



# The Road To Sainthood

## *The Journey of Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen*

# Teacher's Guide

## **The Canonization Process: Understanding the Five Stages of Sainthood**

The Catholic Church carefully studies the lives of holy men and women before officially declaring them saints. This process is called canonization. It helps the Church recognize people who lived lives of heroic faith and can serve as examples for Catholics around the world. The process often takes many years and includes prayer, investigation, and the study of miracles.

Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen is currently in this process and is scheduled to be beatified on September 24, 2026.

### **1. Servant of God**

This is the first official step in the canonization process. A bishop begins an investigation into the person's life, writings, and reputation for holiness. Witnesses may be interviewed, and the Church gathers information about how the person lived their faith.

#### **Teacher Notes:**

This stage asks: Did this person live a faithful Christian life?

The person receives the title "Servant of God."

The investigation usually begins years after the person's death.

#### **Fulton Sheen Example:**

**Fulton Sheen Biography Worksheet and Reflection Activity available for more on the life of Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen**

His cause for canonization was formally opened in 2002 by the Diocese of Peoria, Illinois, where he had grown up and first served as a priest. Once the cause officially began, he received the title "Servant of God." Church investigators gathered thousands of pages of documents, letters, homilies, and recordings. They also studied how he lived virtues such as faith, charity, humility, courage, and obedience.



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One major focus was his lifelong commitment to making a daily Holy Hour before the Blessed Sacrament. Many people testified that he never missed his daily hour of prayer from the day of his ordination until the day he died.

After years of investigation, the information was sent to the Vatican's Dicastery for the Causes of Saints. This eventually led to Pope Benedict XVI declaring him "Venerable" in 2012, meaning the Church officially recognized that he lived a life of heroic virtue.

## 2. Venerable

After studying the person's life, the Pope may declare that the person lived a life of heroic virtue. This means they consistently showed great faith, hope, charity, courage, and holiness.

### Teacher Notes:

The title "Venerable" means the Church recognizes the person as a model of Christian virtue. No public feast day is assigned yet.

At this stage, the Church recognizes holiness, but not sainthood.

### Fulton Sheen Example:

Pope Benedict XVI declared Fulton Sheen "Venerable" in 2012.

## 3. Miracle Investigated

For beatification, the Church usually requires a miracle through the person's intercession after death. Medical experts, theologians, and Church officials investigate carefully to determine whether the event has a natural explanation.

### Teacher Notes:

Miracles are signs that the person is with God in heaven.

Catholics pray asking for the person's intercession.

The Church uses both scientific and theological review during investigations.

### Fulton Sheen Example:

A reported healing connected to Fulton Sheen's intercession was investigated and approved.



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### **More on Fulton Sheen Miracle:**

See Article: *Vatican medical experts OK reported miracle attributed to archbishop* | *National Catholic Reporter*

The primary miracle officially attributed to Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen is the healing of a baby named James Fulton Engstrom. This is the miracle that led to his upcoming beatification. In 2010, James was reportedly born stillborn after his umbilical cord tightened and cut off oxygen during birth. He had no detectable heartbeat for 61 minutes, and doctors expected that he would either die or suffer severe brain damage. During this time, his parents prayed specifically for Fulton Sheen's intercession, repeating his name and asking for prayers. Unexpectedly, James recovered and later developed normally without medical explanation. Vatican medical experts and theologians investigated the case and approved it as miraculous.

## **4. Beatification**

Beatification is an important step toward sainthood.

A feast day is usually chosen at this stage.

The Church officially recognizes the person as being in heaven.

### **Fulton Sheen Example:**

The beatification of Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen is scheduled for September 24, 2026, in St. Louis, Missouri, at The Dome at America's Center. The Mass will be celebrated by Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle, who will represent Pope Leo XIV at the ceremony.

## **5. Canonization**

Canonization is the final step. After another approved miracle, the Pope officially declares the person a saint of the universal Church.

### **Teacher Notes:**

Saints are recognized as models of holiness for all Catholics.

Canonized saints may be celebrated throughout the entire Church.

Canonization does not "make" someone a saint; rather, it officially recognizes what God has already done.



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## Classroom Discussion:

Remind students that sainthood is not only for famous people. The Church teaches that all people are called to holiness through prayer, love, sacrifice, and faithful living.

## Key Vocabulary

Canonization – The process of officially recognizing a saint

Heroic Virtue – Living faith in an extraordinary way

Intercession – Asking someone in heaven to pray for us

Beatification – The step when someone receives the title “Blessed”

Miracle – An extraordinary event attributed to God through prayer and intercession

## Introduce Flip Book Activity:



### The Road To Sainthood *The Journey of Archbishop*

Today you will create a flipbook timeline showing the Catholic Church by following the journey of Archd canonization.

#### Instructions:

Label each box with one stage of the canonization process:

1. Servant of God
2. Venerable
3. Miracle Investigated
4. Beatification
5. Canonization

#### In each section:

- In your own words, write a short explanation of the stage using the description below.
- Draw a picture or symbol that represents it
- Add color and creativity

#### 1. Servant of God

Description: The Church officially begins to study the person's life to see how they lived their faith. The Church is learning about this person's life.

Draw: A Bible, a cross, or a person praying

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### *Sheen Flip Book Activity*

