

Over the next few years, something you'll be hearing a lot about is the Synod process, which will be taking place in individual parishes in our archdiocese. Many other dioceses are doing this too, and the goal is to help people think more deeply about their faith, and to grow closer to God.

It's certainly something I strive to do as a priest, and something that all of us are called to do. So how does this happen day in and day out in our world? A big answer is the Holy Spirit, who uses you and me to go and make a difference. But for this to happen, we need to also have the Spirit within us too. When we do that, we can do great things in the name of Jesus through the power of the Holy Spirit.

One of the great sons of the Church who realized this is the Venerable Fulton J. Sheen; some of you may have watched his program in the 1960s.

Born in El Paso, Illinois on May 8, 1895 to a farmer and his wife, from an early age he knew the love of God. There was an instance when he was serving Mass as a 9 year old boy for the Bishop of Peoria, and he dropped a wine cruet on the floor and it shattered. After the Mass, the Bishop spoke to him and made two bold predictions about him. First, he said he would study one day at a famous theological school in Belgium, and second he said someday you will be just as I am. Above all else he showed him kindness and love in that situation.

He went to high school and went to seminary here at the Saint Paul Seminary before his ordination on September 20, 1919. He'd then do more studies in Belgium at Louvain University, and then went to Rome where he got an advanced degree in philosophy. Even by this point, he had many awards and distinguished citations; but these never went to inflate his ego. For the next 23 years he was at Catholic University of America where he was a scholar, educator, speaker and evangelist.

His talents as a speaker were noticed early on in his priesthood. He spoke at a major campus event, and in 1926 he was invited to record a series of Sunday evening Lenten sermons on a New York radio station. Four years later, he was a summer fill-in for two weeks on the Catholic Hour radio program; the audience loved him and he became a weekly speaker for the show.

This lasted 20 years, and this goes to show you the power of the Holy Spirit working through him, as this presented Catholic teaching in a way that had never been done before. Drawing from the deep well of his faith and scholarship, he'd talk about all kinds of teaching on faith and morals from devotion to the Blessed Mother to the dangers of Communism. He preached the Gospel and showed how it applied to the daily lives of the people who were listening.

As he became popular, by the late 1930s, he would get up to 100 letters a day which he tried to reply to, while at the same time working as a teacher preparing six hours for each lecture. However he never complained, but in fact just worked harder. Teaching philosophy and theology, he also published some 70 books and wrote two syndicated

weekly newspaper columns, one that was in print for more than 50 years called "Life of Christ."

It was on Easter Sunday, March 24, 1940, that he appeared on the world's first broadcast of a Catholic religious service. He spoke on the "Spiritual Symbolism of Television" and kept active in media, starting "Life is Worth Living" in the fall of 1951 after he had been consecrated a bishop. It was a watershed moment for Catholics, because Catholics had often been excluded at the national level. What his show did was to fuse Catholic and American ideals. He'd be on air until 1968 on several networks. And the format of the show was like a classroom lecture, but it was very conversational; it was the most widely-viewed religious series in the history of TV. He won an Emmy for Most Outstanding TV Personality.

Despite all of this though, the success never went to his head. When there were some even in the Church who were jealous of him, he never attacked them. And his message was simple: Jesus Christ must be at the center of everything. He had a deep Eucharistic spirituality. Right after his first communion he prayed for the vocation of the priesthood. He was also struck by a martyr from Communist China, writing: "A priest had just begun Mass when Communists entered and arrested him and made him a prisoner . . . Shortly after his imprisonment, the Communists opened the tabernacle, threw the Hosts on the floor and stole the Sacred Vessels . . . About three o'clock one morning, he saw a child who had been at the morning Mass open a window, climb in, come to the sanctuary floor, get down on both knees, press her tongue to the Host to give herself Holy Communion . . . Every single night she came at the same time until there was only one Host left. As she pressed her tongue to receive the Body of Christ, a shot rang out. A Communist soldier had seen her. It proved to be her Viaticum." No matter how busy he was, he said Mass every day. And he recalls a dream when he was making a Holy Hour where he fell asleep. In his own words: "I knelt down and said a prayer of adoration, and then sat down to meditate and immediately went to sleep. I woke up exactly at the end of one hour. I said to the Good Lord: "Have I made a Holy Hour?" I thought His angel said: "Well, that's the way the Apostles made their first Holy Hour in the Garden, but don't do it again." It's not known if he fell asleep again while at a Holy Hour, but that is how he was found when He died, crossing over into eternal life found in front of the Blessed Sacrament at his apartment.

What I love with his story is he had this kind of life and spirituality that flowed from what happened when he was at prayer or Mass. He truly saw Jesus deeply in prayer and offering Mass. But, as evidenced by how he'd prepare homilies in front of the Blessed Sacrament for instance, he also knew that Jesus was meant to be brought out into the world. Because of him, many came to deepen their faith or come to the Catholic faith; and many more who had heard rumors and stories of Catholicism that were false came to understand more deeply the truths of the faith by watching him.

Today's readings emphasize the presence of Jesus in the world that comes through the Holy Spirit dwelling in us. The apostles are sent by Christ to change the face of the earth; Bishop Sheen was a successor as a bishop, but we also are this as well. All of us

are called to be like Venerable Fulton Sheen - to use what we are given. To love our neighbor. Belief is just part of that; actually using our spiritual gifts is another.

I think looking at how we do this, we can look for signs of the Spirit in us. Remember we receive the Holy Spirit at confirmation, but it's up to us to help manifest these gifts as we cooperate with grace and open ourselves up to God working within us.

One is being bold in our speaking, like Bishop Sheen. He was not afraid to speak the faith and to challenge people. As I've said many times, we evangelize the world through talking about the faith, inviting people to Mass, and talking about what the Church teaches and why. Sheen used a chalkboard. Maybe we use social media, or we have one-on-one conversations, or speak up at a gathering, or take a chance and gently invite someone to return to Mass who has been away. Philip and Peter are out there speaking even though they are being persecuted because they know they have a job to do. To quote Bishop Sheen, "the refusal to take sides on great moral issues is itself a decision. It is a silent acquiescence to evil. The tragedy of our time is that those who still believe in honesty lack fire and conviction, while those who believe in dishonesty are full of passionate conviction."

The Holy Spirit also expels wicked spirits. Remember the prayer of Saint Michael the Archangel, where we pray for Saint Michael to "thrust into hell Satan and all the evil spirits who prowl about the world seeking the ruin of souls." Now certainly there are evil spirits that in some instances cause possession; exorcisms are real. But it's more the subtle temptations of the devil that can take over a soul; and the devil is cunning, and will tempt us and take over parts of our soul in ways we can't see, or become blinded to. The Holy Spirit helps us to look at our souls and say what is there that shouldn't be; we do these through wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety and fear of the Lord - the gifts of the Spirit that help us to understand the faith more deeply and grow closer to God and know right from wrong.

A third way we use our spiritual gifts and see the Spirit in us is through joy. Bishop Sheen said "Joy is not the same as pleasure or happiness. A wicked and evil man may have pleasure, while any ordinary mortal is capable of being happy. Pleasure generally comes from things, and always through the senses; happiness comes from humans through fellowship. Joy comes from loving God and neighbor. Pleasure is quick and violent, like a flash of lightning. Joy is steady and abiding, like a fixed star. Pleasure depends on external circumstances, such as money, food, travel, etc. Joy is independent of them, for it comes from a good conscience and love of God." For instance you often see pictures of Mother Teresa smiling, even though she had a very hard life. I'll also often see this joy around parents; despite being tired or working so hard for their family, there's this joy they have for their children and being in a family. Do we have joy in our heart? It's not to say you won't get moody, but if you are perpetually dour, bringing others down, complaining or negative, it inhibits evangelizing and true happiness.

Fourth, when we truly have the Spirit, we are willing to explain our faith. Peter says in our second reading “Always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope, but do it with gentleness and reverence.” A great line about evangelizing. We will often be challenged on our faith and someone may ask well why do I have to go to Mass, why do you say that is a real person not a potential person in the womb, what do you mean with about Jesus being really present in the Eucharist how is that possible? It’s a big reason why Bishop Sheen did what he did - so people would have the tools to be an apologist for the faith. Remember arguing isn’t yelling loudly than the other person; it’s formulating an argument, a defense of why we believe what we believe and why. So remember faith formation is life long; it’s fine to enjoy our shows, our video games, but there are more important things, deeper things that matter more. When we know what we are talking about, we can help people more deeply to get to heaven and find true happiness.

And lastly love is what brings it all together. “If you love me, you will keep my commandments” says the Lord, and to love is to will the good of the other. The Holy Spirit has been called the outpouring of the love of the Father and the Son, a love into which you and I are invited. Love is what motivated Bishop Sheen to evangelize and help others grow in their faith. It’s what needs to motivate us too. Think of the love of mothers whom we honor today; they do so much for us, but they educate us on right and wrong, they teach us the faith, and they help us to grow from children into adults and spiritual maturity. A person can know the faith inside and out but if they lack love, the faith isn’t what it can be.

In just a few days we will celebrate confirmations at the cathedral, and the sacrament is meant to stir up the gifts we are given at our baptism. Our confirmation is a reminder to us how we are sent and meant to go forth. Each one of us plays such an important part in helping make this world a better place as a person of hope, and it’s up to you and me to help others come to know who God is and how much He loves them. The problem is the world is so confused about what happiness is. Using the power of the Holy Spirit, may we like Venerable Bishop Fulton Sheen, help one another to learn the true happiness that comes from knowing God, like him, doing great things through the power of the Holy Spirit.