



ABOUT THE PROPERs

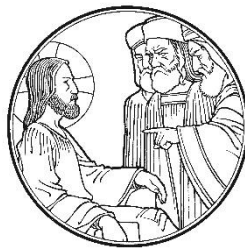
An Explanation of the Variable Parts of the Divine Service



Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Proper 21

October 1, 2023



A Story of Spiritual Insincerity

You have maybe heard the accusation or perhaps even made it yourself: “He’s so fake!” That charge claims someone’s friendliness or kindness is a sham. Such insincerity bothers us. We would generally rather someone be honest about how they feel about us than be fake. Through a story Jesus teaches us that God feels the same. God doesn’t want us to simply go through religious motions like some sort of show. He sees right through that. God’s desire is that our repentance would demonstrate sincere sorrow over sin. God wants us to see the grace and forgiveness he has shown us in Christ, and in response, to love him back deeply and sincerely.

The Propers

*The Proper*s 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

Ezekiel 18:1-4,25-32

On this Sunday when the Church is called to continual repentance, Ezekiel brings a strong warning for Christians who grow lax in their faith or dismissive of their sin. God wants real repentance that leads to true obedience. Israel had not given either. Instead of seeing their suffering as a result of their sin and as a call to repentance, they saw only injustice. With their favorite proverb, “The fathers eat sour grapes and the children’s teeth are set on edge,” they were saying that God should certainly punish sin, but they felt he was punishing the wrong people. They felt they were being punished for the sins of their parents, and they implied that God was not just in treating them this way. God denies it all: the soul that sins is the one that will die. This is not injustice—no, the injustice is that Man who was made for perfection sinned again and again against his God. God shows just how just he is: he will judge each man according to his way. Repent, God says, turn from your wickedness and live. God promises not to judge us by our past, but by our present, and so he calls us to live anew. Repent and receive a new heart and new spirit that leads to true obedience. Why will you die, O Israel? God wants exactly the opposite—repent and live!

Second Reading

Philippians 2:1-11

This is the second in a series of four lessons in the book of Philippians. Paul quotes a Hymn of Humiliation and Exultation as a model to shape our attitudes. Real repentance leads us to the true obedience of imitating Christ. Jesus is the third son—the one never mentioned in the parable—the son who said “Yes,” and also worked in the vineyard. Jesus is the true son of his Father who both said the words, “Not my will, but yours,” and did the work, “obedient to death—even death on a cross.” When his work in the vineyard was complete, God exalted his Son to the highest place and now calls every man to real repentance and the true obedience of bending the knee and confessing with joy that Jesus Christ is Lord.

Gospel

Matthew 21:28-32

They seemed so righteous as they stood in the temple courts. The great men of Israel had gathered against Jesus. These men knew all the words to say and ways to act, but the only “righteousness” they had was a self-righteousness that offended God. They claimed to be doing God’s work and fulfilling his will, but there was no repentance and no true obedience. The parable Jesus spoke against them convicts

every self-righteous person. The father commands two sons to work in his vineyard and receives two surprising answers. The first son flatly refuses; he fails to even offer an excuse, but simply says, “I will not.” The second son says all the right things and tacks on an appropriately respectful title. He seems almost breathless in his readiness to do the father’s will. True obedience, however, is not merely saying what God wants to hear, but doing what God wants done. The first son repented of his wickedness and gave his father true obedience; the second merely mouthed the words and contented himself with doing his own thing. Which did what the father wanted? Jesus’ question had only one answer, and the religious leaders gave it and indicted themselves. Yes, even the vilest sinner that repents gives an obedience far more true than the upright man wallowing in his self-righteousness. What a powerful preachment against the Pharisee inside each of us that wants to be content with saying the right words when it comes to faith! What a stinging rebuke of our lukewarm Christianity that confesses Christ with our mouth but denies him with our deeds! Repent, Christ says, and believe—true obedience will surely follow.

Psalm of the Day Psalm 25 B

“I Lift My Soul to You.” Especially in times of crisis, God’s people seek to be guided in God’s truth. We look to the Lord, our refuge.

Verse of the Day Psalm 51:17

“My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart you will not despise.”

Prayer of the Day

Mercifully grant, O God, that your Holy Spirit may in all things direct and rule our hearts, for without your help we are unable to please you; 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 547 “At the Name of Jesus” (Caroline M. Noel, 1817-1877)

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.

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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