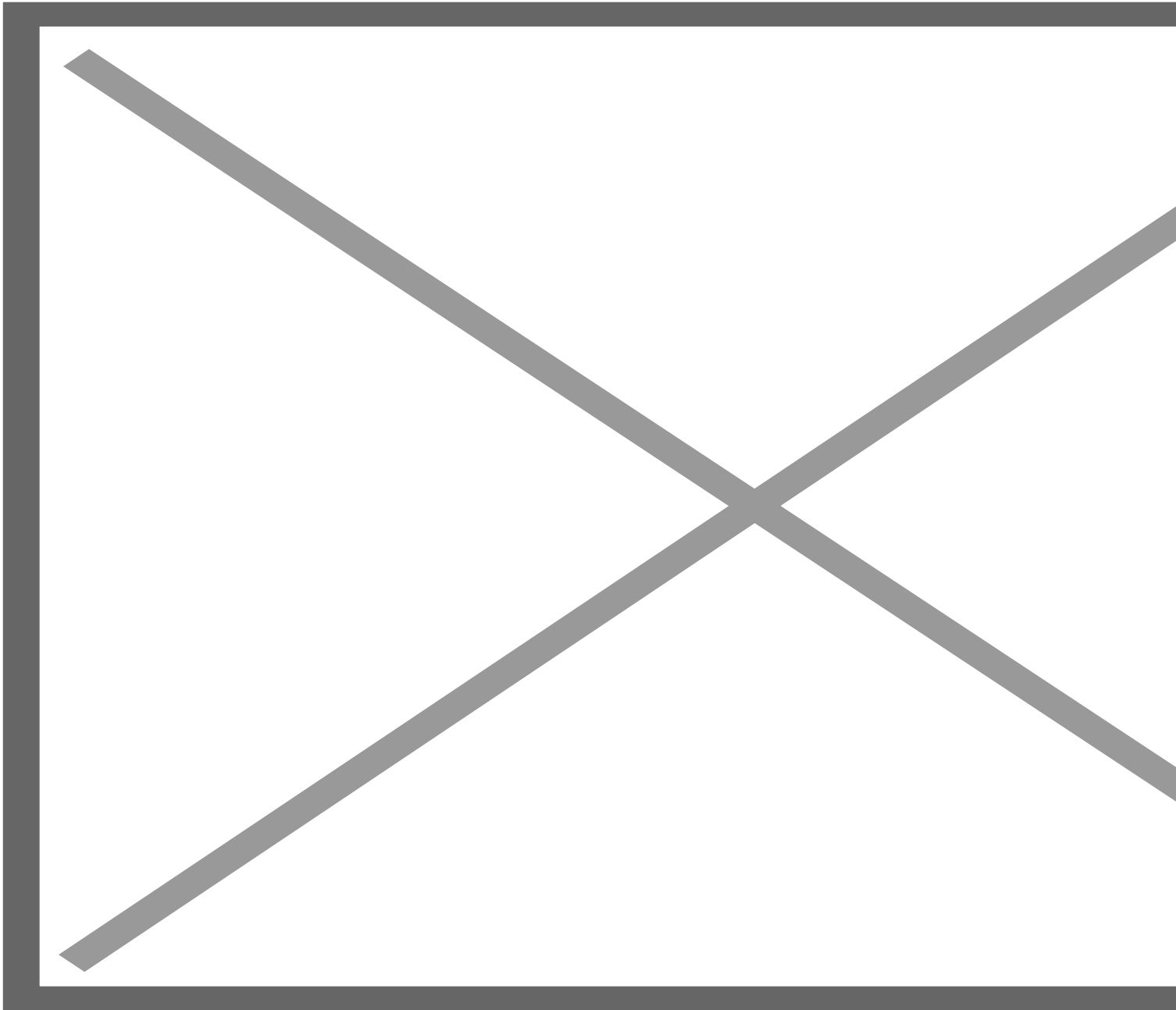


Fulton Sheen, Catholic media star, will be beatified in St. Louis Thursday

by [Aleja Hertzler-McCain](#)

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Artifacts and memorabilia depicting the late Archbishop Fulton Sheen are displayed in the Sheen Museum on July 15 in Peoria, Illinois. (AP Photo/Jessie Wardarski)

In 1953, Lucille Ball, the star of the hit show *I Love Lucy*, was up for an Emmy for “Most Outstanding Personality.” She lost—but not to famous journalist Edward R. Murrow or presidential candidate Adlai Stevenson—she lost to then-New York Auxiliary Bishop Fulton J. Sheen.

“I feel it is time I pay tribute to my four writers—Matthew, Mark, Luke and John,” Sheen [reportedly](#) quipped as he accepted the award.

This Thursday, the Catholic bishop who charmed millions while explaining theological concepts and scrawling on a blackboard for his show *Life Is Worth Living* will come one step closer to being declared a saint. His beatification—which comes after the Vatican found that he lived a life of “heroic virtue” and that his intercession was responsible for a miracle—leaves him just one more miracle shy of sainthood.

Sheen’s beatification mass will take place in St. Louis’s former NFL Stadium, the Dome at America’s Center, and will be presided over by Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle. It will also be broadcast by Catholic media giant EWTN and livestreamed on the [YouTube channel](#) of the Diocese of Peoria, Illinois, the diocese where Sheen was ordained.

For Sheen’s fans and the team promoting his sainthood cause, the beatification is a moment to celebrate his enduring impact on evangelization, Catholic media, and US spirituality.

“One of his lasting legacies,” said Peoria Bishop Louis Tylka, the promoter of Sheen’s cause for canonization, “is the example and invitation for us to, like him, deepen our friendship with Jesus each and every day by being people of prayer, and in particular, praying in front of the blessed sacrament.”

Tylka said Sheen’s example of praying a daily holy hour, or an hour of prayer before the consecrated Communion host, in which Catholics believe Jesus is present, has been one of the most “prominent” influences in the growing popularity of the practice among priests and seminarians.

In the Diocese of Peoria, Sheen’s prayer life has also inspired lay Catholics. Bonnie and Travis Engstrom had the custom of putting each of their children under the patronage of a saint, but when Bonnie was pregnant with her son James Fulton in 2010, she began to watch recordings of Sheen’s shows on YouTube, and they decided to pray for Sheen’s intercession.

“He was so intelligent, but I felt like he had a way of taking really complex philosophy and political thought” to “break it down” for the masses, said Bonnie Engstrom.

During Engstrom’s pregnancy, “everything pointed to a healthy baby,” she said. James would be her third planned home birth. But when the midwife handed James to her, “he was completely limp” and a “bluish-gray” color.

As the midwife began CPR, her husband performed an emergency baptism and her friend left to call 911, Engstrom was in “a state of shock.” She said, “I just remember sitting on the floor and not really being able to process anything, but I remember thinking in my head, ‘Fulton Sheen, Fulton Sheen, Fulton Sheen.’” Engstrom said it was like when you’re walking next to a friend, and you trip and then call out their name.

James’s heart didn’t beat at their home or in the ambulance or even when he first arrived at the emergency room. Days later, an attending physician in the neonatal intensive care unit added up the minutes James had been without a heart beat—and to the doctor’s disbelief, it had been one hour and one minute.

Because of her faith, Engstrom was not shocked to have witnessed a miracle. “I think very much so that Bishop Sheen made a holy hour, and when that holy hour was over, that was when Jesus Christ brought James back to life,” she said. “It was at 61 minutes, not 59,” she explained.

James is now a healthy 16-year-old and the team manager for his high school's freshmen football team. He and his family will present the Sheen relic at the beatification.

Engstrom said watching the Vatican's meticulous process for verifying her son's miracle—that it did not have a medical explanation and that Sheen was responsible—has reassured her faith in the church.

“I now know how thoroughly that has been investigated, and there's a lot of rigor that goes into it,” she said.

Even before Sheen's miracle was verified, his path to beatification required years of hard work for the promoters of Sheen's cause.

“The heavy lifting in a canonization happens before” a miracle, said Kathleen Sprows Cummings, a history professor at the University of Notre Dame who has [studied](#) US saints. “That's when you gather all the evidence, and you have to weigh everything the saint ever said or did or wrote.”

Sheen's path to beatification was uncommonly rocky. First, it involved a public legal battle over his remains between the Archdiocese of New York, who argued Sheen would have wanted to remain where he was originally buried, and Sheen's niece in the Diocese of Peoria. That diocese argued the sainthood cause could not advance while his niece sought the move. In 2019, the Archdiocese of New York [agreed](#) to the transfer, which Sheen's niece had argued would help his chances for sainthood.

Then, just weeks before the 2019 beatification was set to take place, a few members of the US Conference of Catholic Bishops asked to postpone in order to make sure Sheen had not mishandled accusations of sexual abuse by a priest. That request came the same year New York had passed a law expanding the timeframe for victims of child sexual abuse to pursue civil or criminal justice.

The New York lookback process did not raise any concerns and in February 2026, after a six-year pause, the Vatican cleared Sheen's cause for beatification.

“It's a testament to the persistence of his promoters that they maintained, as they said, ‘Sheen is clean,’” said Cummings. “There are so, so many causes open at any given time, and the Holy See is not gonna go forward with a cause that even has a taint of scandal,” she said, saying the beatification points to a “thorough” job by the cause.

In the past months, several Catholic media figures have [credited](#) Sheen's influence on their public ministry.

Gloria Purvis, a well-known podcast host and speaker, said in an interview that she appreciated Sheen's focus on Jesus rather than ego or partisanship.

“He can be a model for those of us in the current public eye about how to do this,” she said.

Sheen was born May 8, 1895, in El Paso, Illinois, and was ordained a priest in 1919. He taught theology and philosophy at the Catholic University of America from 1927 to 1950. After Sheen's time in the Archdiocese of New York, he was appointed Bishop of Rochester in 1966 and then was named an archbishop in 1969.

In 1930, he began hosting a Sunday night radio show, called *The Catholic Hour*, that [reportedly](#) drew 4 million weekly listeners through national syndication on NBC Radio Network. In 1951, after he became auxiliary bishop in New York, he began hosting his TV show, *Life Is Worth Living*.

Lonnie Carter, an award-winning playwright, remembers being “captivated” by the Tuesday night program as a child. “The bishop had a wicked sense of humor,” and a following that extended beyond his fellow Catholics to

his Jewish friends, said Carter.

Carter later met Sheen at the wedding of Sheen's niece and Carter's Marquette University classmate. "I found him to be present, dignified of course, humble in a sort of arrogant way and devilishly handsome," Carter said.

Carter, inspired by the upcoming beatification, has written a one-man play about Sheen, where Carter mixes excerpts from one real Sheen sermon with imagined sermons written by Carter on topics like football and poetry.

Organizers expect 50,000 people to attend the beatification mass on Thursday—many with their own memories of Sheen and his show.

"We're going to get energy—energy to feel good about our faith, so everybody gets their battery recharged so that they can evangelize in their own special way," said Sean D'Arcy, who is traveling from New York City for the mass.

D'Arcy met Sheen when he was 2 years old, when his mother, Mary Louise, was overwhelmed by wrangling her four young children by herself as she boarded a train to Buffalo. A stranger "saw I was having trouble and said could I take one of them, so I gave him Sean," said Mary, now 91.

She later realized the stranger who had entertained Sean was Sheen.

Now, Sean D'Arcy worships at St. Agnes in New York City, the parish where Sheen served at the end of his life. D'Arcy has organized a monthly mass in Sheen's honor.

"It's just wonderful news with him being beatified as the greatest Catholic communicator of his generation," said D'Arcy. —Religion News Service