

## **First Communion (1)**

Ethiopia suffered a terrible famine during the years 1984 to 1986. Cardinal Hume of Westminster tells about an incident that happened when he visited Ethiopia in the middle of the famine. One of the places he visited was a settlement up in the hills where the people were waiting for food that was unlikely to arrive. He was taken there in a helicopter.

As he got out of the helicopter a small boy, aged about 10, came up to him and took his hand. He was wearing nothing but a loincloth around his waist. The whole time the Cardinal was there the child would not let go of his hand.

As they went around he made two gestures: with one hand he pointed to his mouth, and with the other he took the Cardinal's hand and rubbed it on his cheek.

Later the Cardinal said, "Here was an orphan boy who was lost and starving. Yet by two simple gestures he indicated our two fundamental needs or hungers. With one gesture he showed me his need for food, and with the other his hunger for love.

I have never forgotten that incident, and to this day I wonder whether that child is still alive. I remember that as I boarded the helicopter he stood and looked at me reproachfully".

The words of Jesus come to mind: "A human being doesn't live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of God." –spoken during his temptations in the desert.

We need ordinary bread. That is our first and most basic necessity. But we need more than that. Bread nourishes only half of us – the physical side. But we have a spiritual side. It too cries out for nourishment. Even that starving little child recognised that. In the

Eucharist we are nourished with the food of God's word, a word which comforts, guides, inspires and challenges us. And in Holy Communion we are nourished with the food of eternal life.

In the Eucharistic banquet we have nourishment for our minds, hearts and spirits. Here we experience the abiding presence of Christ with us. He is not present as a vague memory of a person who lived long ago, but as a real life-giving presence that transforms us. By eating the food of the Eucharist, we are nourished, and like Christ, are able to nourish others.

To our young people who are receiving Holy Communion for the first time this weekend and to your parents and families who have helped you prepare for this day – congratulations. May you welcome Jesus into your hearts and into your lives and return regularly to be strengthened by his word and sacrament in your lives.