One of the things we cherish as United States Citizens is our freedom to speak our mind and live out our faith; which the Founders recognized came from God, not the government. But if we are going to do that, it's so critical to both know our faith and articulate it - and in so doing rendering to God by living out our faith, and to Caesar by exercising our rights as Americans and not fearing speaking the faith in the public sphere.

One of the great sons of the Church who realized this is Blessed Fulton J. Sheen; some of you may have watched his program in the 1960s. What he recognized was that the faith needed to be shared so people would understand it.

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.”

From 1930 to 1950, Father (then Monsignor) Sheen's weekly talks on The Catholic Hour presented Catholic teaching in a way that had never been done before. Drawing from the deep well of his faith and scholarship, Then Msgr. Sheen addressed different topics, some of which were inevitably political in nature too, such as anti-Communism and later abortion. Rooted in his thorough knowledge of the philosophical thought of St. Thomas Aquinas, he preached the Gospel and showed how it applies to personal moral decisions and the great social issues of the time.

On Easter Sunday, March 24, 1940, Monsignor Sheen appeared on the world's first broadcast of a Catholic religious service. He spoke on "The Spiritual Symbolism of Television." By the time Monsignor Sheen left Catholic University in 1950 to become the national director of the Society for the Propagation of the Faith, he was already one of the most well-known Catholics of his time.

He was consecrated a bishop on June 11, 1951. In the Fall of that year, he began his famous television series, *Life is Worth Living*. It was a tremendous success, eventually reaching an estimated 30 million viewers each week, which would make it the most widely viewed religious series in the history of television. He won an Emmy Award for Most Outstanding Television Personality, was featured on the cover of *Time* Magazine, and became one of the most influential Catholics of the 20th century.

Bishop Sheen influenced the lives of tens of millions of people all over the world. He also was known to have led numerous people to convert to Catholicism, from working-class New Yorkers he encountered in his daily life to celebrities who sought him out for instruction.

Later in life, Archbishop Sheen remained active, spending the last years of his life chiefly in writing and preaching.

Prayer of course and the Mass were the center of his life. Throughout his years at Catholic University, he maintained his daily holy hour, praying in Caldwell Chapel and in the private chapel in his residence. Many people who worked closely with him over the years attest that he never failed to keep his holy hour from the day of his priestly ordination until his death on the floor of his private chapel in Our Lord's presence on Dec. 9, 1979.

Two months before Archbishop Sheen's death, Pope John Paul II embraced him in St. Patrick’s Cathedral in New York. In that encounter on October 2, 1979, the Holy Father said to him, “You have written and spoken well of the Lord Jesus. You are a loyal son of the Church!”
And of course, just a couple of weeks ago, he was beatified.

In our Gospel, Jesus says that we render onto Caesar what is Caesars and unto God what is God’s. On the one hand, it seems like Jesus is striving to

strike a balance to a trick question. But a little deeper, the point is that God is not just the greatest of all beings, but God is the creative good from which all reality comes. Caesar is on the coin which belongs to him, but God created Caesar and Caesar belongs to God, as do all people. God allows the world to exist on our own in a sense, but God is also everywhere and wants us to freely choose to do His purposes and to bring faith, hope and love into this world. As such, the Christian is called to be active in the world, and as Catholics, you and I have a duty to bring Jesus into the world in which we live. This is why when you look at the history of our nation, so many Catholics have refused to remain silent but let their faith inform how they live as an evangelist. Like Blessed Fulton Sheen we do this through how we live, and we don't need a radio or TV show to do it - we just need to work with the Holy Spirit and remember change happens little by little day by day. So how can we accomplish this?

First, it's important to form one's conscience. Bishop Sheen knew that people had this deeper hunger for that exact thing, which is why millions watched him in front of his chalkboard week after week. Our conscience has the task of telling us the hard truth about our actions. The Church has the task of expressing God's love and guiding us to salvation. Vatican II's

Declaration on Religious Freedom states Catholics “must pay careful attention to the sacred and certain teaching of the Church. For the Catholic Church is, by the will of Christ, the teacher of the truth.” The question for us is who informs our conscience? The Church is there to guide us. This is why we have to pick up a catechism, learn what the Church teaches, and remember that the Church is there to help us get to heaven. All moral views do not have the same weight. The problem is a number of Catholics can’t articulate what our faith holds, so we need to learn it, so it can help us to sort out where to go politically when we vote, and what choices to make every day. In our culture though, so many facts go unreported in media, and sometimes the media, in their persuasive effect, instruct the public on how to think and what they need, be it news channels or influencers or social media pages. When we do our homework though and learn what the Church says, we are better able to then act on it. As you do this, you may find things that challenge you. And while some things are of higher moral weight than others, the challenge for us is to be willing to have humility, to submit and to trust in the Church. We still may understandably struggle at times with Church teaching, but this though differs from public, organized dissent (e.g., organizing a protest in support of abortion, attacking the Church on social media for a position on a social issue, etc). So, consider

not only reading the catechism, but finding some good stuff online - you can for instance go and watch most of Bishop Sheen's programs, but there are tons of other great catechetical materials out there too to help us learn the faith.

It's also important to remember that as we form our conscience, there is a hierarchy of truths about human behavior. We instinctively know this. Cheating on a test is bad. Stealing money from someone is worse. Taking the life of another is worse than both. Of course, not all evil things can or should be illegal, as not all evil things have the same gravity. However, there are some things that we cannot tolerate at all. For instance, the dignity of the human person. Slavery in affront to human dignity. The way that persons of color were treated with institutional racism requires a work for racial justice. But from civil rights, flow an even more basic human right, the right to life. The act of dehumanizing and killing the unborn child attacks human dignity in a uniquely grave way. Deliberately killing the innocent is always, inexcusably wrong, as it sets a pattern of contempt for every other aspect of human dignity. So, when we look at what to think about on issues of the day, we have to remember that many social issues matter and require our attention. But some, namely deliberately killing innocent human

life or standing by and allowing, dwarf other social issues. Many issues too require more careful attention and can't be summed up with just a line or two; for instance, with human life in the womb, sometimes there is need to act to save the life of the mother. With immigration, people have a right to immigrate but a nation state has a right to security too and to regulate it. With the more recent issue of pandemic or health issues, there's the issue of the common good too. The point is these issues require a lot of thought, and the Church helps us to understand why they matter and equips us to speak to them too. The struggle for many a Catholic on these is normal; but the key is to keep thinking about them more deeply, for the Church is always open to the guiding of the Spirit to help her articulate them more clearly, and hopefully we are too.

Once we have informed our consciences, it's then time for us to act. And this can have consequences, but it can also lead to long-term change. This is too where we render on to Caesar to speak by being civically active and exercising our rights.

Bishop Sheen obviously did just that, but so too have many others, doing even more to "ruffle feathers" at times. Archbishop Joseph Rummel served

as the bishop of New Orleans from 1935 until he died in 1964. New Orleans had the largest Catholic population in the Deep South and many thousands of black Catholics. It also had segregated schools. While he ensured access to education for the black students, he also was aware that the segregated schools had the same problem with access to less money. And so, he decided to act. He started desegregating the local church. In 1948, the seminary welcomed two black men. In 1951, he pulled the White and Colored signs from Catholic parishes. In 1953, a year before *Brown vs. Board of Education*, he issued a pastoral letter, the first of two, read from each pulpit that condemned segregation. The response? Some parishioners bitterly resented hearing that “there will be no further discrimination or segregation on the pews, at the Communion rail, at the confessional and in parish meetings, just as there will be no segregation in the kingdom of heaven.” By 1956, Rummel said he intended to desegregate the schools. Most boards voted against it, but he did not budge. He even closed a parish when they did not accept a black priest. On top of this, the state of Louisiana was threatening to withhold funds, which were then available to the Catholic schools if he went ahead with his plans, as some Protestants were sending their kids to Catholic schools hoping them to remain segregated. When protests began and some

Catholic politicians organized public protests, Rummel excommunicated three prominent Catholics - a judge, a political writer, and a community organizer, for publicly defying the teaching of the Church. These events made national news. But in the end, though it was costly, most anyone can look back and say this man acted with courage in the fight against racism. The truth is Catholic teaching often has political side effects because it has public implications. When a Catholic takes their Church seriously and acts on her teaching in the world, someone won't like it. But we aren't in the world to seek a safe space or not offend. We are in the world to be different. The first Christians were persecuted for the very reason they did not identify the Church and State as one by worshiping the emperor. We do not worship our country; we love our country, and if we are a patriot, we want to help make that country better by being a person of hope in the world and helping others to see where injustice lies and not remain silent but go and truly make a difference. That happens through doing exactly what Blessed Bishop Sheen did; engaging with the public. This is tough; we all know how charged people are. Even just yesterday, when I was at Planned Parenthood, right before I got there a parishioner said a car just stopped and was yelling at him and seminarians praying the rosary; within about a minute a young woman drove by and just glared at the seminarians

and then made an obscene gesture and drove off. I gave her a blessing and waved. Anger out there is intense as most people seem to use tolerance as a nice bumper sticker slogan applying to people tho think as they do. But what if we embrace fortitude, a virtue, like Bishop Sheen? Surely many disagreed with him too; many said don't do a religion show it will fail. And Catholics were often looked at with suspicion. But he knew he needed to change the world as a fisher of men. Though there were well-known converts from people he met, how many more came to the faith because of his presence on TV? Perhaps we don't have a TV show, but sometimes we can be so afraid to talk about what we believe or why; or maybe we just get riled up in the world of social media with those who attack us or our faith. But knowing what we believe and why and looking for ways to really engage with people; online; at the kids' sporting events; in the office lunchroom; maybe even in a checkout line, there's always those opportunities there. And of course, a big part of that too is right at home, not being afraid to talk to our families and our kids about what we believe and why. And yes, sometimes there will be hostility - but when we are not afraid to articulate our faith, there also will be conversion.

And one last point on that conversion: remember that is the goal, but it takes time. It can be easy to highlight certain aspects of Church teaching and just focus on that. Yes, some teachings are of a higher order - but that doesn't mean others do not matter. What Bishop Sheen did in using Freedom of Speech and his work was to make arguments. You can watch not only Life is Worth Living online but some great conversations he has with people like William F. Buckley and other interviews; an apologist makes the case for the faith. We are so used to shouting and being angry in our various camps - and I'm just as guilty of that as anyone as many political things rile me up too. But to formulate an argument for the faith and to convert, you learn the faith, then you articulate it and challenge it little by little, getting a person to think more deeply. Maybe you don't even live to see that change or it's never evident, but by being patient and making key points, by listening to their objections and trying to find common ground but also point out where a person is in error, maybe you can just gradually bring them to the faith.

What a great country we live in that protects our right to worship and to speak freely; but even greater is the God who we ask to pray for our country and who created the world we live in. As we all know, freedom is

under attack by those who want to regulate calling censorship sensitivity or not offending someone, and who says keep your religion private. But no matter which way an election goes, the Constitution is there, but even more important than that - our faith and the Church are there, and it's not something meant to be kept hidden, but to be shared with the world. We do that when we render onto both Caesar and God, knowing our faith, living it out, and articulating over the course of our lives to a world hungry for the truth to look to not the coin that was created, but to the God who created them and who loves them so deeply by helping them to come to know and respond to that love.