kneeling, he led his office staff in praying the Rosary for the Missions. Archbishop Sheen also took time to offer co-workers spiritual commentary on certain passages from the Bible; as national director he estimated going through practically the whole of Scripture in those office meditations.

"My greatest love has always been the Missions of the Church," he would come to say. "The 'heralds of the Gospel' brought inspiration to my life and to my office and to my pen."

There will be a special Mass to mark the 30th anniversary of Archbishop Sheen's death on December 9 of this year at St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York City, with Archbishop Timothy M. Dolan as main celebrant and homilist. On that day there will be a celebration once again of Archbishop Sheen's life message -- his treasure of love for the Church and the Missions. TP

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Saintly Status

On Sept. 14, 2002, the Congregation for the Causes of Saints in Rome, Italy, gave permission to Bishop Daniel Jenky, C.S.C., of Peoria, Ill., to officially open the cause for canonization of Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen. (Archbishop Sheen was born, raised and later ordained to serve as a priest in that diocese.) As a result, he is now referred to as "Servant of God."

In the summer of 2006, documentation of two alleged miracles attributed to Archbishop Sheen was sent to Rome, furthering the cause for his canonization. In February 2008, a Mass in Peoria, at the Cathedral of St. Mary of the Immaculate Conception, celebrated the end of the diocesan phase of the inquiry into the life and works of Archbishop Sheen.

For more information, please visit www.archbishopsheencause.org.

Archbishop Sheen's 'Hour'

By Monsignor John E. Kozar

If we try to characterize Fulton Sheen and look at what really set him apart as a servant of God, as a holy man, as a priest's priest, I would say far and away the greatest sign of his holiness would be his unwavering devotion to the Eucharist. Each day included a Holy Hour in front of the

Blessed Sacrament -- no matter where he was. He was never too busy, tired or preoccupied to set aside this hour of quality time before our Lord in His Eucharistic presence.

Prayer for him involved listening to God. He incorporated this feature, this listening, into his Holy Hour.

Today, as we look to the life of Fulton Sheen, we have a notable example, especially for us priests. In fact, our culture, our society, needs his example, and we need to do our very best as he taught us not just to talk to God, but also to listen to Him as He speaks to us, especially through the Eucharistic presence of His Son. Archbishop Sheen was such a popular orator and speaker because he was first such an intense listener to the voice of our Lord in the Eucharist.

In his more than 60 years of priestly service, he demonstrated what our Holy Father, Pope John Paul II, privately said to him in a very emotional embrace in St. Patrick's Cathedral only a few months before he died. "You have written and spoken well of the Lord Jesus. You are a loyal son of the Church."

We give thanks to Almighty God for the life of Archbishop Sheen, a holy man and a servant of God. And we place before the Lord the cause for Archbishop Sheen's canonization. May each of us, as priests, incorporate into our lives and ministry all of the good that Archbishop Sheen has taught and left as his legacy.

MSGR. KOZAR is national director of the Society for the Propagation of the Faith, a Pontifical Mission Society, as was Archbishop Sheen.

Tags: [Africa](#), [Archbishop Fulton Sheen](#), [foreign missions](#), [Monica Yehle](#)

By Father Patrick M. Carrion

The Year of the Priest: Rekindling the Gift

Mothers get a day per year to be honored and lifted up on a pedestal. Fathers, like their gender counterpart, receive one day as well. It seems most people only get a day. Secretaries (or office support staff) get a day in April; Grandparents just got their day a few weeks ago. Nurses are honored during National Nurses Week with one day of the week set aside as the day for Nurses.

Priests, though, we receive a full year. St. Paul just received a whole year too. Before we priests let this go to our heads that we are deserving like St. Paul or are 365 times more deserving than nurses, grandparents, mothers and fathers, let us remember that, from a Chinese calendar perspective, this is also the Year of the Ox.

We are given this year not for parishioners to honor us as mothers are honored by their children through a nice dinner out or dads by receiving another box of golf balls or tie. We are given this year to reflect and rekindle the meaning that the priesthood is for us. Daily, mothers and fathers are formed by the very ones whom they are forming, being reminded continuously what it means to be a parent. They are reminded to be that nurturer, provider, that place of security and comfort for their child. Nurses as they administer medicine, walk floors, comfort patients 24/7, 365 days a year are reminded of their role in the healing process. We priests need this opportunity to reflect and rekindle who and what we are as we go about doing the work we promised to do.

Each priest on his anniversary day may reminisce about his ordination, the festivities, the laying on of hands that happened so many years ago. Do we ever go beyond the images we have of our ordination and remember the words that were said? In the presence of the Bishop and all the faithful, each priest-to-be expresses his resolve to carry out the office of priesthood using these or similar words, depending on the era of the ordination:

Do you resolve, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to discharge without fail the office of priesthood in the presbyteral rank, as worthy fellow workers with the Order of Bishops in caring for the Lord's flock?

Do you resolve to exercise the ministry of the word worthily and wisely, preaching the Gospel and teaching the Catholic faith?

Do you resolve to celebrate faithfully and reverently, in accord with the Church's tradition, the mysteries of Christ, especially the sacrifice of the Eucharist and the Sacrament of Reconciliation, for the glory of God and the sanctification of the Christian people?

Do you resolve to implore with us God's mercy upon the people entrusted to your care by observing the command to pray without ceasing?

Do you resolve to be united more closely every day to Christ the High Priest, who offered himself for us to the Father as a pure sacrifice, and with him to consecrate yourselves to God for the salvation of all?

I probably should put these questions on my bathroom mirror instead of the post-it note that reminds me what I think is the primary "to do" for the day, lest I forget. If only I would remember "to do" these questions each day, since I did promise "I do, with the help of God." These questions make for a great daily examination of conscience, if not a full week's retreat.

I imagine most married couples ask themselves the question, "Would I say 'I do' all over again?" Maybe the marriage ritual during the Statement of Intentions should add the phrase "with the help of God" because only these kinds of life commitments can be fulfilled with God's help. It is good to go back to the beginning and think, "Why did I say 'I do' to this?" and wonder, "Would I do it all over again?" Look at some of the phrases from the above questions:

- to discharge without fail the office,
- to exercise the ministry of the word worthily and wisely,

- to celebrate faithfully and reverently,
- to pray without ceasing,
- to consecrate yourself to God for the salvation of all.

When I see these phrases listed so poignantly, stripped of all the flowery language that surrounds them in the ritual, it is a good thing we are having this whole Year of the Priest as it will take me a year to get myself back on track. I look at these phrases and see many of the not so worthy, not so faithful, not so reverent, not so prayerful and not so consecratory moments of my own years.

We all have heard the wise answer when someone asks a married couple, "When did you decide to get married?" or asks a priest, "When did you decide to be a priest?" and the sage answer is "This morning, again." It demands constant vigilance to live out a life commitment, a decision each day to say yes. The mark of ordination may be indelible and you may be a priest forever, but that mark does get blurred if care is not taken. It is so easy just to get into the routine, the rhythm, to go through the motions that we miss a lot along the way. This does not mean that one is not happy nor does it mean that one is burned out. We still are doing good work, but the magnitude of the workload at times leaves little time to reflect. The Church gives us this year as a gift, forcing us or giving us permission to reflect worthily, wisely, faithfully, reverently, prayerfully in order to consecrate our lives once again.

The dwindling numbers of priests in the United States and the increasing number of Catholics at the same time is not news to any of us when we review reports from such organizations as CARA (Center for the Applied Research in the Apostolate). These statistics show that there will only be an increased workload as fewer priests minister to more Catholics. This workload increases the likelihood that the routine, rhythm and the going-through-the-motions style of ministry will only increase. The need to care for the basics (the next funeral, the upcoming wedding, the next appointment) absorbs so much of the day-to-day routine ministry that little time is left for developing one's ministry or, even more important, developing one's call to the priesthood. Priests do an excellent job of maintaining the level of service that parishioners have come to expect when the ratio of priest to people has changed significantly over the years. The danger is that the constant doing impedes the constant conforming my life to the High Priest.

The five questions stated earlier from the ordination rite were once phrased differently: "Are you resolved?" and then answered, "I am," ending the last question again with "I am, with the help of God." This simple shift of these two-letter words from "am" to "do" does shed a different reflection as we declare our intention to undertake this office. Our lives are a constant balance of the "doing what we have become" and "becoming what we do."

The prayer at ordination as the priest receives the paten and chalice with the bread and wine before the consecration reminds us about this balance that is always before us.

Receive the oblation of the holy people, to be offered to God.
Understand what you do, imitate what you celebrate, and conform your life to the mystery of the Lord's cross.

The understanding, the imitating, and the conforming are ongoing aspects of our lives. We are always doing, but are we always understanding? We celebrate the sacred mysteries daily but are we imitating and conforming our life to Christ as we do so?

This Year of the Priest gives us the permission to pause in the midst of the entire ministry we give to God's people, to minister to ourselves as well. St. Timothy in his second letter says to us, "I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you" (2 Tm 1:6). TP

Tags: [Father Patrick M. Carrion](#), [Priestalk](#), [vocations](#), [year of the priest](#)