

Bishop Sheen: One of My Own Teachers of the Faith

I have been very fortunate in my life to have had many great teachers, the first of which were my own mom and dad who brought me to the Altar of our Lord at 5 days of age. When I was still very young – at most 1st grade or so – I remember riding through the small town of Mendon one day with my dad in the pickup and we went by a Protestant church. I asked him what they do in there. I don't remember for sure what he said but I think it was something about as close to: I don't know, as he was going to get! I remember wondering why it was that I was given the Catholic faith while others were not. I certainly wasn't anybody. I didn't do anything to deserve it. I didn't understand it, and I suppose I still don't. It was a free gift from God.

The Lord has provided particularly knowledgeable and astute teachers of the faith in almost every age. One was St Anthony of Padua, Doctor of the Church, whose memorial was this past week. Another was Bishop Fulton J Sheen. Bishop Sheen was born and raised near Peoria, IL, only a few hours drive from where I grew up. He was one of the greatest teachers of the faith in our country. At one point he had a top-rated TV show. I was only 14 years old when Bishop Sheen died and I had never heard of him until I was in my early 40's. I was talking on the phone one night to my dad and I heard my mom in the background say: Tell him about Bishop Sheen – his cause for canonization had been opened. My dad ended up sending me my first (of many) Bishop Sheen books, which is how he became one of my teachers, for which I am very grateful.

As I look back on these completely unmerited graces that God has given me, it does make me sorrowful to see how poorly I have responded. Yet, I remain hopeful. To paraphrase St Paul, another great teacher of the faith, we must constantly look forward and forge ahead. There is simply no time to be stuck in the mud.

Previous articles have, I'm sure, contained some of Bishop Sheen's writings or homilies. Bishop Sheen is the one who said to make a Holy Hour every day (he was speaking to priests but it's good for anyone) – which means spend an hour before our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament (I heard him this was before I went to seminary). Well Bishop Sheen said it, so I thought I should do it. He was right, it is something good to do every day. Bishop Sheen said that some of God's graces are sweet and some are bitter – he was right about that too, and I received both during these daily Holy Hours. I hope to start Exposition and Adoration and since we should pass on the good we have received, I thought we might revisit Bishop Sheen this week. The following are quotes from Bishop Sheen, any one of which would be a good source of mediation:

“Moral principles do not depend on a majority vote. Wrong is wrong, even if everybody is wrong. Right is right, even if nobody is right.”

“A Catholic may sin and sin as badly as anyone else, but no genuine Catholic ever denies he is a sinner. A Catholic wants his sins forgiven - not excused or sublimated.”

“Sometimes the only way the good Lord can get into some hearts is to break them.”

“The rosary is the book of the blind, where souls see and there enact the greatest drama of love the world has ever known; it is the book of the simple, which initiates them into mysteries and knowledge more satisfying than the education of other men; it is the book of the aged, whose eyes close upon the shadow of this world, and open on the substance of the next. The power of the rosary is beyond description.”

“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.”

“Criticism of others is thus an oblique form of self-commendation. We think we make the picture hang straight on our wall by telling our neighbors that all his pictures are crooked.”

“The greatest love story of all time is contained in a tiny white Host.”

“Modern prophets say that our economics have failed us. No! It is not our economics which have failed; it is man who has failed-man who has forgotten God. Hence no manner of economic or political readjustment can

possibly save our civilization; we can be saved only by a renovation of the inner man, only by a purging of our hearts and souls; for only by seeking first the Kingdom of God and His Justice will all these other things be added unto us.”

“Ever since the days of Adam, man has been hiding from God and saying, 'God is hard to find.’”

“Most of us love a non-self, or something extrinsic and apart from our inner life; but a mother's love during the time she is a flesh-and-blood ciborium is not for a non-self but for one that is her very self, a perfect example of charity and love which hardly perceives a separation. Motherhood then becomes a kind of priesthood. She brings God to man by preparing the flesh in which the soul will be implanted; she brings man to God in offering the child back again to the Creator.”

“I feel it is time that I also pay tribute to my four writers, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.”

“Advertising tries to stimulate our sensuous desires, converting luxuries into necessities, but it only intensifies man's inner misery. The business world is bent on creating hungers which its wares never satisfy, and thus it adds to the frustrations and broken minds of our times.”

“When I stand up to talk, people listen to me; they will follow what I have to say. Is it any power of mine? Of course not. St. Paul says, 'What have you that you have not received and you who have received, why do you glory as if you had not?' But the secret of my power is that I have never in fifty-five years missed spending an hour in the presence of our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament. That's where the power comes from. That's where sermons are born. That's where every good thought is conceived.”

“There are angels near you to guide you and protect you, if you would but invoke them. It is not later than we think, it is a bigger world than we think.”

“Prayer begins by talking to God, but it ends by listening to Him. In the face of Absolute Truth, silence is the soul's language.”

“Love is a mutual self-giving which ends in self-recovery.”

“Jealousy is the tribute mediocrity pays to genius.”

“Truth must be sought at all costs, but separate isolated truths will not do. Truth is like life; it has to be taken on its entirety or not at all. We must welcome truth even if it reproaches and inconveniences us -- even if it appears in the place where we thought it could not be found.”

“Never forget that there are only two philosophies to rule your life: the one of the cross, which starts with the fast and ends with the feast. The other of Satan, which starts with the feast and ends with the headache.”

“If you do not worship God, you worship something, and nine times out of ten it will be yourself. You have a duty to worship God, not because He will be imperfect and unhappy if you do not, but because you will be imperfect and unhappy.”

“The humble, simple souls, who are little enough to see the bigness of God in the littleness of a Babe, are therefore the only ones who will ever understand the reason of His visitation. He came to this poor earth of ours to carry on an exchange; to say to us, as only the Good God could say: 'you give me your humanity, and I will give you my Divinity; you give me your time, and I will give you My eternity; you give me your broken heart, and I will give you Love; you give me your nothingness, and I will give you My all.’”

“Charity is to be measured, not by what one has given away, but by what one has left.”

“There is a tendency among many shallow thinkers of our day to teach that every human act is a reflex, over which we do not exercise human control. They would rate a generous deed as no more praiseworthy than a wink, a crime as no more voluntary than a sneeze. . . Such a philosophy undercuts all human dignity. . . All of us have the power of choice in action at every moment of our lives.”

God bless you, Fr Kuhn.