

When Jesus cures a man in the synagogue on the sabbath, his actions are both respectful and prayerful. Jesus respects the man with the withered right hand by offering him help. Corporal works of mercy are always appropriate and doubly important on the sabbath. Jesus is the Divine Physician who shows us what it means to be truly human and how to truly celebrate the sabbath. Visiting the sick and ransoming the captive are incorporated in the saying, “I expect to pass through this world but once; and any good thing, therefore, that I can do or any kindness that I can show to any fellow creature, let me do it now; let me not defer or neglect it, for I shall not pass this way again” (Etienne de Grellet).

Jesus’ help also reflects a prayerful awareness of Psalm 137. “If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right-hand wither!” (Ps 137:1). This verse comes from the mouth of a singer who “refuses to sing the people’s sacred songs in an alien land despite demands from Babylonian captors. The singer swears an oath by what is most dear to a musician—hands and tongue—to exalt Jerusalem always” (Note to Ps 137). Luke is very careful to note that it is the right hand that is withered where the other gospel writers leave this detail out.

Jesus heals the right hand of the suffering man on the sabbath. Implied in the miracle, this is the time to sing the sacred songs for the Messiah has come to rescue the captives and offer healing to the impaired. The suffering, the downtrodden, the oppressed and afflicted, the forgotten and the neglected are quicker to accept Jesus’ message of salvation than the scribes and Pharisees (Note to Lk 4:18). Jesus offers every sinner healing through the forgiveness of sins. He offers us his Body and Blood that we may be changed and transformed into holier people. Through his death and resurrection, he has opened the gates of heaven for us. Indeed, it is a time to sing the sacred songs for Jesus offers us salvation.

Sadly, the intentions of the scribes and Pharisee are out of tune with the saving grace Jesus offers. “Jesus the Savior has clearly come to do good and save life. His opponents, however, have come to do evil and destroy life, hardly a fitting way to observe the sabbath!”ⁱ

There are deep divisions in our own times. Like the scribes and Pharisees, we may be so convinced of our own righteousness, that we are blind to our sins of division and discouragement. Clearly, we must examine our own motives and intentions, looking for purity of heart and soul.

Like Saint Paul in his letter to the Colossians, we are called to encourage people in such a way as to bring them together “in love, to have all the richness of assured understanding, for the knowledge of the mystery of God, Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (2:2-3).

ⁱ Gadenz, Pablo T.. The Gospel of Luke (Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture) (p. 124).