

A-Body and Blood of Christ

During World War II, the officers of the Third Reich's secret service forcefully recruited many 12 and 13 year-old boys into the Junior Gestapo. The harshly treated boys were given only inhumane jobs that they were to perform without rest or complaint.

After the war ended, most had lost contact with their families and wandered aimlessly, without food or shelter. As part of an aid program to rebuild postwar Germany, many of these youths were housed in tent cities. There, doctors and nurses worked with them in an attempt to restore their physical, mental and emotional health.

Many of the boys would awaken several times during the night screaming in terror. One doctor had an idea for handling their fears. After serving the boys a hearty meal, he'd tuck them into bed with a piece of bread in their hands that they were told to save until morning. The boys began to sleep soundly after that because, after so many years of hunger and uncertainty as to their next meal, they finally had the assurance of food for the next day.

This is the assurance Jesus gave to satisfy the fears and daily hungers of his disciples. He gave himself, body and blood, as eucharistic food for their continuing sustenance and support. Jesus, through his saving sacrifice on the cross, became the living Bread given to each of us to hold in our hand as assurance against the struggles and losses and hungers of this life. This gift provides not only food that nourishes our bodies but also the real Eucharistic presence that nourishes our spirits.

In the first reading from the book of Deuteronomy we learn that the bread with which we are nourished does not satisfy mere physical

hungers. The bread God gives also takes the form of a living Word that feeds the spirit. To live by the bread that comes forth from the mouth of God requires a willingness to listen, to grow, to change and to be transformed.

St. Paul in today's second reading from Corinthians recalls the ancient tradition that those who eat together signify by their sharing a responsibility for one another.

When the Israelites whom Moses led out of slavery in Egypt were sojourning in the wilderness their experience of God was of one who fed their hungers, who guided their way, who healed and forgave their sins, who protected them from the dangers of the desert.

St. Augustine of Hippo says of this gift: "God is all to you: if you are hungry God is bread; if thirsty, God is water; if darkness, God is light; if naked a robe of warmth."

In giving himself to us Jesus assures us that he will satisfy our fears and daily hungers. We are not alone.