

# In boredom comes calling

erke, OP

As I had a had a up and ong with ne day. e got no around here. But red stiff. ions he heart of a con-ople who t bored. atter. hurch's it among lems. To-ors often gs many lp. e across nis-christ in out 60 his ly t com- he had told me he had l master ch of

technology. Well-educated, hard-driving and apparently very bright, he moved ahead.

And he succeeded. With single-minded attention this man moved to a position of leadership in his industry, and finally was chosen to direct his company.

Then six months into his new position, he realized that all they wanted him to do was to maintain the status quo. He went to work every day, but his goals were accomplished, his victories won.

He had a title. He had a big salary and recognition. But there was no more challenge and he was bored stiff.

The man looked to the start of each day with dread and to its finish with relief. As he described it to me, he was a victim of his own success.

He had accomplished everything he had set out to accomplish. The only thing he didn't have was a purpose in life.

At this point he sought help. A counselor's questions made him start looking at the values he was living by. What he came up with proved very startling.

"I professed to be a Christian," he said, "but in reality I had become nothing more than a machine with a mind. My goal was the production of smaller and more

powerful electronic parts." His job change brought this to the surface.

This man was fortunate enough to recognize that his lack of real purpose was a spiritual problem. What he needed was not therapy, but a purpose that went beyond production charts.

The pain of boredom goes much deeper than dull work and weary days. It goes to the very thread that ties life together into a meaningful whole.

Some people, like this man, have to go through dramatic changes to find goals that actually measure up to life's worth. Others need look no farther than the people with whom they share the same house.

Christian faith holds that ordinary life can have extraordinary and eternal meaning. But now and then people lose sight of the obvious. Perhaps what is obvious is too close at hand.

Then boredom may enter the scene. And boredom can serve a useful purpose: It can help us see that we just may need to rediscover the meaning and purpose that can be part of even the most ordinary of lives.

*(Father O'Rourke is on the staff of the Family Life Office in the Diocese of Oakland, Calif.)*

# Searching for the cure

he person at does nces are hat he is life may nd he ut why? d Jesus' essions" ave the : wealthy; he asked o share in gested ndments. without ave kept ood." "Jesus (Mark keen what . So Jesus : "There . Go and ve to the sure in

heaven. After that, come and follow me."

Mark tells us that "at these words the man's face fell. He went away sad, for he had many possessions."

This often has been interpreted as a call to practice poverty. In a sense it is. But Jesus never demanded that people impoverish themselves as a requirement for salvation. His answer went deeper than that. It is a recommendation to surrender to God's care, abandoning self-sufficiency.

The man in this story, you see, was not only wealthy; he was smugly self-reliant.

Just the way he put his question indicates that: "What must I 'do' to share in everlasting life?" He obviously felt there was nothing he could not "do." After all, he had unlimited resources. All he wanted to know was how he could use them to satisfy his deepest desire.

The answer from Jesus implied quite clearly that it wasn't a question of the man's "doing" anything.

People do not earn happiness by their own efforts; they certain-

ly cannot buy it, Jesus was trying to tell the man. Jesus meant that only God satisfies completely. Self-sufficiency needs to be given up. No possession, capability or talent ever brings the fulfillment for which people yearn.

Long ago, the very gifted St. Augustine recognized the universal boredom, the nagging uneasiness that drives people to all lengths to find complete satisfaction, fulfillment, happiness. He believed that this striving is doomed to frustration without God. "Our hearts are restless, and they will know no rest until they rest in you."

Augustine thought that until people find God, they always will be restless, unsatisfied, searching.

Is this an automatic cure for boredom? I think that at least it makes boredom understandable; it might keep us from running up blind alleys in a futile effort to relieve boredom.

A way to find real relief is proposed in Jesus' final recommendation to the rich man: "Come and follow me."

*(Father Castelot teaches at St. John's Seminary, Plymouth, Mich.)*

# FOOD...

## ...for thought

Frustrated — but amused — is how one couple felt during a recent, long weekend at the ocean. One afternoon they decided to take a drive, spending a couple of hours away from the sun and the beach exploring the area with their children.

As the family drove along, one child sulked. Suddenly she announced: "This is the most boring family on earth!"

The surprised parents, who thought their children were thoroughly enjoying this weekend, turned and asked: "What is it we do that makes us so boring?" And the child responded without hesitation: "Other families don't go for drives like this."

That little story illustrates boredom's light side. After all, there is boredom — and then there is boredom. It is interesting to note that there is a type of boredom that spiritual writers take quite seriously.

"The great paradox of our time is that many of us are busy and bored at the same time," Father Henri J.M. Nouwen wrote in his book titled "Making All Things New" (Harper and Row). The writer added: "While running from one event to the next, we wonder in our innermost selves if anything is really happening... In short, while our lives are full, we feel unfulfilled."

It seems there is a type of boredom capable of making people its victims.

—Boredom can vandalize your hopes. Then it is difficult to believe there is promise in your future.

—Boredom can block your view of what is happening in the present moment. It becomes an obstacle to your experience of the true riches in the people and the events that are part of your life.

Some boredom is perfectly normal. Some boredom is a fleeting thing. But sometimes boredom is a malady, in the opinion of a number of writers. Then boredom becomes a factor in the human equation, strongly influencing how people feel about their lives — and how willing they are to become more fully engaged in their lives.

It undoubtedly would be a mistake to think that life should be exhilarating at every moment, keeping the adrenalin running full steam all the time. That's not what spiritual writers suggest.

What concerns them is the way boredom becomes an obstacle in recognizing the movement of God's Spirit in our midst. Boredom has a way of devaluing life.

What do you call boredom? What can be done about boredom?

## ...for discussion

1. What does it mean to say that boredom can become an obstacle in life, inhibiting personal growth? Why do you think writers on spirituality would make boredom one of their concerns?

2. What do you do to counteract boredom?

3. Boredom gets in the way when it comes to experiencing life's joy, Father James Young suggests. What does he mean?

4. How would you characterize the person who is not bored? Is this person necessarily someone who is exhilarated all the time?

5. Boredom can convey a message to the person who is bored, suggests Father David O'Rourke. What is the message?

### SECOND HELPINGS

"One of the best ways to prepare for paradise is to learn to celebrate life here on earth to the full," writes Father Lawrence Mick in his book "To Live as We Worship." Father Mick's fundamental conviction in this 98-page, easy-to-read book, is "that the liturgy of the church is a rich source of both insight and inspiration for daily living." He suggests: "A deepening understanding of the connections between life and liturgy should lead not only to liturgical celebrations that are more lively but also to a life that is more of a celebration." Liturgy is a celebration of life, says Father Mick. "If liturgy is different from daily existence," he explains, "it is not because it is totally separate from the rest of life, but because it is a more intense experience of that life and of its meaning." (From: The Liturgical Press, Collegeville, Minn 56321 \$4.95)