

Setting record straight on the Synod

By Father Joseph A. Hart
Guest contributor

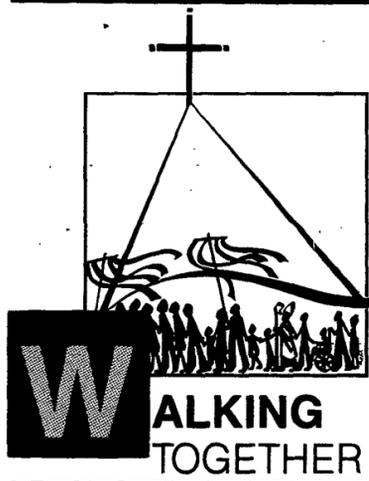
Federal authorities last Thursday arrested eight terrorists who were allegedly plotting to assassinate various political officials and to blow up the U.N. building, two traffic tunnels, and the FBI offices in New York City.

Terrorism is a frightening thing because of its random destruction of life and property. It is meant to be frightening. It results from frustration, of being thwarted in political, personal or religious goals and not finding any ordinary means of redress. Terrorism is one way in which small minorities have found to get their voice heard in the public arena, forcing the majority to pay attention to their needs.

On the same day of those arrests, a large paid advertisement attacking the Synod process appeared in the *Catholic Courier*. In its own way, the ad was a terrorist act perpetrated by a small minority frustrated because it feels that its voice has not been heard. It was meant to hurt people and to undercut the process by attacking the Synod's canonical validity, the matters under consideration, and the bishop who convoked it.

I have great sympathy for the frustrations of terrorists. But I detest their tactics. Among Christians there is never an excuse justifying random and senseless violence — whether in word or in deed.

By quoting the numbers of the



canons governing the diocesan Synod — but not the canons themselves — the people who placed the ad wanted to insinuate that the Church of Rochester is in violation of church law by not following precedent and limiting the scope of its Synod to that held in 1954, i.e., to "administrative and regulatory problems within (the) diocese." However, our Synod is governed by the canons of the 1983 Code, not those of 1917, and so its procedures, scope and membership are by law quite different from all six previous synods in our diocese.

According to Canon 460, "a diocesan synod is a group of selected priests and other Christian faithful of a particular church which offers assistance to the diocesan bishop for the

good of the entire diocesan community." How is the bishop in violation of this law if he asks every diocesan Catholic to participate in a process suggesting to him the topics for discussion and proposes recommendations about how to better carry on our local church's mission? The Bishop of Rome has done as much in his own diocesan Synod.

Canon 465 states that "all proposed questions are to be subject to the free discussion of the members during the sessions of the synod." How is the bishop in violation of this law if he allows Catholics to openly propose to him any recommendations they in conscience feel would be for the whole church's good? In fact, he would violate church law if, in the middle of the consultative process, he silenced some voices or suppressed some recommendations.

Canon 466 reminds us that "the diocesan bishop is the sole legislator at a diocesan synod while the remaining members of the synod possess only a consultative vote; he alone signs the synodal declarations and decrees which can be published only through his authority." This is the legal way of saying that a diocesan Synod is a consultative process but that the "buck stops at the bishop's desk."

Although each of us through our baptism bears responsibility for the church's mission, the bishop bears ultimate responsibility. How can the bishop be said to be in violation of the canons for taking particular stands

through the synod process when, in fact, the consultation is not yet complete and the bishop has approved and published nothing?

As director of the diocesan Synod, I am very sorry indeed that some few are so disappointed in the process. The stacks of positive letters that I have received are ample testimony to the fact that the parish and regional Synod process has been a moving experience for many, many people — laity, religious and clergy alike. More than 30,000 people have participated and there have been very few complaints. As far as possible every human voice was given a chance to speak and even yet there will be time set aside at the General Synod in October to attempt to discover voices that have not been heard.

I can understand the few's frustration. The church is not as they would like. The Synod recommendations are not as they would like. But still I beg them not to give themselves over to a situation ethics in which the end justifies the means. I beg them not to resort to distortion and slander, sacrificing Christian virtue for their program's sake.

To defend the church's magisterium is a noble act. But in another age St. Thomas More regretted those, who with "overfervent mind or indiscreet zeal, or, perhaps, an angry and cruel heart ... offend God in the selfsame deed whereof they should else greatly merit" (*Dialogue IV*;13).

Jesus makes well-fitted yokes for two

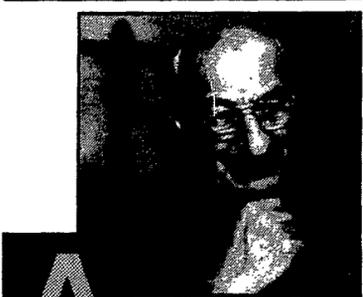
By Father Albert Shamon
Courier columnist

Sunday's Readings: (R3) Matthew 11:25-30; (R1) Zechariah 9:9-10; (R2) Romans 8:9, 11-13.

When Jesus issued the invitation, "Come to me," He was speaking to people who were desperately trying to find God and who were desperately trying to be good. However, they were finding this great labor a crushing burden.

For, thanks to scribal regulations, the Jewish religion had become an unsupportable burden. The people lived in a forest of rules and regulations that made life and living unbearable. When Jesus denounced the Scribes and the Pharisees, He said, "They tie up heavy burdens (hard to carry) and lay them on people's shoulders" (Mt. 23:4).

So Jesus invites these God-fearing people, laboring and burdened by manmade regulations, to come to Him. Jesus never compels or forces anyone, He invites. His Gospel is an invitation, "Come to me." We would be angry if we were not invited to a friend's wedding or party. Jesus invites us all, no exceptions: "Come



A WORD FOR SUNDAY

— one and all.

"Come to me," to whom else can we go? When Jesus asked the Twelve if they too were going to leave Him over the Eucharist, Peter answered, "Master, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life" (Jn. 6:68). And because He has, He can give us rest.

Literally, the Greek translation means more than "I will give you

rest," as though rest were some kind of a blessing bestowed after the giver had gone. Rest is not so much what Jesus gives to us as what Jesus is to us. So, "I will give your rest," really means "I will be your rest."

And how will one find this rest? "Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me for I am meek and humble of heart." A yoke is a wooden frame used to harness two oxen. The two animals would share the yoke equally as they plowed the fields.

There are three things about a yoke: First, those yoked must pull together. If Jesus tells us one thing, we must not do another — pull in opposite directions.

Secondly, the work must never frighten us, fill us with worry or fear, because we are yoked to Christ. He never meant us to try to pull the load alone. "I am with you." Life becomes burdensome and a labor when we seek to do things on our own, when we try to pull the load without Christ, without tapping the supernatural resources He has given us through the sacraments and prayer.

Thirdly, Jesus knew all about yokes. When Jesus said, "My yoke is easy," He meant "well-fitting," Jesus spent

hours helping out Joseph in his carpenter shop. A good carpenter would custom make yokes by carefully measuring the animals. The yoke had to fit perfectly. If the yoke didn't fit well enough, it would harm the animals. It could be neither too big nor too small. It was tailor-made to fit the oxen.

There is a legend that Jesus made the best ox-yokes in all Galilee, and that from all over the country people came to His carpenter shop to buy the best yokes that skill could make. If Jesus' carpenter shop had a sign, it was probably this: "My yokes fit well."

In saying, "My yoke is easy," Jesus means it fits well. The life He gives us to live is not a burden to gail us. Our task, our life, is made to measure to fit us. God knows our frame. He never permits us to be tempted beyond our strength. Life's crosses are fitted perfectly to each of us, fitted to our abilities.

All we need do is to take up the yoke and we shall find that life's burdens are light, because a yoke is for two: for Jesus and me. My neck is in the yoke, but so is that of Jesus.

Together we can do all things easily and have rest.

'A mild answer calms wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.'

Proverbs 15, 1

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