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Tens of thousands of worshippers gather for the beatification of Archbishop Fulton Sheen held at the Dome at America's Center on Thursday, Sept. 24, 2026, in St. Louis. (AP Photo/Kate Munsch)



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St. Louis — September 25, 2026

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In the former home of the NFL's St. Louis Rams on Thursday Sept. 24, there was an unusual option beside the popcorn and soft drinks: T-shirts bearing the face of a Catholic archbishop.

Tens of thousands of attendees filled The Dome at America's Center and many more joined online to view the formal, lengthy ceremony celebrating the beatification of Archbishop Fulton Sheen — who now holds the title "blessed" and is one step closer to sainthood. Sometimes [called](#) the first televangelist in the United States, Sheen's beatification was presided over by Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle, a media star in the Philippines and a Vatican evangelization official.

It came after the Vatican determined Sheen had lived a life of "heroic virtue" and that a mother's 2010 prayer for Sheen's intercession was responsible for the miraculous recovery of her baby, James Fulton Engstrom, who spent 61 minutes without a heartbeat after birth.

Sheen, who died in 1979, beat out Lucille Ball for the Emmy Award for Most Outstanding Personality in 1953. His radio show, "The Catholic Hour," and television shows, including "Life Is Worth Living" reached millions. Pope Leo XIV has said that

he grew up listening to Sheen.

On Thursday, before the Mass, thousands of priests, nuns and faithful milled around a crowded and sweaty expo hall examining Sheen car magnets and buying rosaries. Some ventured to the next hall to attend confession. Some listened to a pre-show with worship music by Christian musician Matt Maher and reflections by prominent Catholic figures, including Peoria, Illinois, Bishop Louis Tylka and retired New York Cardinal Timothy Dolan, with both bishops representing locations key to Sheen's life.

As the procession began, orchestral music spilled out and incense wafted through the air, and hundreds of priests and bishops passed. They all were wearing white chasubles, liturgical vestments, embroidered with a golden "JMJ" on their back, a nod to Sheen's habit of scrawling the initials for Jesus, Mary and Joseph at the top of a blackboard during his popular TV show.

The multilingual Mass included Spanish, Portuguese, English, French, Chinese, Tagalog and Vietnamese.

In his homily, Tagle preached against priests "proclaiming destructive words and doing violent acts" and evangelizers who are "self-affirming." As he spoke to a largely U.S. crowd, Tagle quoted extensively from Sheen's address to the Second Vatican Council, where the Sheen raised concerns about poverty in Africa, Asia and Latin America.

"To preach the gospel from a posture of self-righteousness that prevents you from empathizing with other people's brokenness is not mission," said Tagle. "Blessed is the missionary who digs deep into the heart of the poor to meet Jesus there."

After the Mass concluded, attendees lined up to venerate Sheen's mandible, or jaw bone.

"It's quite stunning to think that the jaw that moved up and down in front of millions to bring the gospel, we now get to stand in front of and say, 'Pray for us,'" said Katie Prejean McGrady, the Catholic author and radio host, from the stage before the Mass.

Many Catholics said they traveled hours to witness the festivities. The Rev. Marek Piedziewicz from the Diocese of Elbląg, Poland, said it took him 30 hours to reach St.

Louis. He learned about Sheen over a decade ago when he saw Polish young people wearing Sheen T-shirts — Sheen's work became popular there after being translated into Polish. " He is very popular in Poland," he told RNS, adding he has gone on to write three books about Sheen.

" This is the consequence of this contact with the T-shirt," he said.

Several said they hoped Sheen's beatification would inspire greater devotion to Jesus Christ.

The Rev. Ray Buehler from St. Louis' Assumption-Mattese parish said, "Fulton Sheen really, in a beautiful way, exemplifies what engaging in the media rightly can do to advance our Lord's kingdom — that there is this sort of humility and love and courage that he embraced it with."

Buehler also called Winona-Rochester, Minnesota, Bishop Robert Barron, who preached at a vespers service the evening before, a "modern-day Fulton Sheen." He said he appreciated Barron's reminder that Sheen is already in heaven. "He doesn't really need our admiration. But if anything, it's just a reminder to all of us that all of us are called to holiness," said Buehler of Barron's homily.

At the vespers service, Barron [said](#), "Anyone who seeks fresh language to bring the gospel to our culture, anyone who preaches the ancient word with a heart on fire, anyone who dares to use the media of communication available to us today, is indebted to Fulton Sheen and finds in him a powerful heavenly friend and intercessor."

With the beatification Mass complete, the Vatican can now begin to investigate potential miracles that qualify for sainthood; Sheen just needs one more for canonization.

"The good news is that Pope Francis originally signed off for the beatification to happen in 2019, and anything reported from the time Pope Francis signed off on a miracle can be considered now for the second miracle for canonization," said Tylka. He said he believes there are already six reported miracles the Vatican can begin to investigate.

Dayspring Brock, a teacher from Dallas, said she anticipated that the day would continue to impact her. "I'm just really open to seeing what graces might come of

being here and witnessing this amazing person just being recognized as a wonderful witness for us all."

Several Catholics said they hoped the bishop and theology professor would be remembered most for his deep devotion to prayer. Sheen's example of praying for an hour a day before the Eucharist — a practice called the Holy Hour — helped popularize the devotion.

"Spoiler alert, this is all about the glory of God," Sister Josephine Garrett, one of the Sisters of the Holy Family of Nazareth, told attendees at a pre-show. "The stadium, the pop-ups, the screens, the chairs, the decorations is about giving glory to God for what he did in one man because he always makes good on his promises."

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