

COURIER-JOURNAL

• October 3, 1984 •

A supplement to Catholic newspapers, published by the National Catholic News Service, 1312 Massachusetts Avenue NW, Washington, DC 20005. All contents copyright © 1984 by NC News Service.

Faith Today

Monotony is a bored game

By Father James Young, CSP
NC News Service

Some years ago I took four of my nephews from Philadelphia on a tour of New England. As we were driving into Boston, where I then was working at a downtown church, my nephew Chris piped up from the back seat of the car: "Uncle Jim, is Boston boring?"

I fumbled for words and finally responded: "I don't find it boring, but why do you ask, Chris?"

"Well, Philadelphia's boring!" he shot back.

Chris Young and W.C. Fields may have suffered the same malady, which I doubt was Philadelphia's fault. Psychiatrist Edmund Bergler would call it "fun-deficiency."



Fun for Bergler is not "Animal House" revelry, but rather a personalized feeling of well-being or satisfaction produced by investing one's emotional energy in someone or something outside ourselves.

Or, to put it in simpler terms, fun is enjoying life. Fun-deficiency is then a lack of balance or deficiency in our experience of pleasure; and to cure it, one must remove the inner obstacles that stand in the way of feeling pleasure.

The choice of one's specific brand of fun is highly individual and can include such things as work, art, social involvement, hobbies, sports, reading mystery stories or watching movies. Peo-

We've all heard of vitamin deficiencies and iron deficiencies, but I'm sure not too many have heard of fun-deficiencies.

ple who are richly involved in many levels in their lives seem to enjoy life and are rarely bored.

A friend named Barney once told me that he felt so weighted down by the humdrum of his job that it was draining all of his vitality. "You know," he said, "I think this situation is making me boring. It's all I think about and talk about. I'm sure everyone is getting sick of hearing about it."

Often, like Barney, we are confronted with oppressive life situations which have no real solution. We can't quit our jobs, move to another town or become a different person overnight. Like an infection, the dissatisfaction spreads to all areas of our lives, shutting down our sources of pleasure. Then boredom sets in.

The solution may lie in examining the sources of stimulation and pleasure available to us. How can we up the fun-level in our lives? How can we strike a better balance? Maybe art classes, jogging or volunteering at the community soup kitchen could provide a way out.

This whole process of striking a better balance and developing new sources of pleasure can be very important to us as Christian believers. For I would like to suggest that the bored person may well be a person out of touch with God.



Some months ago a friend named Sally told me that she found Sunday Mass boring. "Did it ever occur to you," I gingerly teased back, "that maybe God finds you boring?"

"What do you mean?"

Could it be, Sally, that when you get to church you've already checked your imagination at the door, and nothing that could happen during the Eucharist will touch your life? I'm not suggesting that your parish has the best music or the best preaching or the best celebrants for Sunday Mass. But it seems to me that if we go with an open mind and heart, prepared to enjoy the simple pleasures of Scripture, the gifts of the Lord's table, the beauty of God's people gathered, the silent moments for talking with God, we can get the whole thing in better balance.

God certainly can speak to us and touch us in the most humdrum Sunday assemblies, but if we've let

boredom settle over us like a fog, he might not get through.



Fun-deficiency can often be a spiritual deficiency. The spirited person enjoys life and people,

and seeks to be involved in his or her world. Boredom can shut us out of God's world and shut us off from his people and even shut us off from him.

It wasn't too hard to fill up Chris Young's fun-deficiency in an exciting city like Boston. W.C. Fields went to his grave with a fun-deficiency. The rest of us still have time to take pleasure in the Lord, in one another and in the world he has made.

(Father Young is rector of St. Paul's College, Washington, D.C.)

Fun-deficiency is an ailment which affects many of us at one time or another, writes Father James Young. But there are ways, he suggests, to break through the suffocating hold of boredom.