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Famed American Archbishop Fulton Sheen moves closer to sainthood

by Alessandro Speciale by Religion News Service

VATICAN CITY -- Pope Benedict XVI on Thursday recognized Archbishop Fulton Sheen's "heroic virtues," moving the popular radio and TV evangelist one step closer to sainthood.

Sheen is now "venerable" in the Roman Catholic Church and, if the Vatican recognizes that a miracle has been operated through his intercession, he would be declared "blessed," the last step before sainthood.

The acknowledgment of Sheen came in a decree signed by Benedict after a meeting with Cardinal Angelo Amato, head of the Vatican office that oversees sainthood causes. The decree recognizes that the fiercely anti-Nazi and anti-Communist bishop practiced virtue to a "heroic" degree.

Sheen's canonization cause was started in 2002 in his native Peoria, Ill., and his file had been under examination in Rome since 2009.

Sheen hosted radio and TV programs for almost 40 years. His Emmy Award-winning TV program, "Life is Worth Living," ran from 1951 to 1957 and reached up to 30 million viewers. He was made an auxiliary bishop of New York in 1951, later moving to Rochester, N.Y., and retiring in 1969.

On Thursday, Pope Benedict also declared Giuseppe "Pino" Puglisi, a Sicilian priest gunned down by the Mafia in 1993, a martyr, recognizing that he had been killed "in hatred of the faith." He will become a saint if a miracle is attributed to his intercession.

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