



ABOUT THE PROPERS

An Explanation of the Variable Parts of the Divine Service



Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost

September 20, 2020



The Church fulfills her role as her brother's keeper.

The privilege, responsibility and importance of this task all rest in the words from our Gospel lesson that follow Jesus' divine directive, "I tell you the truth..." The keys of the kingdom have been placed in our hands. It is our privilege and responsibility to bind and to loose—to be our brother's keeper—because Christ has appointed the Church to carry out that task on his behalf. Note carefully today's emphasis as opposed to next Sunday's to keep from duplicating themes. While forgiveness is inherent in Christian discipline, today we note the work of the Christian and the Church to reach out with Law and Gospel for the sake of the fallen brother or sister. ¹

The Propers

The Propers are those portions of the service that change (or, 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 Lesson ¹

Ezekiel 33:7-11

Since the time of Cain, man has hated being his brother's keeper. Are we any different today? Who but little Pharisees enjoy pointing out others' sins? But God tells us the task is not optional. No one wants to wake up their next door neighbor at 6:00am on a Saturday. But if his house were burning, and you let him sleep, you are not just loveless and careless. You are a killer. In the same way God drops on us the heavy message of being a watchman for our brother. God's judgment on fallen man is as clear as it is severe. If we fail to do the job God has assigned us, God promises to hold us accountable. With the Law driven deeply into our hearts, God then reminds us why he has given us this job: because of his grace and his desire for the salvation of all mankind. The responsibility of waking our neighbor asleep in a burning house becomes a joyful privilege when he emerges safely from the smoke. May our task of being our brother's keeper always be one done with such responsibility and joy.

Second Lesson ¹

Romans 13:1-10

This is the fifteenth in a series of sixteen lessons that run through Pentecost 17. Paul takes up the issue of government and the Christian's relationship to it. A Christian is a citizen of two kingdoms. The first part of this text is the definitive section of Scripture on our role as citizens of an earthly kingdom. Yet the latter part of this lesson best fits with the theme for the day. We owe our neighbor a debt of love. Keeping the commandments fulfills the law of love. "Love does no harm to its neighbor." Today's lessons point out that doing harm to our neighbor also means failing to do what God tells us in his regard: being his keeper.

Gospel of the Day ¹

Matthew 18:15-20

"Matthew 18" has become shorthand for Christian discipline. This Sunday provides an excellent opportunity to ensure that shorthand has not become short shrift. The importance of Christian discipline lies in the fact that the keys have been placed into the hands of the Church and in no other. The Christian and the Church are a fallen sinner's only life line. Satan tries to make Christian discipline seem like the height of hypocrisy or meddling. But his is a self-interested motive: he wants the fallen brother's sins bound like his for an

eternity in hell. Only love could lead the Christian and the Church to go to a fallen brother. Only love led our Savior to command it. Even the manner Jesus prescribes shows great love for the fallen. First, privately, so that offense and embarrassment might be contained, and pardon and forgiveness might all the more readily flow. Then with two or three, that the matter might be underscored without making tongues wag throughout the congregation. Finally, also in love, the Church calls and, if necessary, shuns. Such a great privilege and power has Christ bestowed on us! It leads us to even greater reliance on prayer for guidance and the presence of our Savior among us.

Psalm of the Day Psalm 51a

Our prayers for forgiveness in this penitential Psalm are based upon the Lord's "unfailing love" and his "great compassion."

Verse of the Day Philippians 4:4 (cf. RSV)

"Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice." The child of God will always find cause for rejoicing since his joy is not based on the ups and downs of everyday life, nor upon the temporary and sometimes artificial happiness which the world has to offer. His joy is found "in the Lord" and in the forgiveness he freely offers. Such joy is a fruit of the Holy Spirit who calls people to faith through the good news of Jesus.

Prayer of the Day

Let your continual mercy, O Lord, cleanse and defend your Church; and because it cannot continue in safety without your help, protect and govern it always by your goodness; for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Hymn of the Day 304 "Jesus Sinners Does Receive" (Erdmann Neumeister, 1671-1756)

Church Year Season¹ 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 teach us the characteristics of the Holy Ministry, the Christian, the Church, our God, and the Christian 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.

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 and Editor.
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