Eucharist: his only strength (Reflection 1 of 2) ...

**It is God who arms me with strength
and makes my way perfect.**   – II Sam 22:33

In 1975, Francis Xavier Cardinal Nguyên Van Thuán was arrested by the Communist government of Viet Nam and imprisoned for thirteen years, nine of them in solitary confinement. He was finally exiled from Viet Nam in 1991. This is an excerpt from one of his books, <u>Five Loaves and Two Fish</u> (pgs 35-37). Tomorrow will feature another excerpt from the same book...

"When I was arrested, I had to leave immediately, with empty hands. The next day I was allowed to request in writing the things I needed most: clothes, toothpaste.... I wrote... *Please, could you send me a bit of medicine for my bad stomach?* **The faithful understood what I meant and they sent a little bottle of wine for Mass, which they labeled** *'stomach medicine,'* **as well as some hosts sealed in a flashlight to protect them from the humidity....**

I will never be able to express my immense joy; every day, with three drops of wine and one drop of water in the palm of my hand, I celebrated Mass. ...

It depended on the situation... On the boat that brought us north, I celebrated at night with the prisoners who received communion around me. At times I had to celebrate while every one was bathing after calisthenics. In the re-education camp, the prisoners were divided into groups of fifty; we slept on common beds and everyone had the right to fifty centimeters of

space. We arranged it so there were five Catholics near me. At 9:30 PM the lights were turned off and everyone had to sleep. I curled up on the bed to celebrate Mass, from memory, and I distributed communion by reaching under the mosquito netting covering us. We made small containers from cigarette packages in which to reserve the Blessed Sacrament. Jesus in the Eucharist was always with me in my shirt pocket."

Francis Xavier Cardinal Nguyên Van Thuán
Five Loaves and Two Fish