Monday 7 September

Today is Monday the 7 September, in the 23rd week of Ordinary Time.

The community of Taizé sing, Mon ame se repose en paix sur Dieu seul. ‘Only in God does my soul find rest.’ Recognising that I am in the presence now of that same God, the only one in whom I can truly find rest, I place myself in God’s loving hands.

Today’s reading is from the Gospel of Luke.

Luke 6:6-11

On another sabbath he entered the synagogue and taught, and there was a man there whose right hand was withered. The scribes and the Pharisees watched him to see whether he would cure on the sabbath, so that they might find an accusation against him. Even though he knew what they were thinking, he said to the man who had the withered hand, ‘Come and stand here.’ He got up and stood there. Then Jesus said to them, ‘I ask you, is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the sabbath, to save life or to destroy it?’ After looking around at all of them, he said to him, ‘Stretch out your hand.’ He did so, and his hand was restored. But they were filled with fury and discussed with one another what they might do to Jesus.

For people of faith, one of the most difficult consequences of the present situation is that across the world, our churches have been closed. Even the world wars didn’t have this impact on our Sunday tradition. With Sunday liturgy having so much significance in the Christian faith, how have you experienced this time? How has the celebration of the Sabbath changed for you?

There is a saying that Jesus always saves his most controversial gestures for the Sabbath. Not that Jesus doesn’t understand the importance of the Sabbath. He absolutely does, he shares the faith tradition of the Pharisees and scribes. It is his understanding of those traditions that separates them. Consider the man with the withered hand spending how many Sabbaths in the synagogue under the accusing eyes of the Pharisees. And then Jesus calls to him. Compassion over observance. Jesus’ act of love. On the Lord’s day, is it not right to do the work of the Lord? Is it not right to welcome, forgive and heal? These are questions that reach to the heart of our faith.

As you listen to the reading again, imagine yourself in the scene. Watch Jesus: how he looks, his tone of voice, how the people react to him.

Jesus says ‘stretch out your hand’. As you end this time of prayer today, stretch out your hand towards his compassionate heart.

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.