

Historic Commentary



(Second Sunday after Pentecost - Year B)

The Liturgy Letter

Commentary on Mark 2:23-3:6 from Selected Church Fathers

[Thomas Aquinas' curated commentary on Mark 2](#), from a 13th century document called the [Catena Aurea](#) that contains compiled verse by verse commentary on the Gospels from the Patristics and others.

Athanasius: In the synagogue of the Jews was a man who had a withered hand. If he was withered in his hand, the ones who stood by were withered in their minds. And they were not looking at the crippled man nor were they expecting the miraculous deed of the one who was about to work. But before doing the work, the Savior ploughed up their minds with words. For knowing the evil of the mind and its bitter depth, he first softened them up in advance with words so as to tame the wildness of their understanding, asking: "Is it permitted to do good on the sabbath or to do evil; to save a life or to destroy one?" For if he had said to them, "Is it permitted to work?" immediately they would have said, "You are speaking contrary to the law." Then he told them what was intended by the law, for he spoke as the One who established the laws concerning the sabbath, adding, "except this: that which will be done for the sake of a life." Again if a person falls into a hole on a sabbath, Jews are permitted to pull the person out. This not only applies to a person, but also an ox or a donkey. In this way the law agrees that things relating to preservation may be done, hence Jews prepare meals on the sabbath. Then he asked them about a point on which they could hardly disagree: "Is it permitted to do good?" But they did not even so much as say, "Yes," because by then they were not in a good temper

Chrysostom: Jesus said to the man with the withered hand, "Come here." Then he challenged the Pharisees as to whether it would be lawful to do good on the sabbath. Note the tender compassion of the Lord when he deliberately brought the man with the withered hand right into their presence. He hoped that the mere sight of the misfortune might soften them, that they might become a little less spiteful by seeing the affliction, and perhaps out of sorrow mend their own ways. But they remained callous and unfeeling. They preferred to do harm to the name of Christ than to see this poor man made whole. They betrayed their wickedness not only by their hostility to Christ, but also by their doing so with such contentiousness that they treated with disdain his mercies to others.

Augustine: If angry emotions which spring from a love of what is good and from holy charity are to be labeled vices, then all I can say is that some vices should be called virtues. When such affections as anger are directed to their proper objects, they are

following good reasoning, and no one should dare to describe them as maladies or vicious passions. This explains why the Lord himself, who humbled himself to the form of a servant, was guilty of no sin whatever as he displayed these emotions openly when appropriate. Surely the One who assumed a true human body and soul would not counterfeit his human affections. Certainly, the Gospel does not falsely attribute emotions to Christ when it speaks of him being saddened and angered by the lawyers because of their blindness of heart.

Chrysostom: I exhort you that you not carelessly slumber so as to leave everything to God. Nor, when diligent in your endeavors, imagine that by your own exertions the whole work is achieved. God does not will that we should be indolent. For God does not do the whole work by himself by fiat. Nor is it his will that we should be entirely self-sufficient. For God does not commit the whole work to us alone.

Athanasius: But Jesus, deeply grieved in heart at the hardness of their hearts, said in effect: “Let the ones who see continue to see. Let the ones who refuse to hear do what they want to do. Let the ones who are hard in heart become stone. But let your right hand become full and tender. Rise, beg no longer.” ... In effect Jesus was saying: “Do not continue to beg because of having a withered hand, but after you finally have received it healthy and whole and have begun to work, stretch out your hand to the poor. Rise up and stand in their midst. Become a marvel to those who see. In you the struggle concerning the sabbath is finally being contested. Stand in their midst, so that the ones who are lame in their legs might stand.... Stretch out your hand. I am not touching you so that they may not bring a charge against me. I am speaking with a speech so that they may not think that touching is an act of work. God did not say, ‘Do not speak on the sabbath.’ But if speech becomes an act of work, let the one who has spoken be an object of amazement. Stretch out your hand.” ... While the withered hand was restored, the withered minds of the onlookers were not. For they went out and immediately, according to the reading, were debating what they would do to Jesus. Are you debating what you will do? Worship him as God. Worship the wonder worker. Worship one who worked good things on behalf of another. He did not add plasters; he was not tenderizing with lotions. He did not apply medical ointments. He did this work openly, standing in their midst, and not in a hidden way, so that some might retort: “He applied a plant; he added a plaster.”