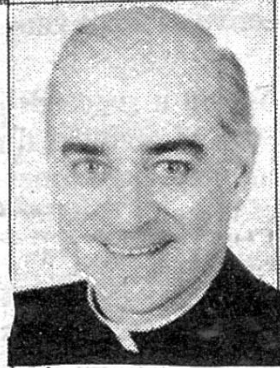


Christ's Mandate

Beware of cynicism. A cynic is one who sees everyone's actions as being selfishly motivated. According to

Webster's Dictionary, a cynical person is often sullen and curmish. The word itself is from the Greek word, "kyon," in Latin, "cynus," meaning: dog-like, snarling.

The cause of cynicism is complex. When people see the great gap between high ideals and actual practice, they become disillusioned and develop a deep skepticism about the motives of others. This leads to cynicism,



the last stage of the fallen idealist. The natural tendency of the cynic is to withdraw from every individual and institution which promotes idealism. Obviously, many cynics have left the church. Whenever I hear their negative carping I say to myself, "There but for the grace of God, go I."

Recently the pope told the U.S. bishops to encourage Americans to pray more. He said that without prayer our people are in danger of losing their souls. Those were strong words, but the pope has seen what has happened in Europe where many of the churches have become empty shells, mere bestiges of the vibrant faith communities they once were. In fact, many of the grand old

churches have closed.

American churches are generally well attended. Our parish organizations are healthy, and we have more of the faithful participating in parish ministries than ever before. Nevertheless, we live in a country which is replete with sexism, consumerism and militarism. These pressures take a serious toll on our spiritual lives. And in the wake of recent church scandals, cynicism has become more widespread among us, and we need to resist it.

During Pope John Paul II's 1980 visit to New York City, I sat in St. Patrick's Cathedral with hundreds of priests and religious, and heard him say, "The church is the soul of this city." In that statement I heard the echo of Christ's words, "You are the salt of the earth." The salt must not lose its flavor.

We all have to work together to uphold

our dignity and our high calling as Christians. We cannot afford to lose the humble childlike spirit which is the antithesis of cynicism. Cynicism is rooted in pride. Cynics think of themselves as superior human beings. They tend to put their careers and their pleasures first and they talk arrogantly about the church as though it were a nuisance. They need to pray more for the gift of faith and humility.

To resist cynicism I urge you to pray more yourself. Become a cheerful person. Proclaim your joy. Live your life passionately. If you stumble, ask for God's forgiveness, and begin again without needless mumbling. Smile more, and trust the Lord with all your heart. Never let yourself become a cynic. Love one another and forgive one another. Live up to the mandate of Christ, and radiate God's love wherever you go.