



A cross made of oysters and pearls...

***Pernicious,
persistent and
Gloriously wild***

***A homily for the 17th
Sunday in Ordinary
Time – Matthew 13:
the parables of the
Kingdom***

Mthr V

I used to bake a lot of bread, back in the day, and it's something I would love to get back to. It's so simple. Flour, water, maybe some salt – that'll make a flatbread, and flatbread is ok, very trendy at the moment – quick, easy, and it'll get you there. Does the job of nutrition.

But if you want more than that – if you want the full Hovis effect – the goodness and nutrition and sheer joy of a well-risen warm loaf – that's when the yeast comes in. Not especially notable for its good looks, or taste-sensation, and in our world of rush, perhaps frustratingly slow to act... but ... add it to your flour and water, and slowly the miracle happens. With a faint smell of alcohol that's just enough to remind us of the wedding at Cana, so your bowl fills with fully dough ready for the baking. One tiny teaspoon, or a small colourless block works through an enormous amount of flour, flushing out the sugars – and we all know that sugars aren't great for us – and turning them into rising agents and alcohol.

Jesus says... be more yeast.

Sometimes in the world we look for fast answers, or we make do with the flatbread of existence – it gets you there after all. The Christian call isn't to settle for that – but to work through the simple things – the flour and water of existence – patiently playing the longer game, bringing a new sense of hope, nutrition and possibility. With just a faint smell of party. Bringing in a harvest of treasure – those metaphorical fish of every kind.

Sounds glamorous.

Sounds quite a big call on a grey Monday morning.

Jesus – the Gardener - knew his fields and crops, and so did the people he was talking to.

Don't get too caught up in the glamour – remember yeast is a fungus. The kingdom of God is like a Fungus, says Jesus – wanna be a part of it?

Might not be glamorous, but fungi are essential – working from within to break down decaying matter. Many plants rely on fungi to survive and herbivores such as cows rely on fungi in their gut to break down the grass they eat. And that's not forgetting the bread and the brewing – the essential nutrition and the party of life.

Maybe you feel like a glorious hot-house Dahlia this morning, or a rose bush of gorgeous scent and colour. But Jesus says, even if you don't feel like the stuff of a catwalk – this world needs you.

As an active raising agent.

(There you go – suddenly you're the 007 of the Kingdom of God.)

Talking of flowers... maybe ... you'd rather be a mustard seed, says Jesus the Gardener to his audience. Now they really do know what a mustard tree looks like. It's small, unimpressive... and if you're really lucky it might grow to 8 foot, more likely three.. OK, it's got medicinal properties, but it's hardly a cash crop, and it self-seeds everywhere. Rabbis tried to outlaw planting them in gardens. Think Japanese knotweed, or Himalayan balsam. Once you've got it... you simply can't get rid of it. Better be careful what you pray for when you pray "your kingdom come"!

Jesus is a rabbi. He knows this.

Who wants to be a mustard seed???

No one fancies being a pernicious weed this week? Nor a fungus?

"In *God's Kingdom*".... Says Jesus Our Lord with a grin, and dust in his sandals... in amongst the crowds...

They say weeds are just flowers that are growing in the wrong place... plants that have grown without invitation, disrupting the plans for a piece of land.

Well, perhaps in a world that is aching for peace, aching for justice, aching for healing, habitually cynical and despairing, a world where power is often mis-used –

we are called to be weeds. Growing where we aren't necessarily wanted. Gloriously beautiful actually - if you aren't necessarily looking for the world's definition of beautiful. Not given much value or credibility, but incredibly hard to get rid of. Persistent, self-seeding ... and, as we are coming to realise more and more... absolutely essential to the natural world, and to our survival. A great habitat as ground cover for all the little and the vulnerable, and the essential insects that keep our harvest going. Yes, the weeds in our lawns are blessed by God. We are not called to be perfectly manicured gardens, but... gloriously abundantly wild.

That's mustard, the pernicious weed of Judea. That's Christianity. Getting where we aren't wanted, buckling the paving slabs of depression and oppression with unquenchable life. Self-seeding and unstoppable in persecution, proclaiming a different sort of beauty. Like yeast, getting down and into the eco system of humanity and blessing it from the littlest upward - from the inside, outward. Often overlooked, and completely undeterred.

There's this thing about pearls. Jesus tells us the Kingdom is like a pearl. Beautiful they are, aren't they. They're not so fashionable in this day and age are they. But you hold one in your hand and let it warm there, and gaze into the depths and depths of translucent colour and story. Now this is more like it! The more 'sexy' image at last. Perhaps being a fungus, or a weed didn't quite cut it for you on a glorious resurrection morning?

Well... this is the Cross of Christ. Don't forget how a true pearl is made. An irritant that it is causing pain and hurt... wrapped and wrapped in layers of healing beauty, until pain is transformed, and held.

No wonder this is something we glimpse... and seek after. That sometimes we need to give all we have, to discover the greater treasure.

Will you follow me, says Christ, take up your cross, take the pain of the world, and wrap and wrap it in love and beauty, layer by layer, until it is transformed and shot through with the translucent light of Easter. Will you be the place where the pain stops, absorbed in the grace and the strength and the hope that I will give you?

The entry into the Kingdom is through 12 gates of pearl. You only get there by holding the pain in faith and transforming it.

Will you follow me?

That glorious harvest of fish of every kind. The good and the bad, all drawn together where God can do his work of wrapping, healing, breaking down, transforming, sorting out all the evils and brokennesses of this world, until eventually – one day – the *whole* harvest will be brought in.

Claimed by Christ, chosen at baptism, beloved by him, glimpsing the kingdom, and seeking for it - we are called to be part of that glorious invasion in the world – small and straggling though we might be, playing the long game with Christ the ... we are called – *In the grace of God I ask... Do you reject evil? Yes, we do.*

Did you know that the closest widespread crop we have here in Britain to the mustard seed is the rape seed crop? Which, just before harvest, sweeps our countryside with those glorious swathes of yellow fields. I used to live in amongst some of those fields, and let me tell you, those flowers self-seed everywhere. But if you look closely, those huge fields of glorious countryside changing yellow, are actually made up of lots of tiny straggling, lop-sided flowers, all blazing away together...

Fungi, weeds, and pearls. We are all beautiful in God's eyes. Essential to the eco-system of the Kingdom, and called to play our part, persistent, disruptive.. transformative.

And once you've seen it... even amongst all that outshines it in glamour and riches - you realise it's worth more than anything else in the world.

