

# OLD SHOES

I showered and shaved.  
I adjusted my tie. I got there and sat  
In a pew just in time. Bowing my head in prayer.  
As I closed my eyes. I saw the shoe of the man  
next to me.  
Touching my own. I sighed.

With plenty of room on either side.....  
I thought, "Why must our soles touch?"  
It bothered me, his shoe touching mine...  
But it didn't bother him much.

A prayer began: "Our Father"  
I thought, "This man with the shoes..has no pride  
They're dusty, worn, and scratched.  
Even worse, there are holes on the side!"

"Thank You for blessings," the prayer went on.  
The shoe man said a quiet "Amen."  
I tried to focus on the prayer.  
But my thoughts were on his shoes again.

Aren't we supposed to look our best.  
When walking through that door?  
Well, this certainly isn't it," I thought,  
Glancing toward the floor.

Then the prayer was ended.  
And the songs of praise began.  
The shoe man was certainly loud.  
Sounding proud as he sang.

His voice lifted the rafters.  
His hands were raised high.  
The Lord could surely hear.  
The shoe man's voice from the sky.

It was time for the offering.  
And what I threw in was steep.  
I watched as the shoe man reached.  
Into his pockets so deep.

I saw what was pulled out.  
What the shoe man put in.  
Then I heard a soft "clink" .  
as when silver hits tin.

The sermon really bored me.  
To tears, and that's no lie.  
It was the same for the shoe man.  
For tears fell from his eyes.

At the end of the service.  
As is the custom here.  
We must greet new visitors....  
And show them all good cheer.

But I felt moved somehow.  
And wanted to meet the shoe man.  
So after the closing prayer.  
I reached over and shook his hand.

He was old and his skin was dark.  
And his hair was truly a mess.  
But I thanked him for coming.  
For being our guest.

He said, "My names' Charlie.  
I'm glad to meet you, my friend."  
There were tears in his eyes.  
But he had a large, wide grin.

"Let me explain," he said  
Wiping tears from his eyes.  
"I've been coming here for months....  
And you're the first to say 'Hi.'" "

I know that my appearance  
"Is not like all the rest.  
"But I really do try

"To always look my best."  
"I always clean and polish my shoes.  
"Before my very long walk.

"But by the time I get here  
"They're dirty and dusty, like chalk."

My heart filled with pain.  
and I swallowed to hide my tears  
As he continued to apologize.....

For daring to sit so near.  
He said, "When I get here.  
"I know I must look a sight.  
"But I thought if I could touch you..  
"Then maybe our souls might unite."

I was silent for a moment.  
Knowing whatever was said  
Would pale in comparison

I spoke from my heart, not my head.  
"Oh, you've touched me," I said.....  
"And taught me, in part;  
"That the best of any man.  
"Is what is found in his heart."

The rest, I thought,  
This shoe man will never know.  
Like just how thankful I really am...  
That his dirty old shoe touched my soul .