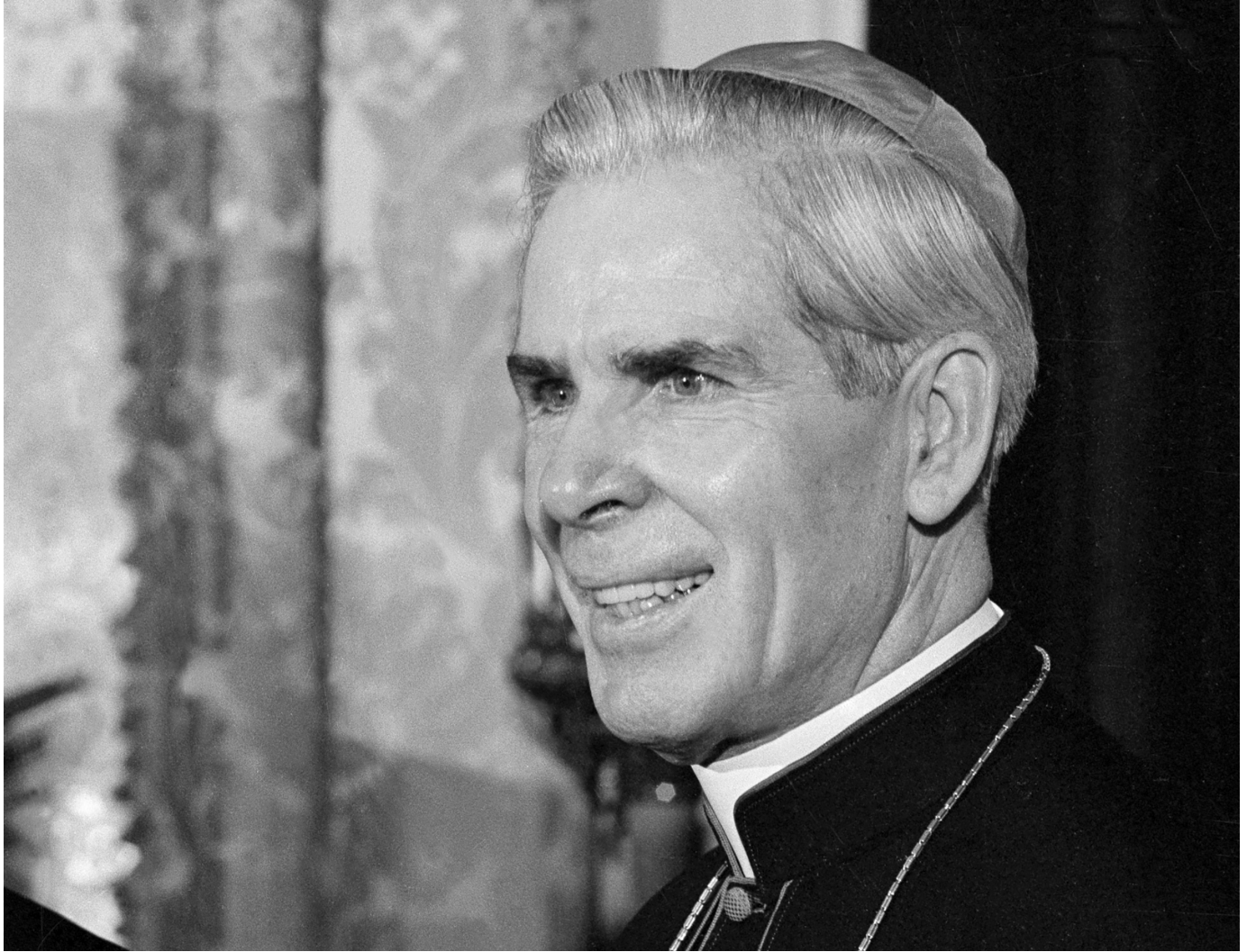


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Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen at his office at the Propagation of Faith in New York on Oct 26, 1966. (AP Photo/Eddie Adams)

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St. Louis — September 24, 2026

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Decades after he was a fixture on American TV screens, the late Archbishop Fulton Sheen is back in a familiar place: the media spotlight.

Tens of thousands of Catholic devotees are converging on St. Louis for a formal ceremony of beatification on Thursday, in which the prelate will be designated Blessed Fulton Sheen — one step away from sainthood.

The afternoon ceremony is taking place at the Dome at America's Center after years of delays. The stadium was chosen for the site because there wasn't a venue large enough in his home Diocese of Peoria, Illinois, to accommodate the anticipated number of attendees.

About 48,000 tickets were distributed as of Tuesday, according to organizers with the diocese and the Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen Foundation, which advocates for his sainthood.

The event honors a prelate who was once a regular presence in the living rooms of millions of Americans — including that of the future Pope Leo XIV, who says he watched the broadcasts of his fellow Illinois native while growing up in Chicago.

Sheen was a pioneering radio priest who quickly adopted the new medium of television in the 1950s, when he began hosting the program, "Life is Worth Living." Dressed in a cassock, cape and skullcap, he stood at a chalkboard and delivered moral and religious lessons without a narrow Catholic focus.

The show competed favorably against entertainers Milton Berle and Frank Sinatra on other networks. In an Emmy acceptance speech, Sheen thanked his writers — Gospel scribes Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. He's been called America's first televangelist.

"Archbishop Sheen was a beacon of faith, hope, and love who shone through radio and television for decades," Pope Leo said in a June speech to directors of The Pontifical Mission Societies, which Sheen headed in the U.S. for 16 years. "I myself witnessed his evangelization efforts as I was growing up."

Sheen was born in 1895 in the small town of El Paso, Illinois, and raised in Peoria. After becoming a priest and earning a doctorate in philosophy, he had a short pastorate in Peoria before becoming a professor at The Catholic University of America in Washington.

He became known both for his academic lectures and his plainspoken addresses from the pulpit and the studio, first on radio and then on TV. He often signed off with the benediction, "God love you."

Sheen appeared in a Time magazine cover article. He guided celebrities and others converting to Catholicism.

He met with popes and spoke at the reformist Second Vatican Council. He railed against communism, though he opposed the Vietnam War.

Sheen raised funds and traveled the world on behalf of Catholic missions. He served as a bishop in New York state, retiring as an archbishop. After his death at 84, he was buried at St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York until his niece won a court battle in 2019 to move his body to Peoria's Cathedral of St. Mary of the Immaculate Conception.

It's there, where Sheen had been a young altar server and was later ordained a priest, that pilgrims now place crucifixes and other items on his marble tomb, giving them status as relics.

To qualify for beatification, the Vatican normally requires one miracle attributable to the faithful seeking the candidate's heavenly prayers.

The late Pope Francis approved the beatification, attributing to Sheen the resuscitation of an infant born in 2010 without a pulse and revived only after lengthy efforts by medical workers. The child, the now-teenaged James Fulton Engstrom, is slated to present relics of Sheen at the ceremony, accompanied by his family, who had sought Sheen's intercession for healing.

The beatification was originally scheduled for 2019, but the Vatican delayed the ceremony. The Diocese of Rochester, which Sheen briefly led in the 1960s, requested the delay out of caution, due to legal investigations taking place then into the oversight of priests accused of sexual abuse across New York state.

Church officials later concluded that Sheen's record gave no cause for further delay, and plans for the ceremony resumed. Pope Leo XIV approved the beatification earlier this year.

"May the example and the intercession of this holy bishop, known for his evangelizing work through the media, inspire many others likewise to find new ways of spreading the gospel message with joyful enthusiasm," Leo said Wednesday on the eve of the ceremony.

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