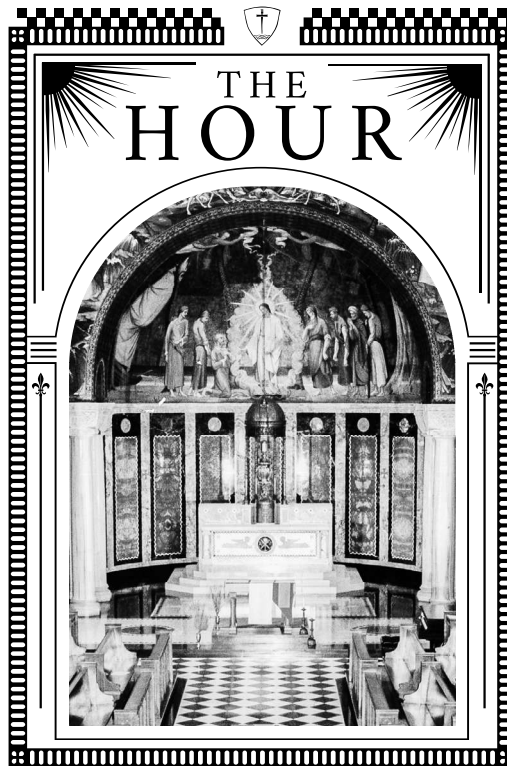


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Reflections on the Holy Hour
**INSPIRED BY ARCHBISHOP
FULTON J. SHEEN**

Rev. Joseph C. Taphorn, JCL, editor

The Hour:
Reflections on the Holy Hour
Inspired by Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen

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*This volume is
dedicated
to the
seminarians of
The Saint Paul Seminary,
past, present,
and future.*

**May they be
found to live lives
of heroic virtue.**



CONTENTS

- 1 Introduction: Very Reverend
Joseph Taphorn
- 11 “The Hour That Makes My Day”
by Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen
- 31 Reflection I: Most Reverend
Bernard Hebda
- 37 Reflection II: Deacon Eric Cooley
- 43 Reflection III: Dr. Josh Hengemuhle
- 49 Reflection IV: Reverend Scott Carl
- 55 Reflection V: Emily Kane
- 61 Reflection VI: Reverend
Joseph Kuharski
- 67 Reflection VII: Nell O’Leary Alt
- 73 Reflection VIII: Reverend
Evan Koop
- 79 Reflection IX: Jonathan Liedl
- 85 Reflection X: Most Reverend
Andrew Cozzens
- 91 Conclusion: Dr. Christopher
Thompson

Jesus said to them,
“Come, have breakfast.”
And none of the disciples
dared to ask him, “Who
are you?” because they
realized it was the Lord.
Jesus came over and
took the bread and gave
it to them.

JOHN 21:12-13



INTRODUCTION

Archbishop John Ireland (1838–1918) founded The Saint Paul Seminary in 1894 on a picturesque parcel of land overlooking the Mississippi River, just a few years after he became the archbishop of Saint Paul.¹ His civic partner and friend in shepherding this construction project was the famous railroad tycoon James J. Hill (1838–1916). When it came time to start a seminary, Ireland turned to Hill to fund its construction. Hill agreed, and in 1890 he gave a \$500,000 gift in honor of his Catholic wife, Mary T. (Mehegan) Hill.²

In 1901, the cornerstone was laid for Saint Mary's Chapel. Construction began, and it was dedicated in 1905. As the crown jewel of the campus, this building stands entirely unique among the buildings with its Romanesque-Byzantine architecture.³ Clad in Minnesota limestone, the structure features a traditional basilica layout. The doors of the chapel open onto Summit Avenue and overlook the river, reminding one of the gospel's call to go out and evangelize. This avenue would become the most prominent boulevard in Saint Paul with its wide

streets, beautiful trees, and historic homes. It is anchored on the west by the Mississippi River and the Seminary chapel. Five miles to the east, it meets another magnificent creation of Archbishop Ireland: the Cathedral of Saint Paul. Today, Saint Mary's Chapel continues to serve as the spiritual heart of our campus.

In the 131 years since our founding, over three thousand seminarian alumni have been ordained priests of Jesus Christ. Among that number are thirty-eight bishops, the most famous of whom is the now-Blessed Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen (1895–1979). A seminarian studying for the Diocese of Peoria, Sheen arrived at the Seminary campus in 1917 at the age of twenty-two, having completed philosophy studies at Saint Victor's College in Bourbonnais, Illinois.⁴

Sheen was extraordinarily bright and excelled in his formation and coursework. He was ordained a priest two years later, on September 20, 1919, in the Cathedral of Saint Mary in Peoria. He was ordained a bishop in 1951 and went on to become one of the most recognizable prelates in America by embracing the modern media of radio and television as tools for evangelization and catechesis, hosting programs from

1930–1968. He even made the cover of *Time* magazine and won an Emmy Award for the Most Outstanding Television Personality.

Yet, Sheen would be the first to say that his extraordinary pastoral outreach was fueled by a single moment. As a seminarian in 1918, an evening walk outside Saint Mary's Chapel sparked the lifelong inspiration that defined his ministry as a priest and bishop. As recounted in his autobiography, *Treasure in Clay*, Sheen wrote about going for a stroll during recreation time. Noting that Saint Mary's Chapel was already locked by 6 p.m., he wrote, "The thought struck me — why not make a Holy Hour of Adoration in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament? The next day I began, and the practice is now well over sixty years old."⁵

Today, I am proud to say that Saint Mary's Chapel is not locked at 6 p.m. but is available to our priests and seminarians twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. And while Sheen may have been among the first who consistently prayed a Holy Hour in the chapel, today it is expected of our priests and seminarians. Three times a day we gather for prayer: an early morning Holy Hour, a midday Mass, and Evening Prayer before dinner. We pray in that very same chap-

el that Sheen came to know so intimately during his daily Holy Hour.

Most of us are creatures of habit. For the morning Holy Hour, I have my usual spot up front, in the second row on the right side, close to the statue of my patron, Saint Joseph. Occasionally I will have to remind a new seminarian, who may not yet have “his” spot in the chapel, not to take the rector’s! But this also creates an expectation—in a good way—that I will be there. If I am not, the seminarians will notice. I recall within the last year receiving a text message from one of the seminarians when I was away from the Seminary for a few days. He simply wanted to check in and ask if I was feeling all right, since he noticed that I wasn’t at the Holy Hour. He was relieved to learn that I was not sick but simply out of town. And I was honored to know that my presence had been missed and that this seminarian was considerate enough to reach out and see how I was doing.

Sheen made the Holy Hour with remarkable, even perfect, attendance during his lifetime as a priest. As explained in the chapter of his autobiography, he regularly invited priests and others who listened to his talks or took part in his retreats to imi-

tate his example and commit themselves to the daily Holy Hour.⁶

I wish I could claim the same perfect attendance in my nearly thirty years of priesthood, but, even if imperfect, a daily hour has been a consistent part of my life as a priest from the beginning. I typically begin the Holy Hour by prayerfully reading the daily Scripture passages from that day's Mass in the manner commonly known as *lectio divina*. I begin by using these inspired texts as a primer to express my heart to the Lord, becoming aware of my own thoughts, feelings, and desires. Then I try to listen to what the Lord may be saying to me, identifying those thoughts, feelings, and desires that bring me into communion with God. My method of prayer can be called Ignatian, after Saint Ignatius of Loyola, and follows the model popularized by the Institute of Priestly Formation in my home archdiocese of Omaha.⁷ I confess that sometimes I don't do so well at acknowledging and relating the deeper thoughts of my heart to the Lord, and sometimes the hour can turn into a bit of "problem solving" with the Lord as I consider so many issues on my heart and mind in a given day. And yet, even that can be real prayer—I would rather problem solve

with the Lord than on my own! And often it seems that the Lord helps. At times, my staff will hear me say something like this when I get to the office: “So it’s either a distraction or an inspiration from prayer this morning, but I was thinking . . .”

I am confident that both Ireland and Sheen would be pleased to know that Eucharistic devotion is alive and well at both the Seminary and in the local archdiocese. I recall the great privilege entrusted to me on Memorial Day, 2024. We were the starting site for a local Eucharistic procession as part of the wider effort of the US bishops to lead our country in a Eucharistic revival,⁸ culminating in the first National Eucharistic Congress in over eighty years (coincidentally, the previous one was held in Saint Paul, Minnesota, in 1941). Carrying that same monstrance from 1941, I exited the doors of Saint Mary’s Chapel to begin the procession down Summit Avenue, ending with Benediction at the cathedral led by Ireland’s successor, Archbishop Bernard A. Hebda.⁹ Walking down the scenic boulevard, our crowd swelled past seven thousand. This turnout marked the largest local procession in the nation leading up to that summer’s national gathering in Indianapolis.

Those who have contributed essays to this book—all of whom, like Archbishop Hebda and Bishop Cozzens, have a deep connection to The Saint Paul Seminary—speak to the value of the Holy Hour in their own lives and make some suggestions for the reader on how he or she may go about praying a Holy Hour before the Blessed Sacrament. I hope the words of Archbishop Fulton Sheen and our contributors become a source of grace and inspiration for you. And may we all strive to follow consistently Sheen’s incredible example and keep watch with Our Lord for an hour a day, as He asked the apostles (cf. Matt 26:40). Doing so will change our own hearts and contribute to a true Eucharistic revival in our country as we are sent out as missionary disciples to bring healing and grace to a world so much in need.

Blessed Fulton J. Sheen, pray for us!

Very Reverend Joseph C. Taphorn, JCL

June 29, 2026

Solemnity of Saints Peter and Paul

The Very Reverend Joseph C. Taphorn, JCL, a priest of the Archdiocese of Omaha who was ordained in 1997, has served as the Rector of The Saint Paul Seminary since January 2019. In addition to his duties as Rector, Father Taphorn teaches courses at the Seminary on the canon law of marriage and the charismatic gifts and ministry while also serving as an instructor in the Encounter School of Ministry at the Twin Cities campus.