

Monsignor Reynold Hillenbrand

(1904–1979)

Reynold Henry Hillenbrand (1904–1979), priest, professor, and pastor, was a leading figure in generating the Liturgical Movement in the United States. This forerunner of the Second Vatican Council's liturgical renewal heralded the conviction that the Church must learn to live organically and that its liturgy is the work of the Mystical Body of Christ, head and members joined in union.

At his childhood parish in Chicago, Hillenbrand witnessed the intertwining of liturgy and life. His parish was steeped in social justice issues and committed to grand liturgical celebrations, popular devotions, and congregational participation.

As a seminarian, Hillenbrand's sharp intellect and interest in papal teaching were recognized. He was chosen to study for a doctorate in theology in preparation for a career as a seminary professor, ordained earlier than most of his classmates, and given a year of study at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome.

However, just as Hillenbrand's world began to expand, the Depression hit. Hillenbrand's stay in Europe would give him a new perspective on the crisis, for he had discovered liturgical reform as a means for establishing wholeness in fractured lives.

Hillenbrand's attempt to refashion the worldview of Catholics in Chicago coincided with his tenure in the seminary, as a professor, then as rector. In addition, he was a leader in various social action endeavors. He was convinced that Catholics must be trained as "lay apostles," and as such, they must see their vocation as one of actively offering themselves at Mass so that they might actively offer themselves to the suffering of the world.

As rector of St. Mary of the Lake Seminary in Mundelein, Illinois, Hillenbrand implemented innovative ideas. He demanded that future priests prepare for a life of social action. Thus, the seminary doors were opened to social justice advocates and liturgical reformers.

To reinvigorate interest in liturgy as Catholic action (participation by the laity in the apostolate of the hierarchy), Hillenbrand sought to educate seminarians in the theological

"Catholic Action is rooted in the liturgy.

Indeed, it is an extension of the liturgy.

Why? Because it happens to be rooted in

Christ. . . . That is the complete Christ—

Christ still in the world, one living thing

with his members, acting through them and

with them."

(*The Family and Catholic Action*, 1946)



Photo courtesy of University of St. Mary of the Lake

meaning of the liturgy. From the outset of his time as rector, he introduced the dialogue Mass and insisted on a common

Eucharistic celebration in the seminary. He required a Homily at every Mass and encouraged the celebration of the Mass of the day. At a time when seminaries focused on the correct recitation of Latin, Hillenbrand turned his attention to teaching the meaning of the prayers.

Hillenbrand's direct involvement with the formation of clergy ended in 1944, when he was named pastor of a parish. Here, too, he focused on the formation of lay apostles. He insisted that the music program both educate parishioners on the role of music and encourage universal involvement. During this time, he also was engaged in the work of liturgical reform across the nation.

Hillenbrand died on May 22, 1979, his life marked by his conviction that sacrificial liturgy forms sacrificial living. He helped provide a strong foundation upon which the U.S. Liturgical Movement could emerge in the heartland and extend from shore to shore. For Hillenbrand, learning the liturgy would lead to the healing of the world. These words, written in 1957, make evident this truth: "Because the Church is the prolongation of Christ in the world, through the history of humanity, the Church is essentially missionary. The Church must contribute to the renewal in Christ in all aspects of our lives (work, love, culture, customs, diverse human communities) and of all the peoples of the world."



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