

# *A Thankful Heart*

*by Rev. Robert J. Hater*

A thankful heart lies at the center of the Christian life. I was fortunate to learn this lesson when I was only five years old—on Thanksgiving Day.

All day long we looked forward to the wonderful Thanksgiving meal that Mom was preparing. Shortly before we were to sit down at table, the front doorbell rang. My four-year-old sister, Mary Ann, and I ran to answer it. A boy about eleven and a girl about ten stood there. The girl held a baby, covered with a shawl. The boy said, “We are poor and have no money for food this Thanksgiving. Will you give us money so we can buy food?”

Mary Ann and I called our mother. Mom answered, “We don’t have much money, but we would like you to share what we have. We invite you to join us for our Thanksgiving.” The children seemed surprised, and the boy said they could not stay. Mom replied, “Then let us prepare meals for you to take along with you.”

While the children waited in the hall, Mom, Mary Ann, and I went into the kitchen and packed the meals. I felt

good as we gathered turkey, dressing, cranberries, potatoes, beans, a piece of cake, and soda pop. Mom prepared a bottle of milk for the baby. Mary Ann and I were joyful when we gave the food to the children. They took it and left.

Since it was a beautiful day, my sister and I went onto the front porch to watch the children leave. They went down the steps and walked up the street toward the intersection. When they arrived there, the girl suddenly threw the baby to the boy. We screamed, “They’re hurting the baby, they’re hurting the baby!” Hurrying inside, we told Mom and Dad.

All of us returned immediately to the porch. As we got there, the girl, now holding the baby, tucked it under her arm. As she did, the boy, who carried the food, laughed in the strangest way. Then he took the Thanksgiving meals we had so lovingly prepared and threw them down the sewer. They continued laughing as they disappeared around the corner.

My sister and I cried, “They hurt the baby and threw away our food!” As

**Reverend Robert J. Hater** is an internationally known lecturer and writer and has served as professor of religious studies at the University of Dayton, Ohio. Father Hater was the religious education director for the Archdiocese of Cincinnati from 1973 to 1979 and initiated the Lay Pastoral Ministry Program for the Archdiocese. He received the 1994 Catechetical Award from the National Conference of Catechetical Leadership. Father Hater holds a doctorate in Philosophy from St. John’s University, Jamaica, New York.