

Watching a baby learn how the world works is a beautiful thing. Sometimes an infant can spend minutes just gazing at that strange thing at the end of their own arm as it moves back and forth, up and down. Soon those little hands are grabbing things, trying to put them in their mouths. Then the real fun begins. These little hands become part of a mobile unit and start exploring their world. That’s when things like plastic plugs appear in electrical outlets. Those devices keep little hands—and the rest of the baby—safe. But soon enough, those hands get bigger and the things they try to handle grow in proportion and in danger. Pots, pans, glasses, utensils. Later, those hands can throw a baseball through a window, take things that don’t belong to them, wrap themselves around objects that could easily become lethal. By and large, those hands learn from experience that some things are not worth grasping. Experience teaches that some things are good ideas and some are bad. Touching a hot stove, for example: bad idea.

We tend to take good care of our hands. Like most parts of our bodies, we normally expect them to work, until they don’t—and it is then that we gain a newfound appreciation for them. But these hands of ours can also inflict pain on others, in an almost unlimited number of ways. How free our fingers feel to fire off a letter, email, or text to ‘put someone in their place.’ Sometimes we grab the phone to make a call in which we talk about someone to the ruin of their reputation—and if not the ruin, at least taking them down a peg or two. And of course, hands themselves can be weaponized to bruise and batter. Hands have been at the center of some of the darkest moments of our lives.

Jesus was walking around once, and a man suffering from leprosy ran up to him. The man knelt before Jesus and said, “Lord, if you will, you can make me clean.” This man was looking for purity and believed that he found it in the holy hands of Jesus. To drive home this point, we need only look at what happened next. Lepers were cut off from society because anyone who got too close could catch the dreaded disease themselves. Jesus reached out and touched the man with his own hand and said “I will; be clean.” And the man was made clean, instantly. Jesus took away the suffering of this poor man with his healing hands.

Now wouldn’t you think that the world would reward someone who could do that? Instead, Jesus was handed over to Pontius Pilate, who consented to his crucifixion. Before that, though, soldiers’ hands would twist thorn branches into a crown, and shove it onto Jesus head. Soldiers’ hands would strike Jesus with a rod and put the beam of a cross on his back. Jesus holy hands, those healing hands, struggled under its weight, carrying it to the place he would die. Soldiers’ hands grabbed hammers and plunged nails into his body, affixing him to the cross until his last breath. Are you ready for this? We stand with those heartless, hardened soldiers when we wrap our hands around the wrong things. We stand with Pontius Pilate when we violate our own conscience, and our hands do not serve as they should.

Every time we use the precious gift of these hands for evil, remember that Jesus’ hands bear the marks of punishment that we deserve. With all the weight of our sins bearing down on him, the nails were pounded into Jesus’ wrists. It has often been said that we put Jesus on that

cross. But what is equally true and perhaps more amazing is that Jesus put Jesus on that cross. Meaning not that he deserved it, but precisely that he didn't deserve it, but he intentionally, obediently, lovingly allowed himself to handle the things that we, by the sin of our hands, had coming to us. Jesus knows what we do—and he knows what we cannot do. So, Jesus became the sacrificial lamb. He came to volunteer his life as payment for ours. For all we do with *these*. He let his hands be subject to the driving nails of the executioner. Because our hands do evil, Jesus hands did the ultimate good.

Jesus' hands could have let go, he could have denied the nails entry into his flesh, he could have leapt from the cross and healed his own wounds. But this would've left us to pay for sins alone—to die in them—to be divorced from God's goodness without hope of reconciliation, ever. Jesus' hands could have used might to get out of his mission; but instead, they used weakness, they allowed the violence, they accepted the sentence of the nails until his suffering was enough. When it was enough, Jesus breathed his last and was brought down from the cross, hands and all.

And, greatest of miracles, that is not the last thing those holy hands—those healing hands—did for us. Three days later, Jesus came out of his tomb alive, and began inviting people to handle his hands and feet and side, to see that he was really real, really resurrected. His living hands embrace us at the font, where we are baptized in the saving name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. His living hands serve us at his table, where He gives his broken and scarred body and precious blood for our nourishment and forgiveness. His living hands are healing hands, curing body and soul. His living hands are providing hands, giving to material and spiritual needs. In his powerful hands, the Church is kept safe. We cannot be stolen out of the grasp of our Good Shepherd. His hands have saved you from hell itself. His hands are saving you still.