

## Black Catholic Workshop

The National Office for Black Catholics (NOBC), in cooperation with the Catholic University of Washington, D.C.'s Center for Pastoral Liturgy, is presenting a program that will address Afro-American culture and worship this summer beginning July 28.

"Sacred Dance, music, art and all aspects of poetic and dramatic liturgy will be the main focus during the tenth Annual NOBC Workshop in Afro-American Culture and Worship that will take place on the university campus," an NOBC release reported.

Fr. Louis J. Hohman



The Open Window

## Masturbation: Abstract, Concrete

Dear Father Hohman,

Being a widow in her early 60s, and given the same set of circumstances as described in the following "Dear Abby" letter, I would appreciate hearing from you in this matter:

"Dear Abby:

"I recently came across a book that described masturbation as a 'valuable tension safety valve.'

"As a woman of 77, brought up to believe that 'self-abuse,' as it was called in my day, would lead to idiocy, I was startled and confused.

"During all my 44 years of married life (and five children) I never once experienced an orgasm. Now, as an old widow, I self-induced one and found it

wonderful. Am I on the path to perdition?"

Dear Father, my education, from grade school through college, was in Catholic schools; but the subject was never mentioned. When I have spoken about this in confession I have received little or no guidance.

My basic question is:

Is masturbation a sin, or is it not? What is the basis

for this opinion? Thank you. M.M.

Dear M.M.,

We have to approach this whole question from several points of view. First of all, it is a well known fact that the Church regards masturbation as morally wrong. The basis for this teaching is the natural law, that is, what is regarded as natural or unnatural. The act of masturbation is considered unnatural and therefore morally wrong. The second consideration which we need is the consideration of the fact that our starting point is an intellectually abstract statement which is: masturbation is morally evil. When it becomes a concrete act, the questions have to be changed somewhat. Is it morally evil in this particular circumstance? Is it morally

evil for this particular person who is psychologically troubled and therefore not capable of acting with total freedom in this particular instance? What is the motivation for performing the act? To what degree can it not be helped? Most modern theologians, I think, look at masturbation today as almost always having one of the above mentioned problems — inability to act freely, emotional hangups, a need to release tension which reduces any possible culpability. Those who deny the sinfulness of masturbation would cite our inability to determine what precisely is natural or unnatural relative to matters of this sort. They also cite that while in the abstract and in perfect freedom the act might be wrong, nevertheless in the concrete

situation there is practically never a time in which it would be seriously wrong. Unless an individual were to do it out of malice or in a way that is contemptuous of morality or of God, it would not really be the serious matter it was made out to be in the past. One of the most tragic things relating to the past was that spiritual leaders were so bound and determined to deter people from such acts that they attached all kinds of terrible consequences to them in the hope of dissuading people from performing them. What they did was to wound people emotionally in a sometimes permanent manner and to cause all sorts of havoc in the psychological make up of the person. In my own opinion that in itself was a highly immoral thing to do.

### Puzzle on Page 15

#### PUZZLE ANSWERS FOR SUNDAY, JUNE 29, 1980

I. 1. Simon 2. church 3. death 4. Louis 5. wound 6. kill 7. rabid 8. year 9. you 10. riot 11. clock 12. Cary.

Key Passage I. "I declare to you, you are a rock and on this rock I will build my church."

II. Peter followed him out, but with no clear realization that this was taking place through the angel's help. The whole thing seemed to him a mirage.

III. That is how I was saved from the lion's jaws. The Lord will continue to rescue me from all attempts to do me harm and will bring me safe to his heavenly kingdom.

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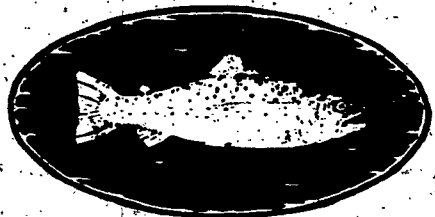
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