



ABOUT THE PROPERS

An Explanation of the Variable Parts of the Divine Service



Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Proper 19

September 17, 2023



The Church Forgives as God Forgives

Anytime we try to imitate God, we quickly realize our inadequacy. Yet today God tells us to model our forgiveness on his: a boundless, free, and loving forgiveness based on the sacrifice of Christ. How could our sinful hearts ever forgive like that? The Prayer of the Day asks that the mercy and grace of God precede us and follow after us, that we might love God with undivided hearts—hearts always ready to forgive as God does: sins are forgiven, forgotten, forever. ¹

The Propers

The Propers are those portions of the service that change (i.e. are “proper” to) each Sunday or season of the church year. The Propers differ from the Ordinary (from the Latin ordo, which means “regular order”) portions of the liturgy, which do not change (e.g. the Lord’s Prayer). The Propers offer the variety to the worship service and emphasize particular worship themes throughout the liturgical calendar.

First Reading ¹

Genesis 50:15-21

How hard it is to forgive like God! We may forgive someone who hurts us, but we never forget. We harbor that hurt deep inside of us for years—never understanding that we are locking ourselves in the prison of the past. Joseph’s brothers feared that they would finally have to pay for what they did to Joseph. His father was gone; he was still in charge in Egypt; and the brothers thought that they were going to face Joseph’s vengeance. As repentant sinners, we often act like the brothers and wait for God to get even with us for our past sins. Shame on us! We are making God as shallow as we are! In God’s eyes our sins are forgiven, forgotten, forever. Joseph wept at their words as he remembered the sordid history and all the emotions that came with it. He wept, but he was free from the prison of the past; he had forgiven his brothers their terrible deeds. Through his tears, Joseph never wavered, but he calmed his brothers’ fears, forgave them like God forgives, and set them free from their prison of the past.

Second Reading ¹

Ephesians 4:29 – 5:2

Paul commands us not to act like the unmerciful servant, but rather: “Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice.” The Church is comprised of people who have been sealed for redemption, so let’s act like it! Not only kindness and compassion, but forgiveness is the primary mark of the Christian. We forgive because God forgave us in Christ. That makes us imitators of God. Every Old Testament sacrificial victim pointed ahead to the death of Christ, the fragrant offering and the atoning sacrifice that won our forgiveness and inspires our forgiveness for others.

Gospel ¹

Matthew 18:21-35

Forgiveness must be learned, and Peter thought he had figured it out. From the elders of the Jews Peter had heard: “If a man transgresses one time, forgive him. If a man transgresses two times, forgive him. If a man transgresses three times, forgive him. If a man transgresses four times, do not forgive him.” Three times, the elders said, was the limit of forgiveness for a good Jew. Peter, however, was willing to go much further; not three times, but seven times, Peter thought with a smile. Until Jesus said, “Not seven times, Peter, seventy times seven— what the elders say doesn’t matter. I say to you that your forgiveness should have no limit, but be like God’s.” Jesus’ parable

contrasts the forgiveness of God and our own unforgiving nature. The servant's debt— by any measure of calculation—was impossibly high (perhaps 150,000 years' wages). Who could have accrued debt such as this? Who could ever hope to repay? What an arresting picture of our debt of sin before God! The greatness of the debt magnifies the compassion of the king who wipes the debt away. Who can comprehend the forgiveness of God? Certainly not unmerciful servants like us, who refuse to forgive the small debts owed to us, and instead, inflict on our fellow servants the punishments that God should rightly have given us. Have mercy on us, Lord, and teach us to forgive like you!

Psalm of the Day Psalm 103 A

“The LORD Is Kind and Merciful.” The Lord is to be praised because he has not treated us as our sins deserve. He has provided cleansing for our souls and health for our bodies.

Gospel Acclamation Colossians 3:13

“Bear with each other and forgive one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.”

Prayer of the Day

Lord God, heavenly Father, you graciously forgive us all our sins and abundantly provide for all our needs of body and soul. Give us confidence in your mercy, and teach us also to be merciful to our neighbor, that we willingly forgive all people, and judging only ourselves, lead blessed lives to your glory; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Hymn of the Day 733 “Forgive Our Sins as We Forgive” (Rosamond E. Herklots, 1905–87)

Church Year Season³ Sundays after Pentecost

After reliving the great events of the life of Christ, the worshipping Church spends half a year focusing on the teachings of Christ. The Church wears green during the season of Pentecost as the Spirit uses those teachings of Jesus to grow the faith of believers. The appointed lessons cover a great body of doctrine for faith and life.

Colors & Symbolism Sundays after Pentecost: Green

Green is the color of life, refreshment, growth, and regeneration. Whereas the first half of the Church Year (the “Festival Half” or the “Half Year of Our Lord”) focused on the life of Christ during his earthly ministry, the emphasis for the second half (the “Non-Festival half” or the “Half Year of the Church”) shifts to the result of Christ's work through the Word: the work of defining and creating faith, and inspiring its fruits. The theme of the Christian's growth in faith (like healthy green plants) fills the season.

Minor Festivals St. Matthew, Apostle (September 21)

Nain Paraments Sundays after Pentecost

SuperfrONTAL: When Isaiah was called to be a prophet of the LORD, two seraphs (a class of angels) appeared and called out to one another, “Holy, Holy, Holy” (Isaiah 6:3). The threefold repetition of the divine adjective emphasizes the infinite holiness of the Triune God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Some congregations count the Sundays in this season of the Church Year as the Sundays after the festival of the Holy Trinity, calling it the “Trinity season,” or the “Sundays after Trinity.” That is why most paraments for this season feature symbols of the Holy Trinity.

Lectern antependium: The equilateral triangle is one of the oldest emblems of the Holy Trinity. The three equal sides and angles represent the equality, unity, and co-eternal nature of the three persons of the Trinity. Though they are three distinct persons, they are of one essence as one God (Deuteronomy 6:4). The three interwoven circles represent the three members of the Trinity and emphasize their unity and eternal nature; Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are without beginning or end.

Pulpit antependium: At each point of the triangle (the significance of the triangle is explained above) is a nimbus, Latin for *cloud*. The nimbus appears as a circle, or a halo. In Christian artwork, nimbi surround the head of the Father (when he is depicted as a human), Jesus Christ, or the Holy Spirit (when he is depicted as a dove) to signify their glory and holiness. In artistic depictions of believers (saints), nimbi are placed around their heads to show that they have been made holy by God's grace in Christ and through faith. The three fish in between the nimbi and that meet in the middle of the triangle signify Christians who are united to the Triune God by faith. Fish have come to represent the followers of Jesus because believers have been brought into the ship of God's church through the efforts of those who proclaim Gospel (cf. “fishers of men” in Matthew 4:19).

¹ Courtesy of “Planning Christian Worship: Year A”. Jonathan E. Schroeder, Author.

² Courtesy of “Planning Christian Worship: Year B”. Daniel M. Deutschlander, Author.

³ Courtesy of “Planning Christian Worship: Year C”. Joel J. Gawrisch, Author.

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