

### Archbishop O'Meara's Homily:

# "Bye Now . . . God Love You Forever"

Homily delivered at The Funeral Liturgy of Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen by Archbishop Edward T. O'Meara, S.T.D. National Director of The Society for the Propagation of the Faith Archbishop-designate of Indianapolis.

A voice is silent in the midst of the Church and in our land, the like of which will not be heard again in our day. The vocation of Fulton Sheen is consummated; he has responded with one final "yes" to the call of God, a "yes" so final that human infirmity and sinfulness can never reverse it.

On Sept. 20, this year with five other of his friends, I listened to Archbishop Sheen review his life during the celebration of the Eucharist which was his thanksgiving to God for 60 years in the priesthood. His own division of his life into three periods will serve us well on this occasion.

First there was the vocation, the call from God, that was as clear to him as was God's call to Jeremiah the Prophet in the Old Testament passage we have just heard, and as the "come and see" of Jesus Himself to John's disciples in the Gospel passage. Never was there a time in his life when he did not want to be a priest, never was there a time in his life when he wished he had pursued another career.

Part of his response to that call from God was a practice he started in the year of his ordination to the priesthood. Every day began with the very first hour - the freshest and therefore the best - given to God in prayer. This was his Holy Hour, and the practice continued, and it was made in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament for the next 60 years. As surely as we are here in this Cathedral this afternoon, he made his Holy Hour last Sunday morning, the day of his passing.

Whenever he chose to respond to those who asked him the secret of his ability

to touch minds and hearts, his answer was always - the Holy Hour - when he spoke to God, and listened to God speaking to him. Here his conflicts were reconciled, for he held no opinions lightly; here his anxieties and insecurities were calmed, for he was the most human of men; here his heart was literally set on fire with the drive that made him ever restless to respond totally to God's call.

This period of his life marked also the expanding of his intellect and the growth of his constant pursuit of excellence and quality. He used to say frequently how grateful he was to the Church for the marvelous education he received, which opened his mind to an intellectual curiosity that never deserted him. He always had to have new books; he loved meeting interesting and informed people, the latest scientific discoveries and technological devices fascinated him.

On Sept. 20, Archbishop Sheen spoke of the second period of his life as the Period of Proclamation. Returning from Europe in 1925, the amazing career of oratory, teaching and preaching began. He was the first to have an on-going series of religious radio broadcasts, the first churchman to have a regular television program. The pulpit of this great Cathedral became his over the years as throngs came to hear his sermons, and therein lies the touchingly beautiful significance of his burial in the vault under the High Altar. His pen produced more than 60 books, as well as articles and letters that will never be numbered. Always he addressed himself to the thought of the times, and insisted that a speaker must begin his message from where his hearers are, not where he is.

It was during this time of his life that the Church asked him to direct The Society for the Propagation of the Faith in the United States. By that time his reputation was solidly



Archbishop O'Meara preaches the funeral homily.

established as a Professor of the Catholic University of America. Many asked him how he could leave such a position for this seemingly narrower apostolate ... to which he replied: "I have pushed out the classroom walls, and now I can embrace the whole world." In this role he would be expected to intensify missionary enthusiasm within the Church, and to gather financial help for missionary needs.

The Church throughout the world is his eternal debtor for the way he discharged this responsibility. He gave missionaries all over the world a new sense of the dignity of this vocation. He capsulated missionary ideals in short, unforgettable phrases:

"It was a pagan Latin poet who said that charity begins at home. On a dry and rocky roadside between Jerusalem and Jericho, a certain Samaritan taught us that charity begins away from home, and with the most unattractive of our neighbors."

Again, "Our charity to the

poor of the world is measured by God, not so much by what we give, but by how much we have kept for ourselves after our giving. That is why the widow's mite was such a large gift; she gave all that she had."

"We can say that to dig we are not able, but let us never say that to beg we are ashamed."

His love for The Society for the Propagation of the Faith endured in life and in death, and surely you are not surprised that both in life and in death he gave it his every earth's possession.

Many came to faith in Christ and the Church through his words, and for every famous name he instructed, there were hundreds of others who were just as important to him as those in the public eye. His presentation of the fulness of the Catholic faith was powerful and convincing. One of his converts spoke for all of them and summed up this gift of his at the finish of an instruction by leaping to her feet, and with clenched fists shouted

heavenward: "O, God, what a protagonist you have in this man!"

On Sept. 20, Archbishop Sheen spoke also of a third period in his life. It was the one wherein he began to know Christ as never before, to love Him with ever greater intensity, and to experience unspeakable peace. In retrospect, this period seemed to me to begin with the writing of his monumental "Life of Christ" in the late 1950's. Gradually he divested himself of his possessions; he was a man who loved beautiful things. But they became less important to him as Christ became more and more important, and as his comprehension of the mystery of the Cross increased.

Frequently he spoke of his death to the amazement and often-times the consternation of his hearers and friends. But he said: "It is not that I do not love life; I do. It is just that I want to see the Lord. I have spent hours before Him in the Blessed Sacrament, I have spoken to Him in prayer, and about Him to everyone who would listen, and now I

want to see Him face to face."

If we could ask him now, I am sure he would say that the apex of his career took place here in the sanctuary of St. Patrick's Cathedral on this year's Oct. 2 when Pope John Paul II enveloped him in a brotherly embrace. Later, I asked him what the Holy Father said as the two stood there. "He told me that I had written and spoken well of the Lord Jesus, and that I was a loyal son of the Church."

Last Sunday at 7:15 p.m. God called Archbishop Fulton Sheen to Himself by name. It was a moment known to God, and fixed by Him from all eternity, a call to perfect life and truth and love, a call to a life he will never tire of, that can never be improved, and which he can never lose.

Dear Friend, Archbishop Sheen, we are all better because you were in our midst and were our friend. We trust you to the care of your "Lovely Lady dressed in blue." We pray that Jesus has already said: "I've heard My Mother speak of you."

Bye now, Fulton Sheen, and God love you forever!



The concelebrants gather at the entrance to the crypt where Archbishop Sheen is entombed.