

**Homily for July 17, 2005
16th Sunday of the Year (A)**

By Father Charles Bowes

**Wisdom 12:13, 17-19
Psalm 86:5-6, 9-10, 15-16
Romans 8:26-27
Matthew 13:24-43**

God is transforming us, and transforming our world through us.

Our gospel, Matthew 13, is filled with images: weeds and wheat together, a mustard seed and yeast in flour.

Of all of these images, the yeast probably gets the least attention. Maybe that is because most of us eat store-baked bread these days. But it is a fascinating, powerful image if we take some time to reflect on, or "digest" it.

First, yeast is ALIVE! It is alive and can live dormant, in a dark place, for a very long time. So, too, the reign of God is alive, awaiting the right catalyst to spur it into its transforming action yet again. Just think of the knowledge of God's mercy and forgiveness that can lie dormant in someone's heart for years until, by the Grace of God, it is miraculously activated and begins to transform and heal the heart that had held it dormant for so long.

Like God's Kingdom, yeast is also dangerous. In the chemistry of cooking, yeast is known as a parasite. Without boring you with the biological processes, suffice it to say that the process by which yeast transforms dough is to rot it. The live yeast actually eats the sugars in the dough, rotting the sugars and producing carbon dioxide, the gas that causes the bread

to rise. The Kingdom of God is like that - it is a complex process in which each of the elements it contacts is radically and substantially transformed. With this aspect of the metaphor, Jesus reminds us of the socially transformative power of the reign of God. The reign of God, which is already here, Jesus tells us, insists on the absolute dignity of every human being. The yeasty reign of God breaks down the structures of oppression, breaks down the sins of greed and materialism. The Kingdom of God eats up those sinful structures and actually uses them to raise the rest of the dough. The transformative power of the Kingdom of God will create energy and power as it destroys those structures and raises us to new life.

Perhaps the most powerful aspect of this parable, though, is that yeast's greatest hour is in its consumption, destruction, and dispersion. The greatest power of the Kingdom of God is what we celebrate at this table day after day and week after week. When we pray with God that the bread, wine, and lives that we lay on the altar will be transformed, they become the Body and Blood of Christ - they become the reign of God. In partaking in the Sacrament of Christ's Body and Blood, we take into ourselves this metaphorical yeast of the Kingdom, the yeast by which God consumes us, transforms us, and changes us into agents of the reign

of God.

When this transformation is complete, a transformation that takes so long that we need to come to this table again and again, week after week for a lifetime, we are transformed into the very thing that changed us - we are transformed into yeast, into the Kingdom of God, agents of God's mercy, justice, compassion, and healing. We are transformed into Eucharist, into Christ's presence in the world.

Saint Augustine, in speaking of the Eucharist, said, "receive what you are, become what you receive." We receive Eucharist, and we are challenged to allow God to work through us to transform us, so that, in being Christ's presence, God can transform the world around us.

The ways that we will transform the world may be large or small. We may be called to mission in foreign lands or to counsel at an AIDS hospice. We may be called to stand up against bullies in the cafeteria or on the playground. We may even be called to forgive even those who try to kill us, as in London, England...to greet the strangers we meet with extravagant kindness and joy, come rain or come shine. However it is meant to happen, the one assurance is that it IS meant to happen. God has mixed the yeast of the reign of God into our lives and is now waiting for the dough of justice to rise.

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