

Homily based on the readings from September 6, 2025 (Colossians 1.21-23; Luke 6.1-5)

As you are probably aware, our Jewish brothers and sisters observe the sabbath – or shabbat – from sundown on Friday to sundown on Saturday. Therefore it is especially appropriate for us to hear this particular Gospel reading at a Saturday morning Mass. This passage recounts one of several instances where the religious authorities denounced Jesus for allegedly not following the guidelines of the sabbath. With two thousand years of hindsight, we can clearly see the *absurdity* of this position. How could anyone have the audacity to criticize *God himself* for disobeying the very laws that *he* had instituted? That is exactly the point Jesus is making when he reminds the Pharisees that the “Son of Man is lord of the sabbath.”

There is another way, though, in which the Pharisees completely miss the point. We would normally hear the continuation of this story at Mass this coming Monday, but it is being superseded this year by the

readings for the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary. In any event, the Pharisees follow up on today's exchange by chastising Jesus for performing a *healing* on the sabbath. In fact, not only is Christ's action not a *violation* of the sabbath law, but it is actually the *fulfillment* of one of the primary purposes of the sabbath. Pay attention to the text of the Third Commandment, as it is recorded in the Book of Deuteronomy:

Observe the sabbath day – keep it holy, as the Lord, your God, commanded you. Six days you may labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath of the Lord your God. You shall not do any work, either you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your ox or donkey or any work animal, or the resident alien within your gates, *so that your male and female slave may rest as you do.*

The sabbath is explicitly designed for us to show mercy to the people – and even the animals – under our care. That is exactly *why* Jesus chose to perform the healings when he did – not *despite* the sabbath, but *because of it.*

It is no accident that God gave the Children of Israel the Ten Commandments at the very moment when he was showing them his greatest mercy – as he was leading them out of bondage in Egypt. Here is the conclusion to that passage from Deuteronomy:

Remember that you too were once slaves in the land of Egypt, and the Lord, your God, brought you out from there with a strong hand and outstretched arm. That is why the Lord, your God, has commanded you to observe the sabbath day.

The commandments themselves are a roadmap for mercy – the mercy God shows us and the mercy we are required to show others. The Children of Israel, as a result of the *cruelty* they had experienced, knew painfully well what it was like *not* to receive mercy. That is precisely why the Commandments begin with the following admonition: “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.” While the specific circumstances evolve, the basic choice never changes: we can live out God’s mercy in whatever

situations he sets before us, or we can look for excuses to denounce the mercy of others. That decision, which the Lord entrusts to each of us, *fundamentally* determines what kind of person we will be. By the grace of God, may we all have the good judgment to choose wisely.