

The Hook and I

A Catholic 12-Step program

By

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INTRODUCTION

This book is an outgrowth of the articles I wrote for the website of the Blessed Margaret Family Help Center, Inc, <http://www.blessedmargaret.org> over a period of four years. In addition, the experience I gained from running a men's pornography addiction support group, "La Misma Nada" ("nothingness itself" in Spanish) helped me to clarify, edit, and expand the thoughts that I felt compelled to express about how any Catholic, be he man, woman, or child, could use the tools that have always been contained within Catholic spirituality to defeat a sinful addiction. This is the entire premise behind this book: using Catholic spirituality to combat and eventually defeat, what I call "the Hook", grow in sanctity as a fruit of that combat, and to give great glory to God in the struggle. The Hook is the means by which we attain our end, which is God. This method is modeled after the 12-Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) who "stole" it from the Catholic Church to begin with. AA takes those Catholic principles and dilutes them by injecting an indifferent attitude to which religion is practiced and blending together different beliefs to make them "acceptable" to non-Catholics who are only interested in defeating their addictions, not on being converted to the True Faith, which should be their real goal. Acting as if to say, "You can't make things too Catholic, you know!" they confused the "means" with the "end". In other words, these other 12-step programs make the defeat of the Hook the objective and not an intermediate step to the real end, which is to save one's soul. My job, so to speak, has been to bring things back to their origin, the Origin of all things, which is God Himself.

I wrote this book in a conversational style so you will find it pretty much devoid of "hard statistics", big words, and footnotes on every page. I did this on purpose. I wanted it to be readable by anyone, not just the scholarly or well educated. If I wrote it as a scholarly tome, the common man wouldn't read it. If I used lots of statistics about addictions, probabilities, and current situations, it would become outdated virtually on the day that it was published. Besides, I'm not an expert in anything – just an addict, so I don't have access to all the statistics and studies anyway. I leave that for others to compile. Next, I didn't want to fix the time and place of the book to when I wrote it. With the grace of God, folks all around the world and for many years to come will read this. This will benefit their souls and help, in some small way, To Restore All Things In Christ. If such be the case, Deo Gratias. If not, I only have my own shortcomings to blame for its failure.

Because these are "Catholic" or Universal principles, they apply equally well to the struggle against pornography, alcoholism, overeating, gambling, sex, materialism, or whatever. They also apply equally well to those who have loved ones who are also suffering from sinful addictions. Because of my own personal experience in struggling against pornography, I have included references to the struggle against that hook. Please don't be turned off by this nor think that the

principles don't apply to your own particular hook. Instead, it should be pretty easy to translate the ideas to your own specific circumstances. I had to have some concrete examples to keep everything practical and not theoretical – besides, it should help you, my dear friend, to see that I'm no different than you.

One may ask how I got started on the path of this book. Skipping the addiction part, I have been involved with the Legion of Mary for a number of years and had attended a Senatus, or conference, over one Labor Day. One of the topics was on the apostolate to alcoholics. I have a friend who is one and I also have a grandfather (RIP) who was one so I felt a certain pulling towards this type of work. I found the talk intriguing but the idea of actually doing something lay dormant for several years until I was “kicked” into starting the Blessed Margaret Family Help Center to help families. This occurred at an Ignatian retreat. The Center was originally going to be only a pregnancy help center – one of what my family calls my “hare-brained ventures”. However, as time passed, God's plan became clearer and the Center's purpose broadened to help families, both in and out of crisis. This resurrected the idea of helping addicts and their families. Finally, an article in Angelus magazine, “XXXX” in the XXXXber, 200X issue conducted an analysis of AA's 12-Steps from the Catholic viewpoint. Going through the article, I mentally translated each step into what I thought the Catholic version should be. I used that article and my mental analysis (along with much prayer) to develop the Catholic 12-Steps. This initial analysis was what I presented on the website. During the acid test of running La Misma Nada, I was forced to seriously think through the missing pieces of those articles and have actually come to the conclusion that there are really 13-Steps but I've kept it at 12 because that's the number people associate with “addiction help” programs. In any case, this book is the result. I don't profess that how I present it is the perfect way but I will stand by my claim that using the principles of Catholic spirituality is the perfect way to cut your attachment to the Hook (you can never get rid of it), attain holiness, and give Almighty God great glory in the process.

May God richly bless you in your struggle.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

First of all, I have to thank the Good God for His grace: in the first place, so that I could overcome my own hook; second, that He would place this burning within me to want to help souls by writing this book. Next, I have to thank the Blessed Virgin Mary who has been my constant companion and kept the grace flowing – especially when I should have been swallowed up into hell. After that comes Blessed Margaret of Castello or “Little Margaret” whose poignant story touched my heart years ago and is the namesake of the Blessed Margaret Family Help Center. She is followed very closely by Venerable Antonio Margil de Jesus whose own nickname, “La Misma Nada” was the inspiration for the Men’s Support Group against pornography. Lastly, in the spiritual realm are all the angels and saints of my own personal “Litany of Saints”.

In the natural realm, I have my dear wife, Benita who, after the Blessed Virgin Mary, is the best wife and mother ever placed on the earth, and my children who have tolerated my “hare-brained” ventures throughout the years. I also want to thank my friend Philippe and my other colleagues of the Legion of Mary – both in Cincinnati and elsewhere. Art in New York for his wonderful encouragement – I pray that I can carry the fight half as well as you have over the years. I owe a debt of gratitude to everyone involved with the Center, whether workers, clients, or benefactors. One more man that I need to thank and I don’t even know his name, but he sent me an email right before I began La Misma Nada, detailing his own struggle against pornography and the great help of this obscure saint out of the American Southwest, Venerable Antonio Margil de Jesus, had been to him.

I cannot begin to list the names of all the priests and religious who have been instrumental to me, either in life or involved in this book so let me just list the most salient ones: Fr. Peter Scott – who taught me about St. John Bosco’s teaching methods, Fr. Helmut Libietis – for the Legion of Mary, Fr. Kevin Robinson – for his wonderful spiritual direction and support on the book, for the folks at Our Lady of the Rosary Library for their much needed spiritual and financial support to the book and BMFHC, and lastly, Sr. Mary Jude (RIP) – my high school French teacher who saw “a diamond in the rough”.

Lastly, I want to express my deep love and gratitude to the most important man in my life, the late Dr. Raymond J. Cannane, D.O. May God rest your soul! You taught me the love of the Rosary and I know that it was graces earned over your praying 42 years of Rosary novenas that make it possible for me to even begin to write this book.

ADDICTIONS:

Greetings, my dear friend, I'm writing this book, "The Hook and I" because I have suffered for a good portion of my life from my own addiction and I know that there are many other souls out there that suffer in a similar way to their own. You are reading this presumably because you too are suffering through yours, whatever it might be, or else you have a loved one in similar dire straits. I am writing this, one sinner to another, because I know how you feel. Now, if you bristled at my saying, "one sinner to another", then, I'm sorry but I don't think you're ready to hear what I have to say. You see, I had to hit bottom before I was ready to be lifted up by God's grace and if you still think that, "I don't have a problem" or "I'm in control", all I can say is "God bless you and congratulations" because, as Rudyard Kipling said, "You're a better man than I am, Gunga Din!" I pray that some day you'll open these pages back up before it's too late.

On the other hand, if you're thinking that life's a big black cloud and every path seems closed off to you and the Sword of Damocles is hanging over your head ready to drop, let's talk, buddy. I know how you feel, 'cuz I've been there, done that, as they say. I'm not a priest, psychologist, or social worker – just an addict who happens to be Catholic and that's the viewpoint that I'm coming from. Other self-help books have their own ways of looking at addictions and I'm sure that they've had their share of success but I am going to look at it for what it really is, a spiritual problem. If we can attack the root of the problem, we can eradicate it – not just cut back or control it. Similarly, if we misdirect our attack by going after something other than the root, we certainly cannot be completely victorious, regardless of our apparent success. This, I believe, is the real failure of all those other methods.

THE HOOK:

Now, when we are born, we have certain characteristics that we get from our parents by virtue of heredity. <G:\dcannane\My Documents\Blessed Margaret Articles\The Hook and I articles\COMPLETED SECTIONS\j0312152.gif> Some of these characteristics we can see: hair color, height, and body build for example.

Other traits that we inherit you can't see physically but you can see in the behavior from generation to generation: "He's lazy like his Dad", "He sure is willful" or "Like father, like son" etc. This is our temperament. It can be masked with training or effort, but in times of stress it always shines forth because it is part of our natures. There are several books available that speak about temperaments, usually classifying them using the categories of Sanguine, Choleric, Melancholic, and Phlegmatic. Aristotle first developed them way back in the ancient days of Alexander the Great but were later adopted by the Church in the Middle Ages. I will speak in more detail about them under Step 3. Now, in



addition to those qualities that are typically associated with temperament we are also born with other traits that can be good or bad. The good ones are our natural virtues: "She's always been cheerful, even as a child" but the bad ones are certain predispositions within our character towards things that morally are called "sins" or acts against God's law. You might call them addictions, bad habits, penchants, appetites, weaknesses, or whatever but I will call them "hooks". Now I call them "hooks" because we are just like fish in the water and this is the means by which the devil "hooks" us and pulls us out of the waters of grace by getting us to commit sin. If our attachment to the hook is strong, it's as if the fishing line of our attachment, so to speak, is very long and it is easy for him to simply dangle the bait of temptation in front of us and just reel us in since the hook is already "set". On the other hand, if our attachment is very weak so that the temptations we experience against our hook are easily thwarted, we can speak of the "line" being "cut" or just being very short and difficult for the devil to grab hold of. Consequently, we are able to stay in the state of grace either more easily or for longer periods of time.

These hooks are our weaknesses and I would argue that everyone, even the saints, have one or more of them. That's right. We have built-in weaknesses that we inherit from our parents. "Gee, thanks, Dad!" I suppose you could argue that our environment can form them but at least from my experience, they seem to be ingrained in us as part of our very natures. They become evident to us as we grow through interaction with the environment, but the environment doesn't create them – it only exposes them. Now these hooks are permanent; we can never escape them because they are part and parcel of ourselves. We can never eliminate or spit out the hook, so to speak. All we can do is break and reduce our attachment to it. These hooks are the major faults that we have and if we are addicted to, that is, have the habit of that sin, just about every time that we are tempted by our own personal hook, we fall for it. These hooks can be just about anything from gambling to pornography to greed to alcohol to overeating, in short, any substitution of an aspect of material creation for our ultimate end. We all have at least one such hook – we may have mastery over it but there is a dominant fault in all of us (with the obvious exceptions of Our Lord and the Blessed Virgin).

IN STRUGGLING AGAINST OURSELVES WE GIVE GOD GLORY

Now you might ask, "Why would the good God put a "hook" in us which would make it easy for us to sin?" Doesn't it sound ridiculous that God would purposely put in us weaknesses that make it easy for us to end up in hell? On the surface it would appear that He has set us up purposely to damn us, that He is the very One who tempts us to sin. Actually, nothing could be further from the truth. *"Let no man, when he is tempted, say that he is tempted by God. For God is not a tempter of evils, and he tempteth no man. But every man is tempted by his own concupiscence, being drawn away and allured. Then when concupiscence hath*

conceived, it bringeth forth sin. But sin, when it is completed, begetteth death.”
(James i. 12-15)

“OK, smarty”, I can just hear the response, “What is the answer?” Well, if you think about why we’re here on earth to begin with, it’s not really ridiculous at all. If we look at the very front of the Baltimore Catechism, questions 3 and 4, where it asks “Why did God makes us?” and “What must we do to gain the happiness of heaven?” we see that “God made us to show forth His goodness and to share with us His everlasting happiness in heaven” which in order to obtain “...we must know, love, and serve God in this world”. If we take just the underlined words from those two answers, we boil down to its essence just we are here and why we each have a hook: “God made us to...share...His everlasting happiness in heaven”. In other words, we are made for heaven. That is, we were created to become saints – yes, saints. And to do this “...we must...love...God in this world.” We have to demonstrate our love for Him here and now. That’s why the hook is there. It comes about as a result of Original Sin so God isn’t the source of it but He is going to use it to bring good out of this evil. It exists as a means for us to demonstrate our love for Him by being more in love with Him than we are in love with our hook – that is, ourselves. The hook has to be strong enough to be a challenge and it must really tax our strength. Anything less would not really gauge the depth of our love. If we consider Christ’s love for us as shown by His Passion and Cross, our love in return has to bear some resemblance. Maybe He doesn’t ask for our blood but He does ask for our sweat!

To help understand this, what glory is there for a pro football team to beat up on a high school team? Absolutely none! If all we had to do were just say, "I love you, Jesus" and, poof, we went to heaven, what glory would there be in that? How much trouble would that be? How would God be glorified by such a penny ante action? Instead, let’s consider Jobs’ words in the Old Testament, "The life of man upon earth is a warfare" (Job vii. 1) and take a moment to look at a military example to illustrate the point.

Now, dear friend, I hope you will agree that when we think of the great armies of history, their glory was in achieving victory by overcoming great odds and one of my favorite examples of this was the 10,000 Greeks under Xenophon back in the ancient days, around 400BC. He wasn't even an officer in the army of Greek mercenaries fighting alongside an army of Persians who opposed the king. Hundreds of miles away from home, they were in a battle in which their allies were defeated. To top it all off, all of their generals were treacherously murdered by the king. Completely without leadership, with no supplies, and surrounded by a superior enemy, Xenophon just simply took over the 10,000 and, strictly by force of will, led his little army over the mountains of Asia Minor (Turkey), through hostile mountain tribes until, one day, the cry rang out from the advance guard, "The sea, the sea!" - they had finally reached the safety of the Black Sea and returned home. This is one of my favorite military stories simply because Xenophon refused to do the easy thing and just simply give up and die. He

simply exerted his will to achieve victory and, in the process, achieved great glory. This true story occurred over 2000 years ago and is still told to this day.

By the same token, God takes advantage of the evil that sin brings to our natures by allowing every man a challenge consisting in a personal weakness (or two) that he must overcome in order to achieve his salvation and by his victory over himself, he gives great glory to God. God is greatly pleased with us when we show Him, by our struggles to overcome our sinful selves, our love for Him. This is so important for us to understand, let me state it in big bold letters: **IN STRUGGLING AGAINST OURSELVES WE GIVE GLORY TO GOD.**

ESTO VIR:

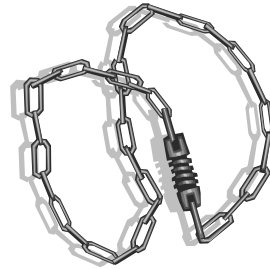
Esto vir, that's Latin for "Be a man!" And that is the challenge that I give to you my friend. I am weak, too, but I know because I have experienced it in my own personal life, that God is with us. If we simply set our wills to reach "the sea" just as old Xenophon, **God will not abandon us.** He will give us the grace we need to succeed. We will fall. We will mess up. We will have setbacks. There will be casualties. But if we have the will to succeed, He will not fail us. Come, my friend, let us together "take up our cross daily and follow Him".

If you have the will to conquer yourself, come join us: "We few, we happy few, we band of brothers" to [St. Augustine](#).

ST. AUGUSTINE

For those of us who suffer from an addiction or hook, a most worthy model and patron is St. Augustine, Bishop, Confessor, and Doctor of the Church, who lived from 354 to 430 AD. For our purposes, he is notable in that he lived quite a promiscuous life until he was around the age of 30. He was born to Placidus, a pagan, and to Monica, a Christian. He was pretty wayward in his early life especially to sexual sins. From the age of 19 he sought after "wisdom" but got ensnared in certain heresies that really aren't important for our discussion. He converted to the Faith around the age of 30 and eventually became a Doctor of the Church. He was brilliant and quite a prolific writer whose works are still read. The one I recommend to you is "The Confessions of St. Augustine" where he recounts in scathing honesty his search for wisdom and how he finally overcame his addiction to sins of the flesh to become one of the greatest philosophers and saints of the Catholic Church. I discovered him when I was teaching high school and I was "forced" to read it so that I could teach it. Please indulge me and read along on these rather lengthy passages. Personally, he speaks deeply to my own heart as he puts into words my own feelings about my struggle against my own addiction but he says it with such emotion and beauty that I could never hope to match it, let alone beat it. The translation is John K. Ryan's and the first selection is taken from Book 8, Chapter 5. Here are his thoughts on his own "hook", or in his words, a "chain". Compare them to your own:

"For this very thing did I sigh, bound as I was, not by another's irons but by my own will. The enemy had control of my will, and out of it he fashioned a chain and fettered me with it. For in truth lust is made out of a perverse will, and when lust is served, it becomes habit, and when habit is not resisted, it becomes necessity. By such links, joined one to another, as it were - for this reason I have called it a chain - a harsh bondage held me fast."



By this point in his life, he had become disillusioned with heresies and was enamored with becoming Catholic. He felt the pull of God's grace on his soul so his will began to struggle against his "chains":

"A new will, which had begun within me, to wish freely to worship you and find joy in you, O God, the sole sure delight, was not yet able to overcome that prior will, grown strong with age. Thus did my two wills, the one old, the other new, the first carnal, and the second spiritual, contend with one another, and by their conflict they laid waste my soul. Thus I understood from my own experience what I had read, how "the flesh lusts against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh." (Gal v:17) I was in both camps, but I was more in that which I approved within myself than in that other which I disapproved within me. For now, in the latter, it was not so much myself, since in large part I suffered it against my will

rather than did it voluntarily. Yet it was by me that this habit had been made so warlike against me, since I had come willingly to this point where I now willed not. Who can rightly argue against it, when just punishment comes upon the sinner?"

This might be the point where you find yourself, my dear friend - struggling against yourself. Sometimes the spirit wins, and sometimes the flesh wins. Augustine further describes his struggle as one striving to awaken but still wanting to continue his slumber:

"Thus by the burdens of this world I was sweetly weighed down, just as a man often is in sleep. Thoughts wherein I meditated upon you were like the efforts of those who want to arouse themselves but still overcome by deep drowsiness, sink back again. ...yet a man often defers to shake off sleep when a heavy languor pervades all his members, and although the time to get up has come, he



yields to it with pleasure even although it now irks him. In like manner, I was sure that it was better for me to give myself up to your love than to give in to my own desires. However, although the one way appealed to me and was gaining mastery, the other still afforded me pleasure and kept me victim. I had no answer to give to you when you said to me, "Rise, you who sleep, and arise from the dead, and Christ will enlighten you" (Eph v:14). When on all sides you showed me that your words were true, and I was overcome by your truth, I had no answer whatsoever to make, only those slow and drowsy words, "Right away. Yes, right away." "Let me be for a little while." But "Right away-right away" was never right now, and "Let me be for a little while" stretched out for a long time."

We can certainly sense the deep love that Augustine has for Our Lord and he deeply regrets his inability to respond to His grace. Both you and I must develop an equal love for God if we are to successfully master ourselves. Finally, the Doctor admits of his own inability to conquer self and what the only source of victory is:

"In vain was I delighted with your law according to the inward man, when another law in my members fought against the law of my mind, and led me captive in the law of sin, which was in my members. For the law of sin is force of habit, whereby the mind is dragged along and held fast, even against its will, but still deservedly so, since it was by its will that it had slipped into the habit. Unhappy man that I was! Who would deliver me from body of this death, unless your grace through Jesus Christ our Lord?"

Let us begin the struggle my friend! Regardless of your addiction, Sexual Addiction, Gambling, Alcoholism, Pornography, Eating Disorders, or something else, let us have confidence that the Good God, who made us, wants our success in the struggle. If we rely upon ourselves, we, like Augustine, will fail.

But with sincere acceptance that it is only through God's grace and not our own efforts, we will surely succeed! Deus vult! (God wills it!).

St. Augustine, pray for us!

HOOKS OR CHAINS?

Well, dear friend, if you've gotten to this point, I pray that you've seen that your experience with your own hook is not really so different than others – even great saints like Augustine. If he succeeded in conquering his hook (or in his terms, chains), then I know you must be thinking that it is also possible for you. Just so you know, I have complete confidence in you as well.

In the last section, I introduced dear Saint Augustine's own words describing his struggle. If you were observant you noticed that he doesn't speak of a hook at all. He uses terms describing tools of restraint like chains, fetters, and shackles to describe his sinful addiction and that's fine. We will resort to these same references periodically. In his mind he saw his struggle as one of becoming free or liberated from a sin that bound him up, that denied him his true liberty of being free to love God in the way that he yearned. In his case, we know that once he was freed from his sexual addiction that he was given the grace of perseverance to remain free from it for the rest of his life – he's a canonized saint and that's our proof. Not being an expert on his life, I don't know if he ever suffered from temptations of the flesh ever again. Maybe he did and maybe he didn't. In his case, his release from his chains was permanent.



In my case, in your case, friend, we have no guarantee that, once victorious we will remain victorious for the rest of our lives. Therefore, we are never completely free from our addictions until our deaths. Even St. Paul wrote of his own temptations, his “sting of the flesh” well after the time of his conversion on the road to Damascus, “...there was given me a sting of the flesh, an angel of Satan, to buffet me. For which thing I thrice besought the Lord, that it might depart from me: And he said to me: My grace is sufficient for thee: for power is made perfect in infirmity.” (II Cor xii: 7-9) If you refer to the commentary in the Haydock version of the Douay-Rheims Bible, you will see that what exactly this “sting of the flesh” was is disputed. For our purposes, it really isn't important but whatever it was, it was important enough to Paul for him to ask Our Lord to remove it from him – even after he had been “caught up to the third heaven” (II Cor xii: 2). In other words, Paul was tempted to sin until the day he was beheaded in Rome.

If even the holiest of saints are tempted with their hooks, what can we who are but dust and filth to expect? For this reason, I think that “hook” more adequately expresses our situation. It's not external to us but actually embedded within us.

It is something that we cannot remove and it is something that is always a menace to our salvation.

Makes sense? Good, let's move on to an explanation of why the Catholic 12-Steps has to be Catholic.

WHY IT MUST BE CATHOLIC

To this point everything that I have written has been from a Catholic viewpoint and addressed to Catholic readers. I am sure that not everyone reading this is a practicing Catholic or even convinced that there is even a need for a Catholic 12-Steps as opposed to just your run-of-the-mill 12-Steps program. Well, my dear reader, if you are either non-Catholic or just not convinced that this needs to be Catholic, please let me anticipate a potential question that you might be thinking right now and that I have heard uttered in various ways by my work colleagues as well as by others. It probably goes something like, “Why does it have to be a CATHOLIC 12-Steps?” or “Don’t all religions lead you closer to God anyway?” or “I like what you’re saying but why can’t I substitute my own religion’s viewpoint; won’t it still work?” or similar objections.

Now before I make my little attempt at answering these questions, please let me say that, first of all, no matter how well or poorly I am able to explain the reasoning of why the 12-Steps HAS to be Catholic, my answer is given out of charity for you. I OWE you the Truth. I don’t intend to talk down to you, insult you, or hurt your feelings. However, you need to know the truth and to start with, we need to understand that true charity, or love as it is more frequently called, is to seek the good of the beloved. That is, my fraternal love for you requires me to tell you the truth because I know that it is for your greater good. It is a giving action, not a receiving action. It’s not how you make me feel but how I can do something good for you. What this means is that I may have to initially cause pain to the ones I love in order to lead them to a greater good even if it’s not appreciated. So what I am going to say is said strictly because of my love or charity for you and your salvation; I am required to tell you the truth – even if it hurts (which I hope it doesn’t but I’m willing to accept that possibility for the hope of a greater gain).

Having said that, I am going to give you the explanation in the way I was taught to do public speaking: Tells ‘em whatcha gonna tells ‘em, tells ‘em, and tells ‘em whatcha told ‘em. You know, Introduction, Body, and Conclusion. This will give you the chance to read the short version, get mad and get it out of your system and then come back later when that gnawing feeling for the truth becomes overpowering so you can read the full explanation and accept it. Got it?

THE SHORT ANSWER:

All right, in bullet form, here’s the Introduction:

- This whole system is based on using the hook to save your soul – not just to beat the hook.
- Only with grace can anyone succeed – and it takes lots of it.
- Only the Catholic Church has the means necessary - both to obtain sufficient grace and to save your soul.

Every other religion (to include Protestantism, atheism, pantheism, secular humanism, Islam, Judaism, freemasonry, etc.) is fundamentally founded on at least one faulty principle and hence, at least in part, on error. Consequently they ALL lead their followers into error. Therefore, they are false religions and cannot provide the necessary grace, and in fact, are impediments to receiving grace. This is most especially true of any 12-Step program that speaks of God in an indifferent sort of way, you know, one that speaks of “God as you understand Him” or some such phraseology.

OK, you mad? Fine, yell, scream, and throw the book. But you’ll be back! Dog-ear this page before you throw it so you can find it later! On the other hand, if you already are a practicing Catholic don’t get smug. You’re one only through the grace of God and nothing else so take no pride in your Catholicism.

THE FULL ANSWER:

Well, brother, are you ready to proceed? Good! Let’s set up the groundwork so that the explanation is at least logical, if not convincing.

First, the final goal of the Catholic 12-Steps is NOT to overcome your hook, whatever that hook happens to be. Its purpose is to help you save your soul by your combat against your hook and to give glory to God by your struggle. We’ve mentioned this before but it’s a subtle distinction that’s crucial as to why we are bothering to fight against ourselves to begin with. If you struggle against your hook honestly and sincerely, passing through the state of grace only to fall and then pick yourself up again, but get hit by a bus and die before you have finally “cut the line” to your hook, the good God will have been sending countless graces to your soul, some of which you will have accepted in your struggle. I don’t believe that Christ will allow the loss of one of His little ones who is valiantly fighting for His sake. In other words, the primary goal is to grow in sanctity or to become holy. The secondary goal is to cut your hook, not the other way around. So, if you don’t care about becoming holy, then the Catholic 12-Steps isn’t for you. Go do a pseudo-spiritual 12-Steps of anyone’s making, maybe defeat your addiction, and then almost certainly end up in hell anyway when you die because you will have chased the wrong prize, friend.

My next point is that it requires grace to succeed. I don’t anticipate an argument here because everyone else’s 12-Steps requires that there be the assistance of a higher power in order to be successful. You may not call it “grace”, but it still comes down to receiving the gift of help from someone outside of yourself to succeed. We Catholics define any supernatural gift from God as “grace” and that’s what that help certainly is – a gift. Makes sense? OK, let’s move on.

For the third point, that the Catholic Church has the necessary tools to provide the needed grace. She has the Mass and the Sacraments. In the Mass we receive Jesus Christ, complete and entire, Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity, in

Holy Eucharist, *“Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, you shall not have life in you. He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood hath everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day.”* (Jn 6: 54-55) She is also the organization or structure that Jesus Christ Himself founded with Peter has the head or first pope, *“And I say to thee: That thou art Peter; and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.”* (Matt xvi: 18) For those who honestly believe that any other Christian group is the “original” Church, I invite you to ask your pastor when your particular group actually started. If he is honest, you will get a date sometime after 1000AD and the name of someone who is merely Man and not the God-Man. If your pastor says otherwise, please look for historic proof of its continued and open existence over the entire 2000 or so years since the death of Our Lord. Show me your martyrs and your saints. Show me the pagan nations that converted en masse to your religion and show me your miracles. Sorry if that sounds mean but it’s not intended that way – just being honest with you, my brother. These are simply historical proofs that Christ founded the Catholic Church – and only the Catholic Church.

The last point is that no other religion provides the necessary grace by virtue of teaching errors. In addition, those not connected to His Church are actually blocked from grace by their faith. Once again, please let me anticipate your potential objection, dear reader. “Fine”, you say, “My religion teaches that I get all the grace I need just by asking for it” or “All religions lead to the same God and therefore all are equal means to obtain grace just as effectively as the Catholic religion.”

To answer both of these objections I am going to resort to logic. Certainly, all religions have something in common since they all deal with the worship of something supreme outside of us yet there are significant differences, and by that I mean doctrinal differences of a fundamental nature that contradict one another, between all of the world’s religions. If there weren’t these differences, we’d all have the same religion ‘cuz we’d all believe the same things. Now something cannot be both True and False at the same time. Truth can’t contradict itself – remember that phrase because it’s important. Something is either True or it is False, but it cannot be both. I haven’t confused you yet, have I? Good! Therefore, we can conclude that they are not all the same.

If it helps to illustrate the point, let’s assume that we are answering the question of how many gods there are. If you are a Hindu, the answer is tens of thousands. If you are a Catholic, the answer is one God in three Divine Persons. See? They’re not all the same since they contradict each other in at least one area of fundamental truth. If you don’t like my using an Eastern religion, fine. Let’s compare the different Christian faiths. The Catholics have their worship centered on the Mass and the Holy Eucharist where Christ is really and truly present, you know, the Real Presence. Sorry, but the fact is that there are NO, that’s right, NO, Protestant groups that have this. They have, in effect, not the

Real Presence but the Real Absence. Therefore, they are different. So, you see, my friend, once again, they are not the same and hopefully you will accept that premise. I could go on with an example of a contradiction with every other religion in existence but I'm afraid things would get pretty tedious and this book is NOT a book on apologetics.

Continuing our use of logic here, we have this set of religions, all stating certain beliefs that, as we have just shown, are counter to what the Catholic Church says in at least one core belief. Now, logically speaking, they could all be wrong, to include Catholicism, so that there is NO True Church. (Now there's a hideous thought!) Or, they are ALL wrong except for ONE, since as we said before that Truth cannot contradict itself. They CANNOT, however, ALL be true, since for the third time, TRUTH CANNOT CONTRADICT ITSELF.

OK, friend, hopefully you will at least accept the possibility of one true religion. Then which one is it?

I offer as proof that ONLY the Catholic Church was founded by God, come down here on earth. Not some man finding a secret book given to him by an angel or found under a rock or dictated to him. There is no other religion that claims this. Second, is the beauty of her doctrines and these NEVER change. Every other religion looks to the Church as the yardstick for their own beliefs. Next, as I mentioned a few paragraphs earlier, are the miracles, prophecies, mass conversions of pagan nations, and that she is indestructible. Despite everyone else persecuting her from all sides, she never succumbs to the assaults. When the smoke clears, the Church is still standing – and it's her opponents that are destroyed. Even the myriad failings of her members, to include the popes, cannot bring about her destruction. Lastly, her enemies know her to be the One True Church. Ever hear of a Black bible study or a Black revival? No, there's only a Black MASS! Gee, what do the satan worshipers know? Hmm...

So, if the Catholic Church is the One True Church, she MUST have all of the supernatural tools necessary at her disposal to fight any type of spiritual combat, to include the fight against the hook, your hook. For if she doesn't, then NO one else has those tools and it is a forlorn hope to be able to defeat the hook by any other than purely natural means.

Now for the last point: all religions are equally effective at providing the necessary grace to combat the hook. A corollary to this is that these other faiths or other 12-Step programs are at least "a good beginning" since they lead you at part way there in the conquest of the hook.

This is the toughest part of all of my points to answer, my friend. Not because the answer is difficult but that the explanation is hard to bear. There are a lot of people out there who are not Catholic but are quite sincere about their beliefs and I can certainly appreciate their sincerity because I've known and worked with

many of these good people. They put many a Catholic to shame in the way they live their faith.

Why the explanation is so difficult to bear is that we live in a relativistic society and have been taught this from Day One. Each one of us believes that he has the "truth" for himself. Your truth is yours and my truth is mine. Whatever you believe is perfectly acceptable for your salvation and likewise for me. Ugh! This oh-so-widely held belief is also oh-so-wrong. Now please hang with me. I'm not going to insult your intelligence and I assume that you are one of those deeply sincere people referred to above. I'm sure that you've spent considerable time and energy to determine whatever plan of salvation you subscribe to (Jew, Christian, animist, Hindu, whatever). What I am going to do, however, is to suggest by way of analogy, that there is a universal plan for the salvation of man that goes beyond, or transcends, both your and my opinions about how we are "saved" or get to heaven.

MATH TEACHER:

I taught mathematics for four years in a very small school that really wasn't much more than a kind of collective home school. Oh sure, the students all wore uniforms but it was so small that I taught only a single student or a pair of students in each grade. In fact, it was so small that I taught 4 or 5 grades in the same room at the same time from grades 4 to 12. I had to be adept at math skills for everything from the multiplication tables all the way to doing geometric proofs and calculus derivatives. Of course, I couldn't retain all these skills in my head all at the same time but since I had the Teacher's Manuals with me which were written by the authors who were experts, I had an authoritative source that I could turn to for the right answer or the method to obtain the right answer for every question in the book. This was very comforting to me because I hate to be embarrassed and with the Teacher's Manual to lean on, I didn't have to rely on my own reason to determine what was the true answer or what was the proper technique to obtain that answer.

I recall my days back at the University of Akron studying electrical engineering. We worked on some incredibly complex, multi-step problems back in those days. You had to show each and every step, line by line, until you obtained the final answer, which you circled. The problems could go to two pages or more in length. Thank God I'm not doing that for a living! You see, when we students would compare answers, I soon learned that, as smart as I thought I was, if my answer differed from someone else's, it was my answer that was wrong and not his. This finally taught me the lesson that I couldn't trust my own reasoning, that I needed someone outside of myself if I were to ever get the final answer correctly.

Another point I'd like to bring up as a teacher was that there was always one and only one "right" answer. Two plus two equals four no matter who you are. It was concrete. It was exact. It was logical. It was universal. The answers were

always either "RIGHT" or "WRONG". My feelings didn't enter into the question. Even when my students sincerely believed from the bottom of their hearts that their answers were correct, they could still be just flat out wrong. Their convictions about the correctness of their answers didn't mean anything if the answer was still wrong.

Sometimes the student would learn the method incorrectly or bring his own prejudices into how a problem should be attacked. "That's not how Mr. S. taught me how to do it!" I heard more than once. Of course, Mr. S. may or may not have taught it that way but that's the way "Little Johnny" remembered it. There were times when I'd have to pull out the old reliable Teacher's Manual and say, "Here, read it and weep. It's right there in black and white." The student's own reasoning was no substitute for his submitting his will and opening up his mind and just being docile to whatever was being taught.

One thing I learned to respect about mathematics was that it built upon itself. You didn't do algebra until you were good with fractions. You didn't do fractions until you could do division, which depended upon multiplication, which depended upon - you get the idea. It was like so many building blocks of mathematical truths or dogmas which all depended upon each other in order to continue to climb in mathematical skill. If you skipped any of the "bricks", the whole wall of your math ability crumbled.

The other thing that I respected was that it punished the lazy student. If he took shortcuts or chose to skip this or that step, he invariably ended up with the wrong answer. I remember one particularly bright student who would just not show his work. He insisted on doing the work in his head. He always scored lower than his colleagues, not because he didn't know the methods but because in his haste to get through the problem, he would make a boneheaded error that would result in a wrong answer. I couldn't give him partial credit when there wasn't anything written down to follow.

THE UNIVERSAL TRUTH:

Now, let's tie all this together to finally answer the question, "Why does it need to be Catholic?" If you've been following my story, you'll agree that Mathematics is objective truth. You cannot depend on your own reason to learn it. There is typically only one right answer. Your answers are either right or wrong; being sincere doesn't count. You have to submit your will to the rules; you either follow the rules or you don't get the right answer (worse, you get WRONG answers) and you fail. Every new mathematical truth depends on all the previous mathematical truths so you can't pick and choose what you want to learn; it's all or none. Lastly, you can't take shortcuts and still get the right answer.

One last exercise, my friend, substitute "Catholic" for "Mathematics" and that's why you and the 12-Steps HAVE to be Catholic.

CONCLUSION:

As I promised, let's sum up. The Catholic 12-Steps is NOT about "curing" your hook, it is about gaining your salvation through your struggle; it takes copious quantities of grace to be successful; the Catholic Church – and only the Catholic Church has the tools necessary to provide that grace; and lastly, it is impossible to substitute any other religion and expect to get the same results.

So, now if you're still with me, let's move on to the overview. I want to make sure we're using the same terms from now on, so there isn't any confusion over the words I use and what I mean when I use them.

BEFORE WE GET STARTED...

INTRODUCTION:

Well, brother, you've made it this far and having endured my introduction, you now get the pleasure of persevering through the overview of the Catholic 12-Steps. Actually, this is probably the chapter that you will refer to in future years as, with God's grace, you will have progressed to the point of not needing the complete details of any one point but just the highlights to keep on or to get back on track.

Before we get into the actual review itself, I have two preliminary points that we need to cover. The first is whether the Catholic 12-Steps should be done on an individual basis or with others, as in a support group setting. Some folks might want to set up such a structure whereas others may simply want to "fly solo" so I wanted to tell you of my experiences in La Misma Nada. The second is to discuss the terms that I use to explain how we must both increase the flow of God's grace to our souls and also increase our capacity to accept God's grace if we are to be successful in our struggle against our hooks.

ALONE OR WITH A GROUP:

If I only had my own personal experience combating a hook of pornography to fall back on, I would suggest that you could do this strictly on your own with only the occasional aid of a decent confessor in order to be successful. However, from February until September of 2006, I conducted a men's support group fighting pornography addictions called "La Misma Nada" or "Nothingness Itself" (see the chapter in the Appendix on Venerable Antonio Margil de Jesús as to why it's called that) and I fervently believe that having the mutual support of good friends and someone to give decent spiritual advice are invaluable aids in anyone's success at defeating the hook – regardless of which specific hook it is.

Each approach has its strengths and weaknesses. Fighting on your own can make for a lonely struggle, even if you have the help of a good priest. You have no one else's assistance when you need a boost or a pick-me-up and you run the risk of making key decisions without running those decisions through a sanity check – you know, that getting someone else's opinion before you make a decision or doing something that sounds good to you but is really dumb when an outsider considers it. It could be beyond your strength or secretly feeding your pride but you're too-close-to-the-forest-to-see-the-trees to see it. On the plus side, your confidentiality is preserved and you probably don't have access to a Catholic support group that focuses on your particular hook (actually, I'm hoping that this little book will start a trend to reverse that!) or is run by someone not spiritually strong enough to do the job right.

LA MISMA NADA:

For a period of seven months I ran a very small men's pornography addiction support group out of my local church. It was an excellent opportunity for me to knock off the rough edges of the program. I learned a lot. The group was small enough that I wasn't intimidated by a large group and I already knew who the men were so I wasn't shy about saying what I needed to say. I don't know if the support group, La Misma Nada, resembled an AA meeting or not – I've never been to an AA meeting and I haven't read their book . However, I have been involved with the Legion of Mary for quite a few years so I knew how one of those meetings ran. Since this is a spiritual combat and the Legion is intensely spiritual I chose to use roughly the same format for La Misma Nada. Both groups exist for the sanctity of the members. Both meetings begin with the prayer to the Holy Ghost and the Rosary. There is an instruction at the beginning of both meetings. A prayer in the middle of the meeting roughly bisects both. The members of both report on their activity for the past week; the Legionaries to report on their work cases and in La Misma Nada the members report on their labors against their hook. Each closes with prayer and confidentiality is maintained about the work being done.

I'd like to share some of what we do in La Misma Nada as a potential guide for anyone interested in starting his own support group. We have certain ground rules that are repeated after the opening prayers each week. They are:

- **The purpose is to grow in sanctity** through combat against one's addiction – using our addiction as leverage to gain holiness and heaven.
- **Complete confidentiality outside of the group** – what's said in here stays in here!
- **Keep support group from becoming a “near occasion of sin”** – no unnecessary details that may cause “reaction” in self or others.
- **Grace builds on nature** – use all natural non-anti-Catholic means necessary to obtain needed grace.

The first point is just a re-stating of what I said in the chapter on Addictions, that what separates the Catholic 12-Steps from everyone else is that sanctity is our real objective and not simply defeating the hook.

The next point stresses confidentiality. Certainly you can't expect anyone to talk about something as sensitive as masturbation or pornography if you can't be counted on to keep your big mouth shut! Without this ground rule it becomes impossible to have any sort of meaningful discussions due to a lack of trust.

The next point, on near occasions, may or may not be relevant for a non-sexual hook group, but for us it was essential! Maybe I'm stating the obvious, but talking about sexual matters is, in itself, a means of arousal. Therefore, we had to make absolutely certain that the words we used and how detailed we got had to stay general enough so that this "reaction" didn't occur. The very last thing that we wanted to have happen was to fall more deeply into the slavery of our hook through the very mechanism that we were using to try to defeat it!

Now we come to the final point. There is an axiom in apostolic work that states that "Grace builds upon nature" and what that means is that, although God can work miracles when He sees fit, He normally works through a slow and methodical process in our souls – a sort of "creeping" of grace, if you will, or a gradual buildup of grace with each gift of grace attaching itself to our souls through some part of our natural selves. Since we all have free will and can reject the grace of the moment, it is most helpful to have a predisposition or a "leaning" in the right direction to easily accept it. In addition, the more elements in our souls that are already in agreement with Catholic Truth means that that much more grace is readily accepted. This causes a sort of avalanche effect so that as our natures become more in line with God's Truth, an increasing proportion of His grace is accepted which further improves our nature which causes an even greater amount of grace to be accepted in the future. Pretty cool, huh? Sort of a spiritual case of "the rich get richer."

To illustrate, let's assume that you are working on converting a man to the Faith. He already believes that in marriage it is "til death do us part". It's a point that you don't have to argue over or discuss in great detail because he already believes it; in other words, he's already accepted the grace to believe this concept. This can be used as a stepping-stone to cover other related points of Catholic Truth and, because he accepts this first point, he's likely to accept the grace to believe your second point that builds off of it since he sees intuitively that you are speaking about things that he knows to be true so, in his mind, you must know what you are talking about. See?

Now in our case, we are trying to cut the line to our hook, of course. But we are all different, so explanations, ideas, or tricks that work for one soul may be completely ineffective for someone else. As such, we have to be creative in using the tools available to us to find the most effective means on an individual basis. Even though the Catholic 12-Steps is primarily focused on the spiritual, we will not, cannot, confine ourselves to just spiritual weapons because these attack the problem from only one direction and if that approach doesn't work for you, well brother, I guess you'd be out of luck!

Now I'm going to go off on a tangent or what some people call a "rabbit trail" but please indulge me for a second. It is an unfortunate fact of life that the crisis in the Church has meant that much of what is labeled as "Catholic" really isn't and much of what the Church should be doing she doesn't. Much of the slack is

being picked up by non-Catholic organizations. In the absence of the “right” tool (meaning the Catholic tool) we have to make due with what’s available. For example, I know of no Catholic anti-pornography videos. There are Protestant ones however that contain fruit in them and these can be used for anyone with his eyes open, so to speak. The key is to be careful and prudent in your use of them. Pick up those aspects that are “Catholic” in their point of view and here you will find spiritual fruit. Those aspects that you have to “twist” into a Catholic interpretation or have to overlook are bad and you should stay away from them. This requires you to know (and to know well) your Catholic Faith as well as have a touch of humility to know your own limitations. (Please note that if you are a slave to your hook now, you DON’T have a high degree of humility so be careful!) This is where a good spiritual director comes in handy. He can give you the right guidance on these things to steer clear of the anti-Catholic stuff. In the absence of such a director you need to make sure that what you are taking from them is not something that contradicts our Faith because it will eventually suck the Catholicism right out of your soul! Use what you find useful and necessary but ALWAYS keep your Catholic wits about you! This is the great trap of AA. Many’s the Catholic alcoholic who told himself that “I’ll just interpret its teachings in a Catholic way” and ended up falling away from the Faith. *“Wherefore he that thinketh himself to stand, let him take heed lest he fall.” (1 Cor x. 12)*

Now, this discussion of “grace building on nature” segues very nicely into our discussion on the terms used and barnacles.

TERMS USED:

Many of the analogies that I’ve been inspired to use have water or sea connotations. Please don’t ask me why because I don’t really know. Maybe it’s because I’ve been “lost at sea” for so long that it’s the only thing that intuitively makes sense to me. Or maybe it’s because the apostles were “fishers of men” that the sea context has some sort of mystical connection with them. I’ve already mentioned the analogy of the fishhook with one’s sinful addiction so I won’t belabor the point here. It also made sense to keep St. Augustine’s chains and fetters but it made more sense to me to keep the idea of an “embedded” weakness and chains can be completely removed once the lock is opened whereas the barbs on a hook keep it attached and the only way to free oneself from it is to sever the ties to it.

BARNACLES AND SHIPS’ HULLS:

The other analogy comes into play because the entire point of the Catholic 12-Steps is built upon receiving grace and our accepting it to use in our struggle. Now, there are two techniques that we can use to get more grace; 1) God can send us more, or 2) we can make more effective use of the graces He does send us. I had originally started with the idea of the flow of water with either a bigger faucet to get a greater flow of water or getting a bigger bucket to catch it in. The

problem to me was the question, "But what do you do with it once you collect it? What good is it?" Well, simply put, friend, it's just water. Sure you can wash with it or grow fish in it but it's not alive - it has no life of its own. In my own little head, God's grace is



more of an organism or a living substance that grows and becomes a part of you, adding its substance to yours. Hence, the idea that God's graces are like barnacles, those little sea creatures that are eagerly seeking to attach themselves to the right surface, a living surface, in order to grow and multiply.



The picture on the left shows a manatee that has barnacles attached all over it; you can see how the barnacles work. OK, the barnacles work for the grace part; the manatee just doesn't work for me for the soul though. Instead, let's hearken back to the days of the sailing ships where the hulls were made of wood. As the ships sailed upon the Seven Seas, they would have a greater and greater growth of barnacles to the point that the ship's speed would be impaired. Eventually the ship would have to be careened or beached so that the sailors could scrape the barnacles off of the sides. In this case we're going to do the opposite and try to accumulate as many of these barnacles of grace as possible.

The other aspect that we need to consider with these barnacles is that the wood of the hull of the ship needs to be exposed in order for the barnacles to have some place to attach to. Therefore we want the maximum surface area exposed to provide the maximum number of potential spots for any particular barnacle to find a home. There are two points that this line of thinking brings up that I think are very important.

Earlier we talked about grace building upon nature. Consider now, if you will, that our natures or souls are ships' hulls. If they are strong, waterproofed, and with strong ribs and supports, then these ships are quite seaworthy. They are able to withstand easily the buffeting of the waves and the abuse of being out to sea without taking on water and eventually sinking. In addition, the larger the size of the hull, the larger the surface area for those barnacles to find a home. Now, how do our souls get this "seaworthiness"? By making the faculties of the soul as Catholic as possible, and we do this by forming our intellects, wills, and memories to be in agreement with the truths of the Catholic Faith as much as possible. We start with what we already have that is Catholic and that's the ships ribbing and maybe some of the planks. We learn more about the Faith and that adds more planking. We strengthen our wills and that adds oakum between the planks to make them watertight. We purge our memories of carnal desires and

thoughts; this stretches the size of the hull. I hope you see how this is work for us (aided by grace, of course) and the harder we work at it, the easier it is for the barnacles to attach and consequently the greater will be the effect of grace in our souls.



The other interesting idea here is that just about the time of the heyday of wooden sailing ships was also the time of the emergence of Freemasonry and its revolution to secularize society, limiting the flow of God's grace firstly into the public domain, and then into the private domain of individuals and the family. You see, just about at the very same time, ship makers began to cover the hulls of their ships with copper to minimize or prevent the growth of barnacles on the hulls. The Freemasonic revolution did the exact same thing to men's souls, altering their natures away from Catholic Truth in every way possible in order to prevent the attachment of grace in their souls.

This point may not be completely clear to many people, so please let me give some examples to illustrate some of the ways that our souls have been "covered with copper", so to speak. Let me make it clear that these examples are true even for devout Catholics. It is only with the strongest efforts that any of us are able to overcome and/or avoid having our natures virtually completely ruined so as to make it very difficult for grace to find any points of attachment in our souls.

We live in a country (and in fact so does everyone else in the world to some extent):

- Governed by a Freemasonic constitution that has led to a practical atheism in all areas of public life (when was the last time you saw a public official or a company president open a meeting with the Sign of the Cross and the Rosary?)
- Where the Church (the soul) and the State (the body) must maintain a strict separation (isn't the definition of death where the soul separates from the body?)
- Where ALL religions are given equal status (what happened to "Outside the Church no salvation?")
- Where homosexuality and every form of immoral behavior is tolerated, even by Catholics (did you ever read your company's Diversity policy?)
- Where the family is constantly under attack (contraception, divorce and child support laws, abortion, assisted suicide, the elderly are literally starved to death, and the tax and welfare laws discourage marriage and large families, just to name a few.)
- Where no major radio or TV station, newspaper, magazine, broadcasting company, bank, or corporation is led by a

devout Catholic and run following truly Catholic principles (and in fact run by enemies of the Church.)

- Where the first capital sin, Pride, is honored as the highest virtue (ever seen any “Power of Humility” bumper stickers?)
- Where rampant avarice and greed are the norm (heard of the “American Dream?”)

Enough! I could go on and on but this book isn’t about restoring all things in Christ, just restoring Christ into our souls. The whole point is that we live in a culture that is ENTIRELY anti-Catholic and the results are that we have very little of our habits and tendencies that have not been attacked by modern day. We have to struggle to keep or to form anything Catholic about our natures in order to provide suitable attachment points for grace – the grace that is necessary for us to cut the line to our hooks and to save our souls.

Before we depart from our talk of hulls and barnacles, I have one last point that I must mention. It is true that God gives grace to all men, sufficient for their salvation as well as His grace for general gifts, *“And he is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world.”* (1 John ii, 2) When I speak of grace, however, I am not speaking of these “general” graces. Instead, I am speaking of the extraordinary graces that are required to wage supernatural war against the hook. These are the graces that come only from the Catholic Church.

Okay, sufficient talk about hooks and barnacles and hulls. Let’s “Begin the beguine”, as it were, and turn our attention to what we came here for: the Catholic 12-Steps.

OVERVIEW OF THE CATHOLIC 12-STEPS: THE HOUSE BY THE SEA:

In the last section I used a decidedly nautical point of view to discuss God's grace and how we will make use of it. For this overview, however, let’s depart from that motif; you’ll notice that I’ve shown a picture of a nice, modest little house to help clarify these steps. In the chapters that cover the individual steps in greater detail I will go back to my naval motif but for now, we’ll play the landlubber and consider this simple little house (by the sea if it helps any). If you’re paying attention and counted all the different little boxes, you’ll notice that there aren’t twelve of them. Now, please don’t think that I can’t count. Yes, there are really 13 steps. The 0 step is to perform an Act of the Will, or to make a Firm Resolution, to succeed in severing the line to your hook. Other 12-Step programs, I believe, include it within the other steps but my experience with La Misma Nada is that this is so important that it really needs a step of its own so I hope you’ll forgive me in being a rebel and giving it it’s own individual step.

Let's envision that this house is our soul and we want to make it a suitable dwelling for, not just anybody, but for Our Lord to make His abode in. Well, before we even begin to build a house we need to make sure that the ground that we build it upon will hold the structure. If it's sandy or swampy all of our work will be a waste of time so we'll probably have a soil test done so we are convinced that embarking on our little construction project in this particular spot is the right place to build. In the same way, we need to recognize that there is a problem in our lives of major proportion and that the "particular spot" in our lives where the hook is, is the right place to begin building the "abode" for God. *"If any one love me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him, and will make our abode with him."* (Jn xiv.23)

As Catholics, this shouldn't be a problem to figure out. If you are even reasonably aware of what the Church teaches, your conscience is already telling you that you have a problem with some particular mortal sin. You always find yourself confessing the same one over and over again (assuming that you're still going to Confession). You're probably even to the point of figuring that you might as well go into the confessional and say, "Yep, it's me, Father," and saying sheepishly, "I did it again!" Therefore, the old adage about the-first-step-in-solving-a-problem-is-to-recognize-it-exists is already assumed in the Catholic 12-Steps. If you have a hook you know it. It isn't part of the "house" itself but it is a necessary pre-condition that we know we're building in the right place in our souls before we even get started.

Now that we've identified the right spot, we have a hole for the foundation dug. It goes down to undisturbed soil and somewhere below the frost line. And here we pour the concrete footers. In my area they go down at least 30 inches and are a minimum of 8 inches wide by 16 inches deep. In this way they will be firmly anchored and won't be shifted by the winter freezes. One interesting aspect of concrete is that it is extremely strong on forces pushing down on them or "compressive" forces. Since all the weight of the house pushes down on top of the footer and compresses it against the firmness of the soil, concrete is the ideal material with which to make our footers. In the same way, Step 0 is a firm Act of the Will to overcome our hook. It is the very basis by which every action following it will succeed or fail. This is so because God certainly wants our salvation and He knows that cutting the line to our hook is the ONLY way we will achieve it. What we have to do is conform our free will to the Divine Will. Later on you'll see that it is because our wills are weak and our self-love very strong that the hook has mastery over us. What we are expressing is a strong desire to do our utmost in this fight. Therefore, here is Step 0:

0. **I will make a firm act of the will to succeed in my resolution to defeat my hook.** I will make this resolution before God; I will repeat this act of the will periodically or whenever I feel that my resolve is weakening.

Okay, now we have the footer poured on our little domicile. Whether we will have a crawl space or a basement, we have to put up walls to reach above ground level. We'll use concrete again. It can either be poured concrete just like the footer, or we can use those 8 by 8 by 16 concrete blocks. We'll use block. With block, we will lay one course, or row, of block upon another, binding it all with mortar and building up the wall until it gets at least one course of block above the earth. If we don't get above the dirt, or "humus" in Latin, then the moisture and insects will rot out or infest the structure that we are trying to build, destroying the fruits of our labor. Similarly, my friend, we have Steps 1 and 2 that are based upon that same "humus" or "humility". Step 1 requires us to make an Act of Humility, confessing that the hook is master over us. "Humility" gets its root from that same "humus" we just described, so in the same way, Step 1 is an action below grade or, "down in the humus". It is tied intimately to Step 0 in the same way that both the footer and the block are made from that same hard and durable concrete. Step 2 requires an Act of Hope; forcing us to admit and to accept the fact that it is ONLY through God's grace can we ever succeed. It binds our Act of the Will with our Act of Humility in the same way that the mortar binds the blocks, one to another, as well as to the footer. We will introduce a prayer to be said daily, the "Nothingness Itself" Prayer. It will speak in the first paragraph of our own nothingness being enslaved to our hook and in the second paragraph it will speak of our hope in receiving the necessary help from God. Here are Steps 1 and 2:

1. **I will admit that I - me, myself, and I, - have a problem that controls me.** I am helpless against it and that I am its slave.G:\dcannane\My Documents\Blessed Margaret Articles\The Hook and I articles\COMPLETED SECTIONS\Consolidated Book\Documents and Settings\dcannane\My Documents\BlessedMargaretsteps_1_n_2.htm
2. **I will admit that only with God's grace can I succeed.** I have failed with even the best of my efforts. His power and grace are infinite; I am infinitesimal. I will grow in my capacity to accept His grace so that I can overcome my addiction.

Here is also a copy of the "Nothingness Itself" Prayer, which is to be said daily:

O God, I, who am nothingness itself, come before Thee, confessing that I am powerless against my sinful habit, my addiction, my hook that Satan has used * to pull me from the waters of Thy grace * and to make me his slave. I am enchained and prostrate at his feet * without so much as the strength to break these bonds * let alone to rise and return to Thee. I admit before Thee and all the Heavenly Court * that I am in this wretched state through my own fault * and that even with the best of my own efforts * I am powerless in this struggle. I am beaten, I am defeated, and I am damned. In my anguish I cry out to Thee, "Help, Lord, I perish".

But Thou, O Lord, art my hope. Most beloved Jesus, Thou alone canst send the rain of Thy grace * to melt my hook, my chains, and my shackles, freeing me from this terrible bondage. In my nothingness, I am totally dependent upon Thee and Thy good favor. O merciful Redeemer, I beseech Thee, despise not this contrite and humbled heart, but unleash the storm clouds of grace, through Thy Most Holy Mother, that I may be victorious in this mortal combat within me. O Mary, my Queen and my Mother, pray to Jesus for me! Amen.

Once we have the foundation on our little bungalow, it's time to start adding the parts of the house that are the skeleton, or support structure upon which everything else that goes into the house is placed. We have the floors, the walls, and the trusses.

If we imagine this as a wood home, the floors will be made of wood and not concrete like on a slab house, so there will be some means to hold the floor up such as a sill of pressure-treated lumber that goes around the perimeter of the house as well as a series of steel posts or concrete piers that bear up the floor at strategic load-bearing points. Obviously the floors and supports need to be very strong for they support the weight of the rest of the house as well as our own weight as we go about living within the home – it certainly wouldn't do to fall through the floor into the laundry room in the basement, would it? In this way, we have Step 3, which is to know myself. We mean this in two respects. The first is the examination of conscience, which is clearly necessary before you confess your sins. This examination is represented by the floor itself, which is clearly visible to anyone coming into the home. It is necessary to know the state of my soul with this same clearness of vision, both in terms of the here-and-now which includes my as-yet unconfessed mortal sins but it also includes the history or "bill", if you will, of all the sins I've committed throughout my whole life. This knowledge will support the weight of my good confession. The second aspect is that I need to know my temperament – that is, the nature of my personality. Having this knowledge will give me insights into what my sins have been, which near occasions of sin affect me most, and also how Satan uses the natural weaknesses in my personality against me.

Once the flooring is installed, the wood frames are set in place. These "sticks" of 2 by 4 and an occasional larger board, mark out the entire structure of the home - where the bedrooms are, where the windows and doors will be placed, and so on. Since they are only studs and cripples, they provide no protection from the weather; the rain and wind come right through so, by themselves, they are insufficient protection but they provide the structure that all the "house wrap", pink board, brick, insulation, paneling, etc. will be hung and these will provide that protection or armor against the elements. This is Step 4, which requires me to confess my sins to the priest. Regular and consistent use of the Sacrament of Confession is key to the Catholic 12-Steps, just like the regularity of the "on-16

inch center” 2x4 studs that are repeated over and over again within each wall, both inside and outside of our little house. Without the regenerative powers of the confessional, our struggle against the hook will be futile since it is only first by returning to the state of grace, and second, by consistently staying in the state of grace for longer and longer periods will we be able acquire sufficient grace to be successful in cutting the line to our hook.

The very top of the house is the roof, of course. Inside the modern roof, however, are usually pre-built trusses that are installed above the walls and are the support structure on which the roof boards and shingles are placed. They each rest securely on the frame walls below and are placed at regular intervals so that each one supports its neighbor by bearing its own share of the load of the roof. This is Step 5, which requires me to do the penance the priest gives me in the confessional. This applies in both the immediate case of the “Say five Hail Mary’s” for that specific confession but also for beginning to complete the temporal punishment, or restitution, due to my past sins. For any particular hook, we are likely to have harmed others – especially our loved ones, and we need to start to repair those damaged relationships insofar as we can. Certainly we’ve offended God by our sinfulness (and He should be the first Beloved in our lives) but we also have spouses and friends. We need to “hold up” our end of these relationships by doing whatever restitution is called for. Just like the trusses that depend on good walls underneath, so too, do our penances depend upon good Confessions to provide strength to our souls.

Together, Steps 3, 4, and 5 are the framework of our abode. They return us or keep us in the State of Grace. They provide the strength and “soundness” to our souls so that God’s grace can “cover this framework” to begin again, or to continue, to work in our souls so that we can complete the construction of this House for God. Without a strong frame, nothing added to the house will be long lasting and the entire house is liable to collapse upon itself if we try to add too much else to it. Here, then, are Steps 3, 4, and 5:

3. **I will know myself**; both to determine what sins I’ve committed and also so that I know what my “hooks” happen to be. I will examine my conscience and my life so that I really begin to know my sins and myself.
4. **I will confess my sins to a priest**; a general confession preferably, but at least I will make a sincere confession, being genuinely contrite.G:\dcannane\My Documents\Blessed Margaret Articles\The Hook and I articles\COMPLETED SECTIONS\Consolidated Book\Documents and Settings\dcannane\My Documents\Blessed Margaret\steps_5_n_6.htm
5. **I will do the penance that the priest gives me** during confession and I will begin to make restitution to God and man for my sins; both in the particular case and in the general case.

Well now, buddy, we’ve got the makings of a pretty decent little structure going; built on firm ground in the right spot, solid foundation that’s impervious to freezing

and thawing, and sturdy framing to support the weight of the rest of the structure. Only problem is that it won't keep out the rain and it's still mighty drafty!

What we need now is to put up those walls – both inside and out. The frames of the outside walls will get either plywood or chipboard sheathing while the interior walls will get drywall added to them. Each of the seams of the drywall we'll tape over and put "mud" over the dents and shallow spots. At the bottom we'll add molding so that our "little mistakes" are covered over. All of this will help to deaden the noise from room to room. This is Step 6 where I begin to attend Mass more devoutly and more regularly. The Mass is the greatest prayer on the face of the earth and, consequently, the greatest source of grace, which is the main ingredient in our battle against our hook. In it, we gain us an increase in sanctifying grace, which, just like the walls of our house, provides a bulwark against the ravages of the world. The Mass also is a means of forgiving venial sins. This is the molding and taping on the interior walls that hide the little imperfections of the carpenter's work. Over time, we will begin to experience an increase in inner peace, the "peace the world cannot give", which will begin to deaden the internal "noise" or aggravation felt in the daily stresses of our lives. Strong and sturdy, the "walls" of the Mass are the principal defense against damnation – not only for our own souls but also for the entire world!

No home would be complete without the "mechanicals", that is the electric, plumbing, and heating. You know, the "utilities". Without lights we couldn't see in the darkness, without water we couldn't bathe or remove waste, and without heat we would freeze to death in the wintertime. Here we have Step 7. These are the Sacraments that we will receive more regularly. All of these enlighten our souls with sanctifying grace, some wash us clean and remove the "waste" of our sins, and all of them provide the heat of their sacramental grace as well. In addition, when these utility systems are first installed they are typically inspected and then tagged to show that the initial installation is according to code. Then there is a regular maintenance schedule set up so that they continue to run in tip-top shape, like changing the AC filters and draining the dirty bottom water out of the water heater. We will do the same thing with our souls. If there are any one-time sacraments (like Baptism and Confirmation) that leave a mark or "tag" on our souls that we haven't received yet we will take whatever instruction is necessary and get those received. In the meantime, we will begin a regular schedule of going to Confession and receiving Holy Communion. This will make sure that our souls will be in tip-top shape in our combat against our hooks. This program will heal or repair the damage done by our sins and also strengthen our souls for further operations.

We've installed the sheathing of chipboard on the frames, but you have to admit, they're not very pretty to look at so we'll add some type of external covering that will be both additional protection as well as attractive to outsiders. In our case, we're going to add a veneer of brick all the way up to the eaves. This will make for a low maintenance exterior that is very eye appealing with a come-on-in-and-

make-yourself-to-home kind of charm for our anticipated Guest. On the inside we'll wallpaper or paint each of the walls. For my tastes, if we're going to use wallpaper I'd like to have a nice nautical theme, say a border around the tops of the walls with sailboats or lighthouses. And for the paint, any light color will do. Here we have the first part of Step 11 (what I call 11A). This is to begin to start to pray regularly. The most important prayer outside of the Mass is the Rosary – especially requested by Our Lady of Fatima. This is the brickwork, "...Fair as the moon, bright as the sun, terrible as an army set in battle array" (Cant. vi, 9), words which fairly describe well-done masonry and which exactly describe Mary. The absolute necessity in praying the Rosary can NEVER be overstated. In addition, other prayers should be said like Morning and Evening prayers, Grace, etc. in the same way that you wouldn't have only the exterior of the house eye appealing but you would also add the wallpaper and paint we just talked about. Our prayer life adds a level of protection by the graces we receive from them, especially the protection from the robustness of the "brickwork" of the Rosary, and with this simple beginning to build an interior life, starts to make our souls appealing to Our Guest, the hoped-for Bridegroom of our soul.

We now have the basis for a very livable home. It has a level of protection, is attractive to the eye, is fully functional, and is strong enough to bear the additional weight of either functional or decorative items that will enhance the value of our home. Here, then, are Steps 6, 7, and 11A:

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6. **I will begin to attend Mass – the True Mass;** I will attend more regularly and more devoutly. I will always try to go to Communion if I am able.
7. **I will attend the Sacraments more regularly;** completing any one-time ones such as Baptism or Matrimony, which are necessary to the state of my soul and circumstances, but more importantly going to Confession - especially when I have fallen back into my addiction but at least once a month and also regularly receive Communion.
11. (A) **I will strengthen my sanctity by regular and fervent prayer.** I will especially develop a great love for the Rosary and the Blessed Virgin. I will develop my own list of personal patron saints and I will pray to them regularly.

OK, friend, this little bungalow by the ocean is really starting to take shape, but if you really know anything about home construction you're probably already tearing your hair out saying, "This idiot doesn't know a thing about houses – he left out the insulation in the walls, he doesn't have any shingles on the roof and there aren't any windows! What a complete dope!"

Well, you're quite right. It's time to correct these deficiencies. Please note that, although I'm covering the Catholic 12-Steps as if each of these steps is separated from each other, they are really part of a unified whole with each part depending on the other parts being done either simultaneously or done in proper sequence – none of these steps can be taken away or the whole structure is endangered. This is one of the reasons that the Catholic 12-Steps has to remain the CATHOLIC 12-Steps – with no deletions or substitutions.

If we've protected the frames with chipboard and brick, we certainly have to do the same thing to those trusses up above. No sense in keeping out the wind but letting in the rain! Atop the trusses we'll add an underlayment, then a layer of tarpaper, and last we'll put on those familiar overlapping shingles. This will keep our roof from leaking (but only if we have a complete watertight covering). With the addition of drip edge around the perimeter of the roof, gutters to flow away the rain, and flashing near the chimney, no water will be sitting around looking for a way to work its way inside our little house. Step 8 is to identify and avoid Near Occasions of Sin – those persons, places, or things that tempt us and cause us to sin through our hook. Near occasions are just like rain on the roof. If we don't build a complete and impervious barrier to water it will find some sneak path into the home and, once inside, will begin its insidious work of water damage, mold growth, and otherwise ruining everything that we value and worked so hard to create. Likewise, when water is permitted to sit on a surface it will eventually work its way inside. First it will degrade the surface on which it sits, and then, once it is weakened, it will find that proverbial sneak path through it. This is exactly what near occasions do to our souls. If we flee from them they cause us no damage. If we resist them immediately they cause us no damage. This is the water flowing down the shingles, into the gutters, and down the spout. On the other hand, if we permit them to hang around, our defenses will eventually fail and the damage done to our souls is limited, not by us, but by how much rain Satan chooses to enter into our souls. In other words, as long as the rain stays outside, we are in control – sitting warm and dry in our recliner. Once the water enters, it is Satan that is in control – we are stuck bailing, mopping, and drying things out and not sitting in our recliner.

Now, my astute friend, this brings us to the insulation that we apparently forget when we were erecting the walls. These days, houses have a layer of blue or pink closed foam insulating board and a house wrap that goes between the chipboard and the brick veneer. This insulation is a barrier that keeps moisture from penetrating into the home and it keeps the heat where it belongs. In the summertime, it keeps the heat from the sun outside the home so it stays cool inside. In the wintertime it keeps the heat inside so that it doesn't escape. This insulation is Step 9. Here I will strengthen my will by acts of mortification and penance. These are either acts of denying myself something that I enjoy or doing myself something that I find unpleasant. Now, understand that my will is

naturally weak due to the effects of Original Sin and further weakened by my living in a society in which my will has never been encouraged to grow. Indeed, every effort to prevent my will from properly forming has been made; this is especially true for men and boys. By performing acts of mortification and penance, I add a sure means of insulating myself from the three sources of temptations: Satan, the world, and my body,. Satan's smooth words are the water vapor that constantly and invisibly attempts to penetrate into my interior, in the same way that water vapor is in the very air itself so that it is constantly present but at the same time virtually impossible to see. The vapor barrier of mortification prevents this from happening. In addition, when I am cool with interior peace, mortification prevents the external sun of the temptations of the world from penetrating and it also keeps the heat of my own passions under control; it keeps them contained.

The last of these apparent deficiencies is that we need to add windows and doors if we ever want to get in and out of our house don't we? If we are smart we'll have triple pane windows and lots of them so that the house has a well-lit interior – there won't be a wall that doesn't have at least one. As for doors, certainly we'll have a front and back door but what variety? I'm partial to wood myself but I like the kind that have the window in the upper half, maybe even a stained glass one to remind us of church. Step 10 is improving our intellect by educating ourselves on the truths of the Faith, in other words, enlightening our minds with the Light of Truth. Our Lord said of Himself, *"I am the light of the world: he that followeth me, walketh not in darkness but shall have the light of life"* (John viii. 12). But how do we do that? Just as I previously remarked about our weakened wills, so too do we have weakened intellects. Therefore we have to educate ourselves. And that means daily spiritual reading and that will let the Light of Truth into the interior of our souls. Now isn't that just what windows do, let in the light? Therefore, this house of our souls needs a generous supply of the windows of truth in order to form our intellects to know the Truth in order to do the Truth.

As for doors, what is their purpose? They permit access to those who are allowed to enter and they bar the way to intruders. OK, then they need locks, doorknobs, and hinges. Certainly you don't expect your mother-in-law to crawl in through the window, do you? Therefore, the doors have to be of the right size to permit easy entry. In a similar way we have our intellect, or reason. With a properly formed intellect we have the proper number and the right size for our doors as well as knowing whom to let in and to whom to bar the way. Along with the hardware of a docile spirit, we will be enlightened by the light entering in through the windows and the knowledge to open or shut the door as needed to anyone knocking at the door of our souls.

We now have completed every aspect of the construction of our house. It is fully functional; it is insulated and protected from the elements, it is warm and ready for the final inspection by the building inspector. To this point we have formed or

reformed every aspect of our soul to be successful in the struggle against our hook. Just as our house is fully functional, so too are our souls – both in the fight against our hook but also that the Beloved of our souls is ready to cross the threshold and abide with us. Here again, are Steps 8, 9, and 10:

8. **I will identify what near occasions of sin affect me most** and I will work to distance myself from those persons, places, and things that most easily lead me into sin, concentrating on my addiction. G:\dcannane\My Documents\Blessed Margaret Articles\The Hook and I articles\COMPLETED SECTIONS\Consolidated Book\Documents and Settings\dcannane\My Documents\Blessed Margaret\steps_9_n_10.htm
9. **I will strengthen my will by mortification and penance.** I will work to gain mastery over myself by practicing virtue. I will begin with simple, easy-to-win battles over myself and then progressing to more difficult ones.
10. **I will strengthen my intellect by educating myself on the truths of the Faith.** I will regularly read the Bible, the works of the Saints, Encyclicals of the Popes, and good Catholic reading so that my intellect and my conscience will become properly formed.

At this point we have a complete house – but not a home! We have created a beautiful, functional, strong, warm, and secure building with great potential but it still lacks one vital ingredient – love. Therefore, we will finish it off with garnishes and decorations as well as two items that no house I'd ever want to live in would be without: a stove and a fireplace.

Once all the construction is done, there is still a good amount of sawdust, old caulking tubes, empty boxes for nails, and the like that still needs to be cleaned up. The crew drops its hammers and saws, replacing them with brooms and dustpans. The windows are washed and the paint is touched up. The walls are wiped down. Next, carpeting is placed on the floors as well as pictures hung on the walls. Of course by this point, you'd expect me to have a seascape or two; maybe we could put one of those small water fountains in the living room as well? Good. There's not a speck of dust, no imperfections whatsoever for the Bridegroom to wrinkle His nose up at. This is the remainder of Step 11 – what I call 11B. It is on prayer but it's the second stage of prayer. In the beginning, saying five decades of the Rosary will be a chore. Once you have gained some mastery over your hook, it's time to go above and beyond, so to speak. It's time to grow in sanctity, in other words, to become a saint! You certainly want to give the Good God, Who gave you ALL the graces needed to overcome your hook, the completeness of His glory by becoming as holy as He would have you become. He is the Bridegroom; therefore, your soul is the Bride. Now can you imagine a bride who is so passionately in love with her fiancé that she would do anything for him? Of course you can. That is the level of love we are talking about.

So the next step is to eliminate our habitual venial sins (since at this stage we've already eliminated our habitual mortal sins) and then to eliminate our imperfections. This is the cleaning up phase. While we are in this stage, the type of prayer we are talking about commencing is doing daily meditations on the Truths of the Faith. No, not yoga nonsense but Catholic meditation. From these meditations, it will grow into contemplation where communication between lover and Beloved becomes intimate. This is the level of love that Jesus speaks of here: "...If any one love me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him, and will make our abode with him." (John xiv. 23).

With the house nicely decorated and with all that hard work behind us, it's time to light a fire in the fireplace so that our Beloved can relax and take His ease while we prepare His favorite dish on the stove. They say that fire is a symbol of love and that's what both of these fires in our home say. They provide warmth and nourishment that comforts both body and soul. In short, they say, "I love you." This is Step 12, performing the works of mercy. In general, we'd call them doing Charity work. Another thing they say is that "Goodness diffuses itself" which means that the more one is in love with God, the more one MUST share that love with others, as if it's a fountain gushing over that cannot be contained or stopped. "You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a mountain cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but upon a candlestick, that it may give light to all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven" (Matt v. 14-16).

Here are Steps 11B and 12:

11. (B) **I will increase my sanctity by regular and fervent prayer.** I will start to meditate on the truths that I am reading about so that my interior life will be sufficiently strong for the combat that I am in. G:\dcannane\My Documents\Blessed Margaret Articles\The Hook and I articles\COMPLETED SECTIONS\Consolidated Book\Documents and Settings\dcannane\My Documents\Blessed Margaret\steps_11_n_12.htm
12. **I will perform the works of mercy.** I will especially perform those works that impact souls who suffer with my addiction. I will perform good works to give glory to God, the salvation of my own soul, and for the good of my neighbor.

LISTING OF THE CATHOLIC 12-STEPS:

OK, let's recap. I really like lists and tables and charts and such. They help me to see everything all in one glance. Nothing drove me crazier in school than to have a textbook that had the principles all scattered throughout the chapter without putting everything all in one place – and then having the gall to have as one of the questions to state what they were!

In any case, I think it's important to tabulate all of the 12-Steps together for a handy reference. In this case, I'm going to move away from the house construction analogy and simply group the steps together in the principle that they fall under in our war against the hook.

Steps of Humility (Daily say the "Nothingness Itself" Prayer)

- 0. I will make a firm act of the will to succeed in defeating my hook. (**Will**)
- 1. I will admit that I have a problem that controls me. (**Humility**)
- 2. I will admit that only with God's grace can I succeed. (**Hope**)

•

Steps of Returning to Grace (Confession cycle – repeat as necessary):

- 3. I will know myself. (**Examination of Conscience**)
- 4. I will confess my sins to a priest. (**Sacramental confession**)
- 5. I will do the penance that the priest gives me. (**Penance**)

•

Steps to Maximize Flow of Grace (Barnacles):

- 6. I will begin to attend Mass more regularly and more devoutly.
- 7. I will attend the Sacraments more regularly.
- 11.(A). I will increase my sanctity by regular and fervent prayer.

Steps to Strengthen the Soul (Hull):

- 8. I will identify what near occasions of sin affect me most. (**Memory**)
- 9. I will strengthen my will by mortification and penance. (**Will**)
- 10. I will strengthen my intellect by educating myself. (**Intellect**)

Steps to Increase the Life of Sanctity (Lover):

- 11.(B) I will increase my sanctity by meditation.
- 12. I will perform the works of mercy.

In the following chapters we will go over each step in greater detail, beginning with what the Catholic Church has always and everywhere (*semper et ubique*) taught on the subject at hand using the Bible, the Baltimore Catechism, and other Catholic writings as the basis for our discussion. So, if you are ready my dear

friend, let us continue and, paraphrasing the words of Karl Marx, “Souls of the world unite! We have nothing to lose but our hooks!”

INTEGRAL NATURE OF THE CATHOLIC 12-STEPS:

Taken together, the Catholic 12-Steps is a complete package, just like the house we just built is a complete package. If you remove any one aspect of either, you have a defective, even possibly dangerous situation. There is nothing that can be left out and each works with the others in complete harmony – strengthening what is weak in another and being reinforced by the others in turn. The program that I’ve outlined will NOT work if you find that there’s a particular step that you find distasteful so you’re tempted to skip it or to skim over it lightly. My brother, you do this to your peril. I’ll tell you flat out right now that Steps 8 and 9 are the hardest. Avoiding your near occasions of sin and mortifying yourself will be the toughest things that you do in your life because you are waging war against yourself. But if you don’t pass through the fire of the crucible, so to speak, of these two steps, **YOU WILL NOT SUCCEED!**

Most of these steps are cyclical in that you have to repeat performing them over and over again. Also, with the exception of when you first start out and Steps 11B and 12, you will be performing all of the steps at the same time. You will be renewing your act of the will to succeed every day that you say the “Nothingness Itself” Prayer. You will be mortifying yourself, praying the Rosary, going to Confession, receiving Holy Communion, avoiding sin, and doing spiritual reading all in a unified, or integral program that will cause both more barnacles of grace to flow past the hull of your soul and also to strengthen that hull so that more and more barnacles will attach themselves to it. In this way you will cut the line to your hook to its shortest possible length. In this way, you **WILL** save your soul and give great glory to Christ our King. Speaking of the soul, the next chapter will be covering that very topic; you can’t fix something that’s broken unless you know how it works! And speaking of Christ the King - **Viva Christo Rey!**

THE SOUL AND ORIGINAL HARMONY

My friend, I know that in your heart you seriously want to defeat your hook. It's brought you great difficulties and you are deeply worried about it being the cause of losing things that are very important to you, like your marriage, your job, your self-respect, maybe even your soul. The loss of your marriage, job, and self-respect is pretty much up to God's will. Your soul, on the other hand; I think I can help you with. The central focus of the Catholic 12-Steps is your soul because it is the key to defeating your hook. Believe it or not, your very soul is the weak link in the chain. Its weakness is why your hook enslaves you and properly increasing its strength will be why you will successfully cut the line to your hook. Therefore, it is important for you to know a good bit about your soul and its faculties so that you will make good decisions based upon solid understanding. As we cover the different steps in this book we will come to some that will concern your soul. These steps are HARD! *"The life of man upon earth is a warfare."* (Job vii, 1) Please don't forget this! You will fail unless you go in with your eyes wide open, as they say. So please pay special attention!

These steps concerning your soul will either take advantage of the faculties of the soul or are designed to improve or strengthen those faculties. Even with the preliminary step, Step 0, we need to tap into whatever strength of will you have now for you to decide to stick through this to the end. You see, the will is one of the three faculties of the soul, the other two being your memory and your intellect. We will return again to your will when we discuss Step 9, which concentrates on using mortification and self-denial to strengthen it. Those other two faculties will be covered in Step 8 (memory), and Step 10 (intellect). These three steps make up what I consider the "combat" steps of the entire Catholic 12-Steps because they force you to fight an opponent who is always with you – yourself. Don't despair however; God's grace will be with you every step of the way.

Now it stands to reason that since all three faculties are in the make up of your soul, it is necessary for you to strengthen all three of them in order to fully strengthen your soul. Cutting corners on any of the three will stunt your soul by making it lopsided just as the fiddler crab is lopsided by having one claw larger than the other. Although this arrangement might work well for the fiddler crab, when man has one faculty vastly greater than the others, he has a tendency to take pride in it to his detriment. For example, having a brilliant intellect but not having the will to control it properly can easily lead to pride of intellect so that you are "always right", or at least "never wrong". Be advised: being richly blessed has a tendency to lead us to take pride in the blessing instead of humbling ourselves as unworthy of such a great gift. One look at the lives of "The Beautiful People" in



Hollywood should be enough to convince you of that.

To complete this overview, I'm also going to discuss Original Harmon, as opposed to Original Sin. We'll do this because all the faculties of Adam's soul when he was first created were in complete harmony, both with God and with creation. This will help you to see what the ideal for us should be in order to help you work your way back to that ideal.

Just so you know, I have used definitions found in the Glossary and Terms section of "Collected Works of St. John of the Cross" by Kavanaugh and Rodriguez as well as my trusty old Baltimore Catechism, New Saint Joseph Edition. This way you can be sure that what I present is sound Catholic doctrine.

THE SOUL:

There are a number of ways that we can use the term "soul". Sometimes it can refer to the whole person with both a spiritual or immaterial part as well as a sensory or physical part. Thomas Aquinas describes it that way, for instance. For our purposes however, I find this too complicated and confusing; I suspect that that might be true for most folks as well. I find it hard to think of my "body" as part of my "soul". The one is physical and the other is spiritual so how can my physical side be part of my spiritual side? It may be technically true but, sorry, it turns my head into a pretzel just thinking about it. Instead, I will take the approach of St. John of the Cross and as the catechism says, i.e. that we are composed of body and soul. We will consider them as two separate entities. The body is the physical part of you. It's your flesh and bones, to be sure, but it is also your appetites or your desires. You could also call them urges. A fancy word is concupiscence. These are all the baser instincts of pleasing your senses.

Your soul, on the other hand, is your spiritual side. It is nothing that you can see. It is the principle part of you that "is made in the image and likeness of God." It is the part that communes with God. Now, **your soul is composed of three faculties: 1) intellect, 2) will, and 3) memory.** These are the three aspects of the soul and we need to strengthen them greatly in order for us to gain the victory over our hooks. Therefore, it is crucial that you understand their importance and exactly what you need to do to improve each one of them. This will all be explained in detail when we come to each of the steps in turn.

First, we have the intellect. This is the power of knowing and it is the greatest of the three. As I've said before, nothing comes into our intellects except through the senses implies an interdependence between them; the senses transmit data to the brain that the intellect interprets in order to understand things. This is true of the natural world. I see my breath in the air and feel the snow striking against my nose. Therefore, I know that it's cold outside. I should mention that it is possible for God to infuse knowledge into souls since nothing is impossible with

God but this is way beyond where we are now spiritually so we will ignore this possibility for our discussion.

There is another item that I want to mention concerning the intellect, namely that nothing material can unite our intellects to God. This union requires the virtue of faith. That means that a Catholic's faith and his intellect also have interdependence as well. These two must be in agreement; they cannot contradict each other and if there is a contradiction then only one of them can be true. Either the faith is malformed or the intellect is. This is so because either both are wrong or one of them is wrong since truth cannot contradict itself. This is important to understand, dear friend, so burn that last point into your brain. **TRUTH CANNOT CONTRADICT ITSELF!** I cannot have both a well-formed faith and a well-formed intellect if there is disagreement between them. Any discord or contradiction between the two means that I have some work to do to strengthen one or the other of them – and most likely both. Since I figure that this applies to all of us, let me present the following maxim: **I need to know the Good in order to do the Good.** Stated a different way, unless I know what is right, I cannot hope to do what is right. We'll cover practical ideas on strengthening the intellect in Step 10.

Proceeding to the next faculty of the soul, we have the memory, which is the power to recall and relive what is past. It is what you remember from past experience. What did you do yesterday? Where were you last August? How did you sin since your last confession? These questions are answered by your memory. Along with the imagination and fantasy, it is the archive or library of all intelligible images. We'll wrap all three of these into the term, "memory", for simplicity. The memory is dangerous because it brings up things from the past into our consciousness, either for good or for evil. If good, there's no problem. If evil, however, these memories can be merely temptations or they can cause us to sin. This can be extremely hazardous since we usually think about our hook before we act on our hook.

For example, remembering scenes from pornographic movies viewed in the past can cause "release of chemical stimulants into the brain, such as the release of epinephrine (an adrenal gland hormone that 'locks-in' memories of experiences occurring at times of high arousal), adrenaline, adrenocorticotrophic hormone (ACTH), noradrenaline, norepinephrine and testosterone, among others". (Steve Woods' Freedom Letters No. 23, May 25, 2005) Not being a chemist nor a doctor, I can't tell you great details about these hormones – I can't even pronounce them, but I can tell you that release of these chemicals causes a highly pleasurable physical sensation. Some of the slang terms for this "highly pleasurable physical sensation" are "rush", "buzz", or "high". This means that your memory is the path that can cause you to have to fight a two-front war against temptation; not only are you fighting against the mental picture but you are also fighting the chemicals in your body! Certainly, if pornography and/or masturbation is your hook, having mastery over your memory is key to combating

it but I hope you can see the need for control of the memory regardless of your particular hook. You can't eliminate the images you have in your memory but you can exercise control over what the new ones are and you can fight the bad ones from emerging into your mind.

Failure to do this will be like the proverbial camel's nose under the tent. In case you haven't heard this expression, let me explain. Imagine that these sinful memories are a camel outside of your tent – the tent of the consciousness of your mind. The camel can't just walk right into the tent through the door because it's too big; it just doesn't fit through the opening. Besides, you'd smack it right



on the nose to drive it out if it tried. You do this with temptations. You react with horror with the blatant ones because there's been no buildup to it. You just aren't ready for it so you instantly and easily reject it. You can't go from a laying down position to a full sprint instantly – it takes time. Instead of the door, the camel, or the temptation, has to find a sneak path that it will use to infiltrate or gradually enter into the

tent until it's too late to keep it out. It can't come through the door, but it can squeeze its nose under the door flap or under one of the sidewalls. This is what the camel does. It inserts just the tip, then the whole nose and then the whole head – and then it lifts its head up. Once it does that there's no stopping Mr. Camel! Up pop the stakes, poles, and tent up right up into the air. Now everything's a mess with the camel standing right where the tent used to be. Now, if you are on the inside when the camel starts his little infiltration act, maybe involved in some worthy activity, you might not be paying attention to what's going on outside. I suppose Mr. Camel's intense smell or grunting noises fade into the background if you're busy enough. Nor do you notice the two tan nostrils edging up under the flap – but this is where you need to stop him! Better whack him on the nose now to drive him out 'cause once the whole head's inside you're done for. Temptations from our memory (and many other temptations as well) work just like the camel. Expect that the assault will occur gradually starting with something that's just at the edge of the hook – just like the camel standing just on the outside edge of the tent. This is the most effective time to combat it. The same way the camel's nose gets bigger and stronger the more of it that you permit to come up under the tent flap, so too are those sinful memories. We'll have more to say about defeating temptations in Steps 3 and 8.

This leaves us with the last faculty of the soul - the will, which moves and governs the other two faculties. It's not the superior faculty of the soul, but it is the "bossy" one. With Original Sin, the will tends to "have things its own way" regardless of what the intellect is saying. One of the major tasks before us in the

battle against our hook is to re-establish proper governance of our souls by getting the will to conform itself to a properly formed intellect.

We should understand that the workings of the will are distinct from our feelings and should not be confused with emotions. For example charity, or love, is an act of the will, which is defined as desiring the good of the beloved. Contrast this with lust, which desires delightful feelings for oneself. This is a massive difference. Besides governing the intellect and the memory, the will should ideally also govern the body also. That means that the will should dictate to the body what is to be done or not done as opposed to the other way around. The body or the appetites were meant to be controlled and not to control – they make for very capricious masters because they constantly change and are never satisfied. We are going to be striving for this type of mastery of the will and shall use the term “strong will” or “willpower” to describe a will that does indeed have this mastery over the body. Even **the ultimate objective of the Catholic 12-Steps** has to do with the will and that is: **Intimately uniting our wills with the Divine Will** with just simply getting it to become master over the body when it comes to the hook as the short term objective.

Please permit me to go down a short rabbit trail for a moment but I have something to say about this when it comes to men, especially men who are husbands and fathers or who want to become husbands and fathers. This lack of willpower appears to be an epidemic among modern men. This probably comes as no surprise to the modern woman since most of the men she knows are really just big boys. Like Peter Pan, they never grow up – they just get bigger. They also want bigger toys. There’s even a bumper sticker to that effect. The problem is that we have no self-control or will power. Go ahead. Ask your wife if you don’t believe me or listen to women talking and sooner or later you’ll hear the comment, “That’s all they (men) think about, sex, sex, sex!” The only things that have gotten bigger with our bigger bodies are our bigger appetites. Our wills, on the other hand, have remained dwarf-size – dinky little things that are slaves to those bigger appetites and unable to control or contain them. We may be strong-willed and always insist on getting our way but we do not have strong wills. Please don’t confuse being strong-willed with having a strong will. When I am speaking of having a strong will I am speaking of the will having control or mastery over the appetites. This means strong self-control. It is the ability to forego one’s own pleasures or satisfaction for the sake of a higher good – God or one’s own family for example. It means doing so without getting angry, hurt, or upset but being resigned to doing whatever the good-of-the-moment is and still maintaining an inner peace. That’s what I mean with the term “strong will” or having “will power”. Strong-willed, on the other hand, is really a form of slavery of the will to our concupiscence or appetites that tend to the gratification of our senses. Here, the will tries to force on others whatever the urge-of-the-moment happens to be because it marches to the orders of the body. Since the appetites are never satisfied and constantly changing this can make for a very trying life for those who are either dependent upon or subordinate to, the person

who is “strong-willed”. This is doubly true for the wives and children of husbands who have this trait. I seriously pray that if “The Hook and I” has only one positive result, it is for a drastic reduction in the number of strong-willed men in this society. (Because it would mean a great increase in the number of saintly men).

“Why is this?” you might ask. This is so because the will of the modern man has never been properly exercised. We played sports when we were younger where we exercised our muscles so that our bodies became strong and powerful. We went to school where our intellects were exercised so that our intellects became strengthened with knowledge (at least in some areas since it probably wasn’t with the right knowledge). What we didn’t do however was to undergo activities that would exercise our wills. Oh, we certainly spent time crying, whining, and fighting to get our way but we never had to practice the thing that would keep our wills from growing wild and that was to practice self-denial. We never had to do without. Even if we were poor our parents catered to our appetites – even as small boys. In this urbanized materialistic world we live in we have had everything that our hearts could desire, and way too much more. In the richest civilization ever, we are drowning in a world of “stuff”. Very little is denied any of us – even the poor are fat and have cable TV. We were never told, “No!” by our parents as children and by the time we became teenagers we were too big to be stopped – we indulged ourselves with every appetite from eating everything in the cupboard to whatever other urges popped into our heads. Without going into a huge laundry list of all the factors that “assist” boys in not maturing into good Catholic men with strong wills, suffice it to say that I see virtually nothing in our society that actually does help them to mature. Name a topic about our mainstream culture and it can be shown that if it is not anti-Catholic by its nature, it can be shown to be anti-Catholic by its implementation. Scary concept, I admit, but it goes a long way to explain why so many of our men are slaves to their passions and why women, wives, and mothers have to pick up so much of the slack in running our selves, our families, our workplaces, our associations, our military, and even our governments.

OK. Let’s get off the rabbit trail and get back on topic. We need to mention free will here as well. It is our power to choose between two opposites. Of all the things that we are or have, it is the only thing that we really have control over. I can’t control my sex, my nationality, when I was born, my body type, or my temperament. But I can choose to cooperate with grace or I can choose not to. Simply stated, exercising my free will to choose the good will gain me Heaven, exercising my free will to choose the bad will “gain” me Hell. Regardless of all the factors that I don’t have control over; no matter how disadvantaged I was when I was born; no matter what others may do or not do; when it’s all said and done, it is how I - me, myself, and I, exercise my free will, that I will be judged and whether I get to Heaven or Hell. I can blame no one else. My sins are my own because they were committed by my use of my free will. Period.

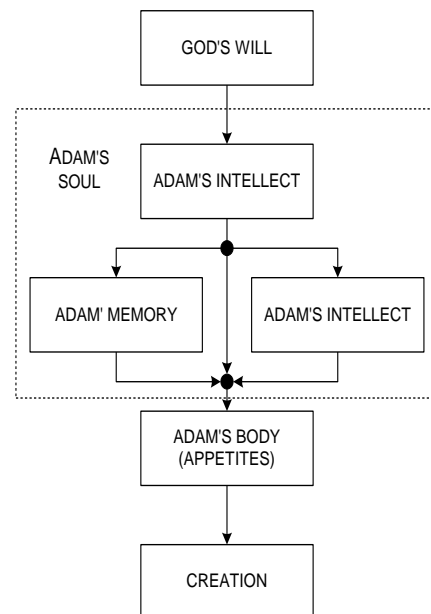
That completes our discussion of the soul but it doesn't answer the question of how we got here "in this valley of tears" to begin with, which is the subject of the next section. I hope you know that the life of man wasn't always so difficult. At one time, he didn't need to worry about being a slave to his passions and there was no struggle between his soul and his body. In fact, at one time, all the faculties of his soul, his body, and even creation itself, were in perfect harmony.

ORIGINAL HARMONY:

I'm sure you've heard of Original Sin. It's one of the first lessons in our catechism, of course. You know, it is when Adam sinned against God's commandment not to eat of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. His sin brought on a calamity for all of his children but not many of us have probably given much thought as to what he was like before he sinned. Well, as originally created there was a harmonious relationship between God, Man, and the world with everything being in perfect order. This relationship was a hierarchy of superiors over subordinates with everything in its own place and being obedient or subservient to those elements of the hierarchy placed above it.



First, we have God and His will. He was the Creator and He made the rules. He knew what He intended for Man and He created a structure with a place for everything and everything in its place. Each element in this structure was endowed with great gifts as long as there was no rebellion against Him. All creation was beneath Him and, at least for a brief period of time, obedient to His will. In the highest place of God's natural creatures was Adam. So directly under God's will was Adam's soul with his intellect at the top as you can see from this chart that I call: Original Harmony. He possessed a strong intellect that had complete control over his will, his memory, and his body. God gave Adam infused knowledge so that he knew a great many more things than you or I. He didn't need to be taught and he knew what the Will of God was by virtue of his great powers of reason and he also knew that God would punish him if he were disobedient. Now, because his body was subordinate to his intellect, Adam wasn't bothered by concupiscence. He ate only when he was



hungry and only enough to sustain himself. He didn't indulge in eating just for the sake of relishing the taste of the food. Nor did he indulge his reproductive powers. He would have done so only to procreate and he would have desired relations with Eve only if she were fertile. Assisting his intellect was Adam's will, which, of course, was free. This meant that although he was created with his will in union with the Divine Will, he always had the power (not the right) to make choices that weren't in agreement with God's will, in other words, to sin. The last element in this hierarchy, the world around him, was also obedient to him. He didn't need to worry about being eaten by a lion or stung by mosquitoes. His food was readily at hand and he didn't need to cook it first before he could consume it. He also didn't need to worry about being exposed to the elements or catching diseases. His life was, well, paradise – until he sinned.

And what was his first sin? Was he guilty only of just eating a piece of fruit or being tricked by his wife or a snake? No, my friend, what made Adam's sin so terrible is that he used his free will to make a choice that his intellect told him was against the Divine Will and carried a punishment with it – yet he did it anyway. Also, his memory recalled God's words to him – probably as he was taking that first bite, *“And he commanded him, saying: Of every tree of paradise thou shalt eat. But of the tree of knowledge of good and evil thou shalt not eat. For in what day soever thou shalt eat of it, thou shalt die the death.”* (Gen ii. 16-17) Now, when I sin, it is by my will only that I commit the sin. In Adam's case, however, he sinned not just by his will but also by his intellect. He knew he was disobeying God in doing so, he knew the consequences of doing it, and yet he freely chose to do it anyway. That's why when I sin, as long as I'm alive I can ask for forgiveness and repent of my sins, but with Adam, there was no going back into the Garden of Eden after that first bite.

Nothing has been the same ever since. Of course, from your catechism lessons, you know that Adam lost his sanctifying grace and was driven from the Garden of Eden. You also know that as a result of his Original Sin we are all born without sanctifying grace and have inherited his punishment. His punishments stem from his destruction of the harmony that God created and the advent of the disharmony that replaced it. Why? Whenever any element in the line of Original Harmony rebels against God, it and every element underneath it, is wounded by the sin. So if we refer back to the Original Harmony chart, we can see that because he sinned by his soul, it and everything beneath it was wounded. His will, his intellect, his memory, his body, and even all creation became wounded by his sin and rebelled against his will. All of the faculties of Adam's soul became weak. His intellect became clouded in acquiring new knowledge.. His will lost its union with God and the mastery he had had over all creation; he became forgetful except for the nagging memory of the tremendous gift he had lost. His body, as the instrument used in committing the sin, rose up in full-scale rebellion. Since he had used his sense of taste in satisfying his appetite for the forbidden fruit, both his senses and his appetites threw off the yoke of his will and only with great difficulty was he able to contain either one of them. Instead, they

tended to become his will's new masters by that concupiscence that demanded he gratify his senses just for the sake of gratification. Lastly, all of creation – to include Eve and his offspring, cooperated with his will only with great exertion, *"...cursed is the earth in thy work: with labour and toil shalt thou eat thereof all the days of thy life. Thorns and thistles shall it bring forth to thee, and thou shalt eat the herbs of the earth. In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread till thou return to the earth out of which thou wast taken: for dust thou art, and into dust thou shalt return."* (Gen iii.17-19)

All I can say is, "Thanks, Adam." What this all boils down to for those of us with hooks is contained in the following list, which is essentially a rehash of the first part of this chapter:

- Our will is weak and no longer united to God's Will; it gains mastery over our body and soul only with great difficulty.
- Our intellect is defective and easily fooled; it needs to be properly trained in order to aid the will.
- Our memory easily leads us to sin by recalling sinful images and thoughts; it needs to be controlled by what goes into it and what is allowed out.
- Our senses have become wild and rebellious, easily becoming masters over our will through concupiscence; thus we have "hooks".
- The world itself, with its own concupiscence will attempt to draw us into sin by appealing to our strong appetites and constantly striving against our weak will.

Friend, there you have it. Adam's sin has put us in the position of being "behind the power curve" as they say. We start our lives having lost God's friendship to begin with by having the stain of Original Sin on our souls, our wills are wimpy, and our appetites are insatiable. Everyone and everything about us makes almost overwhelming appeals to us to indulge our concupiscence. Naturally speaking, there is nothing about us that doesn't point to our being predestined for damnation. Of course, because we have the Faith we aren't going to go about this fight against our hooks "naturally speaking." Instead, we will wage this fight through grace, *"But to every one of us is given grace, according to the measure of the giving of Christ,"* (Eph iv.7) and this is all we need because it *"...is sufficient for thee."* (2 Cor xii. 9) See you in the next chapter where we will talk in more detail about the will.

STEP 0: AN ACT OF THE WILL TO SUCCEED:

Dear reader, you are about to embark on a journey that will help you save your soul. That journey, of course, is the Catholic 12-Steps, which, with God's grace, will be the means of your conversion back to God and away from your hook. As you've heard me say before, I don't promise you that it will be an easy road that you will travel but I do promise that it will be productive if you follow it all the way to the end. Before we actually begin it or any other journey, for that matter, we have to prepare for it and that is what we will discuss here, doing the preliminary step necessary to make your journey through the Catholic 12-Steps a successful one. That is, you're going to make an Act of the Will to Succeed. You saw it back in the Overview chapter but here it is again:

0. I will make an Act of the Will to Succeed; I am going to make a steel-clad resolution with God that I am going to defeat my hook; regardless of the difficulties, regardless of the changes I must make in my life, and regardless of how long it takes.

Now, before you go on any business trip or on vacation what do you do? Of course, you plan your itinerary, buy your tickets, pack your bags, and maybe even take the dog to the kennel. These and countless other tasks as well are necessary to complete before you even actually leave home. They lay the groundwork necessary to make for a smooth and worry-free trip. Skipping any of these preparations reduces, to one extent or another, your enjoyment, or could even prevent the trip altogether. Just think, if you don't fill up the car with gas or forget to buy your plane tickets, you may find that you don't get out of your own driveway or that the plane's completely booked when you get to the airport. In these cases, your lack of preparation has completely spoiled all progress on making the trip. So, let's make sure that we have your gas tank full and your plane tickets in-hand for your spiritual journey. We'll start this discussion with my explanation of why it's Step 0 and not Step 1.

SIDEBAR: WHY STEP 0?

If you're a computer programmer or digital circuit designer, you probably start counting with zero, which makes perfect sense if you think digitally, that is, in terms of ones and zeroes. For the rest of us however, the counting numbers begin with one. So why would I start the Catholic 12-Steps with Step 0? Good question, so I figured I better provide an explanation.

You see, in creating the Catholic 12-Steps I followed the 12-Steps that other 12-Step programs use as the basis. After having worked with the men's pornography addiction support group, La Misma Nada, it became obvious that there was something missing in starting directly with an act of humility, admitting that I have a problem that is beyond my ability to solve and that I need God's

help to do it. As we progressed through the different steps week-by-week I noticed a faltering or a weakening in the men's resolve to successfully carry things through to the end. I had included an Act of the Will to Succeed as a sub-point, if you will, as a part of Step 1. In my opinion this just doesn't put nearly enough emphasis on the critical requirement, and I mean requirement of stirring one's will to defeating the hook. It HAD to have its own step. What to do? If I made it the new Step 1, the numbering of every other step would now be out of sync with what everyone familiar with 12-Step programs has come to expect, besides, who ever heard of a 13-Step program? If I left it as part of Step 1, its importance would be lost in our focusing upon humility.

Therefore, in order to keep things numbered so people would recognize this as a "12-Step" program and also to give the Act of the Will its due, I made it a preparatory step, hence, Step 0. It stands on its own because it is only through exercise of a faculty of the soul – the will, that we can force required changes upon ourselves and yet it is still closely connected to Step 1 since it is only through humility that we receive the graces necessary to strengthen our wills enough that we can even make the attempt, let alone persevere, in overcoming our hooks. It makes sense, don't you think?

This "humility" usually comes in the form of being "humiliated" by crosses that tend to crush us. Just a few examples would be serious health issues, being arrested, losing your house or job, serious marital problems, having your hook "discovered" by others, or any of an almost endless list of personal tragedies that can befall us. We frequently speak of these times as "hitting rock bottom" or "running aground". I will use the term "running aground" in keeping with my naval motif. It is only at these times that our pride is reduced or distracted enough that we receive and accept God's saving grace. Why is this?

We'll answer this question through scripture and a children's story, Treasure Island. We'll continue the chapter with some practical steps using another fictional character you are probably familiar with, Scarlett O'Hara, in order for you to take maximum advantage of your own "running aground" experience in preparing to make your own determined Act of the Will to Succeed. All of this will give you a running start as you begin your own journey through the Catholic 12-Steps with sufficient momentum to successfully cut the line to your hook. Bon voyage, mon ami!

RUNNING AGROUND:

For this discussion, dear reader, I will assume that you are reading this because you have, indeed, run aground like some ship that has struck a sandbar. Everything's running along just fine and, "Wham!" something happened and your life has just come to a grinding halt! This "something", whether it's an event,



some occurrence, or some situation is causing you a great deal of distress. It might be any of a countless number of things, but whatever it is, you feel as low as you've ever felt before; it's as if life has just sucker punched you and you feel doubled over in pain. Been there, so I know how you feel.

I'm sure you're aware that when a soul, your soul, is deeply enslaved to a sinful hook that it is in the state of mortal sin more often than not. This is a simple statement of truth from your catechism so there's no problem here, of course and you know that in this condition you are no longer a temple of the Holy Ghost and that God is not dwelling within you. Well, another name for God is Holy Wisdom since obviously nothing is wiser than He. *"For wisdom will not enter into a malicious soul, nor dwell in a body subject to sins. For the Holy Spirit of discipline will flee from the deceitful, and will withdraw himself from thoughts that are without understanding, and he shall not abide, when iniquity cometh in."* (Wis i. 4, 5) Now, if you saw yourself in the words, "malicious soul" – great! You're on the right track so keep on reading. If you didn't, however, I suspect that you really aren't "aground". You might as well put this book away until our loving Father gives you a harder cross and then try reading this again. Don't worry; I'll still be here for you.

Assuming you're still with me, friend, I am also positive that you know that in this state of mortal sin we are less and less attuned to what God is speaking to us. In fact, the longer and the deeper we are enslaved to the hook the less we listen to the pangs of conscience and to His words, so much so that we arrive at a point where "all that religion stuff" becomes disturbing to hear, sounding more like fingernails on a blackboard than soothing words of comfort. Oh, we may still go through all the motions of what's expected of us due to our duty of state but this is all surface faith just as a flat rock thrown at a pond skips across the surface without penetrating into the depths of the water. Once we are at this point, God permits us to become spiritually blind and deaf: *"And he said. Go, and thou shalt say to this people: Hearing, hear, and understand not: and see the vision and know it not. Blind the heart of the people, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart and be converted, and I heal them."* (Is vi. 9,10)

What scary words! Once we've hit this point, God no longer speaks words of comfort to us. Actually, according to St. Ignatius, at these times it is Satan who speaks comfort to us: "It's not really a mortal sin", "It's natural to do this", "I was born this way", "It's not my fault, it's (fill in the blank)'s fault", or rationalizations that lull you into quieting your conscience. But of course, the conscience, being the voice of God within us, doesn't give up without a fight and pricks us whenever it gets a chance. This pricking, along with other painful things really come from the Good God. Since we are deaf and blind to His consolations, He reaches out to us with desolations instead. I've already mentioned several examples but let's talk about some of the general characteristics in order to help you to see the crosses that you are experiencing as something quite valuable to your soul.

Expect that these crosses will be worldly in nature. Since we are spiritual cripples it isn't of much value to communicate to us by spiritual means. Instead, since in this state we are worldlings, that is, we are of the world, so that is the only way that God can reach us. Even if we put on a spiritual front for others, God reads the heart and in this state He knows that we are worldlings. Therefore, He communicates His displeasure with us in the only medium we can comprehend, and that is through our senses. Regardless of the form, these crosses will also come in ever increasing severity. First we get the gentle nudge to see if this will work. If it doesn't, God will increase the severity for the next cross. The alcoholic doesn't get cirrhosis of the liver after the first drink. Most people are patient enough to give you another chance until you've proven yourself incapable or unwilling to stop hurting them. Certainly there are exceptions. God has chosen how many times He will permit each of us to sin and no more. Don't expect that just because someone else was permitted to "get away with it" for 60 years is no guarantee that you will, too. The severity of the crosses will continue until we repent and convert our lives back to God (where the crosses will continue but be of a different type) or we die unrepentant and we go to hell (a drunk dying in a car wreck). If you are enslaved to your hook and God is NOT sending you any crosses, beware! God has given up on you knowing that you will never change. As long as the crosses continue there is hope! Remember that they come from a loving God Who ardently desires your return to Him: *"What man among you that hath a hundred sheep, and if he shall lose one of them, doth he not leave the ninety-nine in the desert, and go after that which is lost until he find it?"* (Luke xv. 4) Lastly, expect that all these crosses, or humiliations, will be humbling in at least some way. No one wants to have a criminal record. No one wants to get caught masturbating. No one wants to be foreclosed on. No one wants to get fired. No one wants a crippling disease. Let's put these characteristics in table form for your later reference:

Characteristics of Crosses for the Hook

- Though painful, they come from a loving God
- Their purpose is to cause our repentance
- They are worldly in nature
- They will increase in severity
- They will be humbling to increase our humility to a point that we will accept grace

Each of these crosses will act, to one degree or another, to chip away at the huge block of pride that our souls possess. Because we are worldlings we possess vices in greater amounts and virtues in lesser amounts. The natural virtues we possess depend on our temperament and the supernatural ones in greatly diminished degrees. We don't lose our faith completely by being consistently in mortal sin but it is weakened and we are in danger of losing it, but just being in mortal sin does not wipe out our faith. Presuming that you are a Catholic reading this book, I would assume that is not the case for you. Therefore, our degree of humility, which is the virtue that is opposite the vice of

pride, is minimal while our pride is immense. Since they balance each other out, you don't get both large humility and large pride. Since the chances of being both equally humble and proud are virtually nil you get one or the other to predominate but not both. Pride obviously dominates in the case of the worldlings we're speaking about. Remember that: "*God resisteth the proud and giveth grace to the humble.*" (*Jas iv, 6*) This means that for us to obtain God's grace it first requires an increase in our humility and a decrease in or a distraction to our pride before God will give us the necessary graces. This has to happen on at least a temporary basis, a window of opportunity, if you will. There has to be at least an instant, however fleeting, when the power of our humility exceeds the power of our pride. This is when God will help us. This "window of opportunity" also happens to coincide with those desolations when we've run aground. I like to think of our pride being "distracted" as opposed to diminished since it is typically over a long period of time that our pride (or any other characteristic we possess) is really and truly changed for either the good or the bad. That's why it is so important to make the Act of the Will during or shortly after we've run aground. Delaying it only lets the pride recover from being distracted so we "cross our fingers", so to speak when we do finally make that Act of the Will and put mental reservations or conditions that serve to provide the will with an escape when the combat gets tough.

To help you visualize the situation, let's say that your soul is a small sailboat. Your will is the captain of the boat. The wind is your hook blowing at you, sometimes strong, sometimes weak. Now a sailboat goes faster when it's traveling at right angles to the wind so you can travel to the right or to the left at 90° to the direction. This is called "reaching". So you can reach in either direction equally well, same with your hook. You can reach to the right, traveling further into sanctity due to your successful struggle against the temptations of your hook, or you can reach further to the left, into sin under the force of your hook. Your choice; you're the pilot. As an addict still enslaved to the hook, you're definitely reaching deeper into mortal sin. So, how does God stop your progress into the wrong direction? Well, if the wind is very strong, it not only billows the sails until they are "poofy" but it also causes a tipping over action of the mast towards the water's surface. If the pilot's smart, he hikes out over the windward side of the boat so his body weight counteracts the force of the wind, but if he's caught by a surprise gust of wind or he's distracted or he really doesn't have mastery over the boat, the mast will tip over and touch the water. Ker-splash! The boat's capsized. All forward motion is stopped. You go neither right nor left – just sitting still in the water making no progress at all. Of course you can step out onto the centerboard and right the boat and set sail in a new direction but for the time being you are motionless – and helpless. If the mast has tipped over too far, you might even have it stuck in the mud at the bottom of the lake, which puts you in a real jam. Another way that God can stop you from reaching into sin is to have you run into a sandbar, that is, to run aground, literally. Since you are the only crewman aboard, it's pretty hard to steer the tiller, work the sails, and read a chart too, all at the same time. Especially if you

haven't sailed into these waters before, it should be pretty easy to sail into underwater obstacles like sandbars and obstructions, which is a similar result to capsizing. In this case, however, depending on the force of the wind and how the bar is composed, you might be stuck for a good long while. You certainly can't go further in the direction of sin if you want to break free. The only solution is to go in reverse, at least until you are free. In other words, move toward the opposite direction from sin, that is, toward sanctity in order to start moving again. Whichever way God chooses to halt your reaching into sin, the end result is the same. He halts you for a time, maybe a moment, maybe forever, from moving further in the direction of sin. However He chooses to stop you, it is both unpleasant and forces you to stop, hopefully to reassess where you're going. That makes sense, right?

Well, friend, I hope it's clear now why we have these desolations, let's move on to explore the relationship between humility, pride, and the faculties of the soul during them. To do that, I'm going to use a popular children's story that I figure that most of us have read or seen the movie at some point: Treasure Island.

TREASURE ISLAND:

Robert Louis Stevenson wrote this story about a young cabin boy, Jim Hawkins, and his adventures to a desert island to find buried treasure, back in the 19th Century. He was born in Scotland and was a prolific writer, much of which dealt with Catholic subjects or had Catholic characters, even though he himself was not Catholic. We'll let God judge where his final resting place is but the influence of the Faith is evident in his writings. In fact, Treasure Island describes our situation very well; it might even have been written as an allegory for our topic although I highly doubt that that was Stevenson's intent. Let me give you a rundown on the story for those who are unfamiliar it.

The main character is a boy of unspecified age, who lives along the English coast, working to run the family tavern since his mother attends her dying husband. An old sailor moves in who just so happens to be a pirate on the lam from the rest of his pirate shipmates. They hunt him down and terrorize Jim and his mother but not before the pair take possession of a treasure map from the dead body of the old sailor. They flee to two respected townsmen, Dr. Livesey and Squire Trelawney, who interpret the map's meaning. Determining to recover the treasure, the doctor and squire make plans to hire a ship and crew to sail to the island with Jim as the cabin boy. Unknowingly hiring the very pirates who attacked the Hawkins' tavern, they prepare to set sail from Bristol, England aboard the Hispaniola. The ship's captain, Captain Smollett, confronts the pair, as he is uncomfortable with the crew, the arrangement of the powder and muskets aboard ship, as well as the fact that it is no public secret that this is to be a treasure hunt cruise with him being the only one that the secret has been kept from. Placing a number of demands for changes upon our heroes, they agree to do things the Captain's way and they set sail.

The ship's cook, one-legged Long John Silver, takes Jim Hawkins as his assistant and befriends him. He is the leader of the pirate band and insists that they maintain a low profile until reaching Treasure Island when they will mutiny by taking over the ship and the treasure map. Once the treasure is secured they will leave the legitimate owners of the Hispaniola marooned on the island and sail away to spend their ill-gotten gains no doubt on rum and carousing in some safe pirate haven. All these plans are unknown to our heroes until one night when Jim climbs inside a barrel to fetch an apple; he overhears Long John discussing plans for the mutiny with the crew. Jim reveals the plans to the captain, doctor, and squire who now are able to make counter-plans of their own to protect themselves. They place great faith in Jim because he is still friendly with Silver and the crew: "Jim here", said the doctor, "can help us more than any one. The men are not shy with him, and Jim is a noticing lad." "Hawkins, I put prodigious faith in you," added the squire. "I began to feel pretty desperate at this, for I felt altogether helpless; and yet, by an odd train of circumstances, it was indeed through me that safety came." (TI, Chapter XII, page 80)

Treasure Island is sighted and the ship is hauled to a harbor where she is anchored. Most of the crew goes ashore along with Jim while the doctor takes the jolly boat to search for an old stockade on shore. He returns to the boat with a plan to abandon the Hispaniola and to transport most of their necessities to the old stockade for protection. In his words, "I told my plan to the captain, and between us we settled on the details of its accomplishment." (TI, Chapter XVI, page 106) Most of the transfer of goods ashore is completed before the pirates discover this. The mutiny is now in full swing. While Jim flees from the pirates on his own, the pirates assault the old stockade and are repulsed. Captain Smollett shows his mettle when asked to take down the Union Jack flag that he has raised over the stockade: "Strike my colors!" cried the captain. "No, sir, not I"; and, as soon as he had said the words, I think we all agreed with him. For it was not only a piece of stout, seamanly good feeling; it was good policy besides, and showed our enemies that we despised their cannonade." (TI, Chapter XVIII, page 118) While fleeing, Jim runs into Ben Gunn, a sailor marooned on the island by Silver years ago. Gunn shows him a small handmade boat and leads Jim to the Stockade where he rejoins the rest of the heroes.

In the morning, Long John Silver comes in to the stockade under a flag of truce and parleys with Captain Smollett who refuses to negotiate with Silver. Upon Silver's departure, the captain shows his command of the situation (and his anger) when most everybody, except one man named Gray, has stopped keeping watch and left his post to listen to Silver's embassy with the captain: "Quarters!" he roared. And then, as we all slunk back to our places, "Gray," he said, "I'll put your name in the log; you've stood by your duty like a seaman. Mr. Trelawney, I'm surprised at you, sir. Doctor, I thought you had worn the king's coat! If that was how you served at Fontenoy, sir, you'd have been better in your berth." (TI, Chapter XXI, page 132) He then proceeds to give orders to all hands where their posts are to be. All obey; a short time later a second, more severe,

assault on the stockade begins. It, too, is repulsed but only after the captain is wounded.

A lull in the action begins. After the captain, the doctor, and the squire converse, they decide to send Doctor Livesey with the treasure map out to find Ben Gunn. Once again, Jim decides to take matters into his own hands and sneaks out of the fort. His plan is to take Gunn's boat, sail out to the Hispaniola, and cut her anchor cable so she runs aground. After much adventure trying to master the boat, Jim cuts the cable and climbs aboard ship. Taking advantage of the drunkenness of the pirates still aboard, Jim strikes the Jolly Roger and takes command of the Hispaniola. It seems that since the mutiny began, all of the pirates have been too busy drinking every drop of liquor to pay much attention to our protagonists and have commenced to killing off one another in drunken fighting. While the Hispaniola drifts into the beach, Jim is pursued by the last remaining pirate on the ship and is forced to shoot him after being wounded. Being the lone survivor aboard ship, he successfully beaches the Hispaniola. He returns to the stockade only to find that it is now occupied by the remnants of Long John Silver's band and he is captured.

With the grounding of the Hispaniola, Long John sees the end of his hopes of getting the treasure and getting out alive so he begins to work out a deal with Jim to save his neck: "You mean all's lost?" I asked. "Aye, by gum, I do!" he answered. "Ship gone, neck gone – that's the size of it. Once I looked into that bay, Jim Hawkins, and seen no schooner – well, I'm tough, but I gave out. As for that lot and their council, mark me, they're outright fools and cowards. I'll save your life – if so be as I can – from them. But, see here, Jim – tit for tat – you save Long John from swinging." (Ch XXVIII, page 189) Silver does likewise with the doctor who has come to treat the sick and wounded pirates. As Jim has been less than open with his comings and goings, the doctor is understandably cool to Jim but only until he learns what Jim has done to the ship. It is then that the real value of Jim's work becomes clear to him: "Rapidly I described to him my adventures, and he heard me in silence. "There is a kind of fate in this," he observed, when I had done. "Every step, it's you that saves our lives; and do you suppose by any chance that we are going to let you lose yours? That would be a poor return, my boy. You found out the plot; you found Ben Gunn – the best deed that ever you did..." (TI, Chapter XXX, 203)

At this point, Silver begins to play "both sides against the middle" to save his own hide and leads the pirates to the treasure site using the map given him by the doctor. Finding the treasure already gone, the mutineers turn on Silver but are ambushed by Ben Gunn, the doctor, and a loyal seaman. The rest flee into the jungle. The heroes all return to Ben Gunn's cave where the treasure and the rest of the party wait. Silver is pardoned for his crimes because of his assistance. The Hispaniola is re-floated, the treasure removed to her, supplies are left for the pirates still alive on the island, and our heroes sail back to a port in South

America. Here, Long John Silver, stealing a bag of coins and a boat, deserts the ship never to be heard from again. The Hispaniola returns to England. The End.

I think that's enough details to make my point. I would certainly recommend you read the story for yourself, either for the first time or once again; it is a quick read so it won't take you long.

"Nice story," you might say. "But what's your point?"

Well, we can look at the schooner, Hispaniola, as our soul (there's that ship being a soul idea again!) on a voyage seeking for treasure – hopefully the eternal treasure of heaven, but seeking treasure regardless. She is officered by the faculties of will, intellect, and memory, which are loyal to her proper pursuit of that heavenly treasure. These are Captain Smollett, Doctor Livesey, and Squire Trelawney, respectively. These three men are the rightful masters over the ship and crew. Only they have the necessary skills to plot a course to Treasure Island and they possess the map with which to locate the buried treasure once they arrive. Her crew, on the other hand, is our earthly body, infected by a pirate crew craving only earthly treasures. Incapable of sailing the ship on their own, they must lie in wait, seemingly obedient to orders, only to rise up in mutiny to overwhelm the officers at the proper time and place. Although superior in numbers, they are easily distracted by rum and weakened by fever and constant infighting. Once their secret is known, they are no match for the well-prepared and resolute officers.

The leader of the pirates, of course, is Long John Silver. He is your pride, and just like your pride, he disguises his true identity until the time is right for the mutiny to erupt. By outward appearances a cripple, he is still quite powerful and is the leader of your pirate crew of appetites. When the other pirates rise in rebellion against him by serving him "the black spot", he is able to cow them into submission by asking, "What fool's cut a Bible?" (Ch XXIX page 192). He is not fazed by any of the men, officers or crew, yet he succumbs to the small cabin boy, Jim Hawkins, with whom he plea-bargains with to save himself when he sees that the game is up. Still, when the pirates of the body have been defeated and our spiritual Hispaniola sails away from Treasure Island back to its heavenly England, our Long John pride escapes, subdued but unvanquished.

Captain Smollett is the will. He governs the ship. From the very start while the Hispaniola is still in port, he places demands on the other officers or he simply isn't going. Although the doctor and squire are the owners, the captain is the master of the ship. Initially ignorant of the mutiny he faces and wounded in the struggle against the pirates, he makes use of the advice and skill of both the doctor and squire. Still, he maintains his leadership over the rest of the loyal crew by forcing them to do their duty.

The doctor is the intellect, as I've said. As one of the owners of the Hispaniola, he is the superior to Captain Smollett but he bows to Smollett's judgment. Using his reason, he sees the mistake he makes in misjudging Jim's actions and instantly changes his opinion. Knowing that the squire is a better shot, he advises the captain to give him his musket and he understands that Ben Gunn's removing the treasure renders the map worthless, he gives it up to Silver. Also, he uses his medical skill to treat even the pirates, diagnosing their ills and injuries based on what he sees and hears in the same way our intellect draw conclusions based on inputs from our senses.

The squire is the memory. The most striking thing about him is that he can't remember to keep his mouth shut when he goes to Bristol to buy and outfit the ship. Instead, he blabs to everyone his intent to go on a treasure cruise. This, of course, alerts the pirates to his purpose so that they all sign on as the crew. Similarly, it is through the memories of our experiences with our hook that keep our own pirates onboard ship, so to speak.

Lastly, let's speak of Jim Hawkins. He is the virtue of humility. Small, weak, and young he is able to go back and forth between the officers and pirates. Allied to the officers but tending to work on his own, he is effective only when everyone else is distracted. Hidden in the apple barrel, he overhears the plans for the mutiny. He hides in a foresheet in one of the boats heading to shore when they first arrive at Treasure Island. He slips away into the jungle where he meets Ben Gunn. While in the stockade, he again slips away when the officers are treating the captain's wounds. On board the Hispaniola after he cuts the anchor cable, Jim is able to strike the Jolly Roger and elude Israel Hand due to his drunkenness and injuries. All of these examples show that whenever the much more powerful men are alert Jim is a weak little boy. On the other hand, when the officers are preoccupied he is able to act decisively to help defeat the pirates. In addition, without Jim accompanying them they are only able to hold their own against the pirates but nothing that they do is decisive in defeating the pirates. Similarly, the soul has natural abilities to be sure, but without humility, those abilities are not given the grace to act decisively in the supernatural realm. Without the presence of humility, at least at key moments in time, the will is incapable of the decisive action necessary to defeat the hook. These key moments are when the soul has run aground, just like the Hispaniola. Even then, the pride lives on within us, subdued but still capable of escaping.

Quite a story, eh? I pray, my good friend, that this explanation makes it clear in your mind why the episodes where we run aground are so valuable and even required if we ever want to defeat our hook. Let's now move to the last part of our discussion that is on our actually making that Firm Act of the Will to Succeed that we need to even begin the voyage of the Catholic 12-Steps.

AS GOD IS MY WITNESS:

At this point, I want to make sure that you are indeed ready to make an Act of the Will that will give you the strength to persevere through each and every one of the steps. I'm assuming that you are in the midst of or just past, an episode in your life that you really and truly count as "running aground". Whatever it was, it has left you feeling literally run aground with no way forward or backward. Stuck! Trapped! Call it what you will. If you feel right now, at this very moment, that you stand at a crossroads in your life and at this crossroads you HAVE to make a decision that probably – no definitely, your whole life, your whole world, your whole soul depend upon. You can either continue on in the direction that you've been going, knowing that it means your damnation, or you can take a new path that, although it is rocky and narrow, it at least promises you hope. If this is your story, my friend, keep reading. On the other hand, if you aren't in this position, please let me kindly suggest that reading the rest of "The Hook and I" will be an interesting intellectual exercise for you but don't count on it helping you sever the line to your hook.

Giving you the benefit of the doubt, I'm assuming that you are in the "run aground" group so let's continue on. Now, I don't have a formal one-size-fits-all Act of the Will prayer, all composed up nice and pretty. I don't think such a composition would have any value for anybody else but for the author of it. For this, you must speak strictly from your heart – in fact, from the absolute bottom-most part of your heart. So, what should you say? Let me give you an example. This one is from Gone with the Wind, a novel written by Margaret Mitchell and made into a movie. You're probably more likely to have seen the movie than read the book. It's the story of Scarlett O'Hara, a strong-minded woman of the Southern aristocracy at the time of the Civil War. There's the scene where she's just returned to Tara having evaded the Yankee army after the fall of Atlanta. The mule dies just as she arrives at the gate, her mother has also just died, her dad's lost his mind, the Yankees stole or burned just about everything except the big house, they have only one cow that no one knows how to milk, all the field hands have gone, the rest of the family is sick, and there's nothing left to eat. She's returned home to find everything in a shambles.



Miserable, sore, starving, and exhausted, Scarlett goes out to the garden to get something – anything to eat. Finding only a measly carrot, she breaks down to the ground and cries. Slowly she rises to her feet and with the setting sun in the background, she shakes that carrot in her fist into the air and says, "...As God is

my witness, I'll never be hungry again!" This is what I'm talking about when I say make an Act of the Will to Succeed.

Now I'm not championing her exact phraseology nor do I consider her as a good character by any means. She's really pretty evil when you get right down to it. What's important here is: 1) that she's just run aground: everyone's starving, sick, crazy, or dead; and there's no food; 2) She speaks straight from her heart, presumably to Our Lord (she is a Catholic) with simple, clear, and decisive words to express the depth of her conviction that she is going to make things change; 3) She musters every bit of strength of will that she possesses to succeed and she draws on that strength of will from that point on to carry out her resolution. You do the same. Make your Act of the Will to Succeed in the exact same way.

Now, where should you make your Act? What kind of location is best? Well, I agree with Scarlett; my own Act of the Will was done standing in my garden, too. Unlike her, however, I had nobody else around. I was home alone having just arrived from work. The location is not important. Make it wherever God gives you the strength of will to make it. It could be in Church (always a nice place to converse with God), your backyard, in your car, your bedroom, or some other place. The location is relatively unimportant; for that matter, neither are the words. What IS important is the strength of conviction with which you say them. From that strength of conviction that your will now holds is going to come the driving force necessary to succeed. This strength comes from within you because for a time, your pride was distracted enough for His grace to touch your will to want to succeed, come what may. Now, as they say, "I never promised you a rose garden," instead, I promise you just the thorns – at least for a time. Expect that the voyage you now begin will have its share of storms and shoals and that you will be tempted to turn back. Know this, however. God desires your return. God gave you the grace to want to return. God gave you the grace to decide to return. Do you honestly believe that He will withhold anything you need to return? Let's not be stupid. We both know the answer. Now, it's on to the actual beginning of the Catholic 12-Steps: Step 1.

STEP 1: AN ACT OF HUMILITY:

Once we've steeled our wills to succeed, it's time for us to begin the long struggle that will result in cutting the line to our hook, once and for all. Let us again state Step 1 so that we can focus on all of the different aspects that make this step the most important of the Catholic 12-Steps:

- 1. I will admit that I - me, myself, and I, - have a problem that controls me. I am helpless against it and that I am its slave.**

This step is similar to the Sacrament of Baptism because both are the initial steps and also, because they are both the most important. In Baptism we obtain the commodity necessary for our salvation – sanctifying grace, and here, we actually begin the fight against our hook. Step 0 gives us the motivation to succeed but Step 1 gives us the essential tool that we do not possess. It is the supernatural virtue of humility. Now, since we are slaves of our hooks, we are almost without a doubt habitually in mortal sin, in which state our souls do not contain sanctifying grace; in fact, they are completely devoid of it. Besides making us enemies of God, we also don't have, or no longer have, habits of virtue. Instead, we have habits of vice and the worst one is the first of the Capital Sins – Pride. This is self-love, and reprobates (that is, the damned, which we should classify ourselves as until the hook is mastered) have an over-abundant supply of this self-love. If it is true that *“God resisteth the proud but giveth grace to the humble” (James iv.6)*, then how do we ever obtain this humility and overcome the hook? In short, we ask for it and God will give it to us. But for the complete answer to that question, let's take a look at virtues in general, discuss pride and humility, and then give you another tool that will help you to grow in the humility that the Good God will find irresistible and He will then lavish His graces upon your soul.

WHAT'S A VIRTUE?

The term “virtue” comes from the Latin word for “man” – *vir*. Maybe that's funny to the American mind but the Romans saw manly traits as virtuous traits whereas we think of virtues as kind of a “goody two shoes” thing. In other words, the Romans saw the virtuous man as extremely masculine and not a sissy at all. We will look on it in the same way. Since “The life of man upon earth is a warfare” (Job ix.5) the virtuous man is a brave warrior in the spiritual battle of life. For you to succeed against your hook, you MUST instill virtue within you and become that “virtuous man”, that “brave warrior in the spiritual battle” as well. This will take time and it will take work. This is one of the reasons those crafty Romans saw virtue as masculine; they thought that farming and soldiering were the only two vocations worthy for a man. A man, a real man, is meant for strenuous activity, for hard labor, for challenge. This process of growing virtue will match the hardest physical exercise you've ever done, brother, but the rewards are greater than any physical reward you've ever earned but I know that you are up to the

fight. You want to succeed in severing that fishing line so I know you are up to the challenge.

The next thing to consider about virtues is that possessing a virtue does not mean a once-in-a-while thing but something that is practiced each and every day – something that is automatic behavior. In other words, it is a habit! We possess a virtue by making it a habit to think and act in a particular manner with respect to that virtue. As I said before, this will take time but you will see results.

Let me explain by way of something I observed when I was in college. The University of Akron campus was your typical collection of brick buildings interspersed with grass and trees. There was one large boulder, however, that the landscapers had left in place. It was called, “The Rock”. Every few days, one of the fraternities, sororities, or campus organizations would steal out in the middle of the night and paint The Rock. They would use whatever particular colors and symbols typified their group and their handiwork would survive until the next group came out and repainted it. One day, however, the Civil Engineers came out and, instead of painting it, they poured concrete over it and made it a solid gigantic cube. Of course, this would never do so the groundskeepers jackhammered the concrete off, taking all the paint with it. I was amazed! This huge boulder was a much smaller sized rock. Having layer upon layer of paint added over time had substantially increased the overall size of The Rock. Each layer had built upon the previous layers of paint, so that as time went by, The Rock swelled in size. Practicing virtue is the same way. In our case, doing an act of humility each day will add one more layer of “paint” to The Rock of our souls to the point that we will actually begin to possess the virtue of humility. Unless we permit Satan the groundskeeper to jackhammer the paint off of our Rock, it will always continue to grow. Now, previously I talked about the sin of pride and the virtue of humility. These two are opposites of each other so let’s compare them.

PRIDE VS HUMILITY:

Friend, in order to understand these two we first need to know what they are. Pride is self-love whereas humility is to see ourselves as God sees us. The pride-thing was probably pretty obvious and straightforward but I bet I caught you off guard with what humility is. Let’s refer back to my good friend, St. Augustine. In his classic work, The City of God, he describes two cities. The first is the City of Man, which is hell or things (like souls who are slaves to their hooks) that are opposed to God. He defines it as “love of self to the point of contempt of God”. The second is the City of God, a term he uses to describe Heaven or “heavenly” things, like holy souls. His definition for this is, “Love of God to the point of contempt of self”. These two definitions are polar opposites and they are the “limits” of both pride and humility. A man may go between these two cities during his lifetime and even be part of both at the same time. However, when you get to either place you will have love for only either self or God and contempt for the

other. If your hook is habitually causing you to be pulled out of the waters of grace, it is absolutely imperative that you understand and accept the fact that you are in the City of Man and that you are filled with self-love or pride if you want to have even a snowball's chance of success in defeating your hook so I want to discuss pride in a bit more detail.

I mentioned earlier that pride is the greatest of the Capital Sins. Remember Lucifer? God created him the mightiest of all His angels but when he was asked to serve Our Lord in heaven his response was, "*Non serviam*" or "I will not serve." He thought so highly of himself that he refused to serve God even though he knew that he would be banished to hell for all eternity. His love for himself transcended any possibility of his being a servant of anyone – even God. Therefore, it was the root of the sin of Lucifer and since it was the first sin, **pride is the source of all sins – to include our own sins:** "*Never suffer pride to reign in thy mind, or in thy words: for from it all perdition took its beginning.*" (Tob iv. 14) Every sin that you or I commit has an element of this self-love.

As any school child in catechism class knows, God created us to love Him. That's why we exist so God expects us to give our love to Him, not to someone or something else. Since this takes from God what is rightly His, **God is not pleased by our pride:** "*Every proud man is an abomination to the Lord: even though hand should be joined to hand, he is not innocent.*" (Prov xvi. 5) Check out the "hand should be joined to hand" part. This describes praying as in joining your hands in prayer. What this is saying is that even though we pray to God, our pride makes us disgusting in His sight. I know I'm going to get some readers who will object to this, "God loves everyone!" You're right but imagine that you are a little child who's been playing outside and covered in mud. You want a drink of juice so you come running into the house with arms outstretched calling, "Daddy, Daddy, please give me a drink!" When he sees this mud ball running towards him about to get him all coated in filth, what's his reaction going to be? To get you that drink? I think not. We both know his first reaction is to stick out a finger that catches you on the forehead to stop your approach and he's going to say, "Get out of this house and go wash off all that mud with the garden hose! What would your Mother say if she saw you getting her kitchen all muddy? Go on. Go!" Am I right? God's reaction is the same – His abhorrence or disgust at our pride is a serious impediment to God giving us what we ask for. This is important! The more proud we are, the less God is pleased with us.

Even worse than God not being pleased with us, we are His enemies because of our pride. Imagine that you have an important favor to ask of someone who is your enemy or a friend who you have alienated through some fault of yours. Is he likely to grant your favor? If you have the gall to even ask the favor, an answer of just a simple "NO!" means you've probably gotten off easily. Therefore, as His enemies: **God withholds aid to the proud:** "*Wherefore he saith: God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.*" (James iv: 6) This certainly puts us on the horns of a dilemma. We know we need grace but

even if we ask for it, God is inclined to withhold at least some measure of the very thing that we demand. This scripture passage, however, contains the essence of what we need. You'll see it quoted again and again in this book because it's so critical. Store it in your memory, my dear friend, and we'll come back to it after I've finished my explanation.

The next aspect of pride is discussed in the very opening of St. John's Gospel refers to Christ as the *"That was the true light, which enlighteneth every man that cometh into the world."* (John i. 9) As I'm sure you are aware, being in mortal sin drives God out of our souls. Well, if He is the Light, then our souls must certainly be in the dark since He is no longer there. Maybe you have better night vision than I do but in the dark, I am blind. Therefore: **Pride makes us blind:** *"And if our gospel be also hid, it is hid to them that are lost, In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of unbelievers, that the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should not shine unto them."* (2 Cor iv. 3-4) The obvious conclusion is that pride will lead us astray in our spiritual blindness. We will not ask for help when we need it and when we do ask, it will be either for the wrong thing or we will ask for it badly.

Now if this weren't bad enough: **Our pride runs throughout every aspect of our lives.** Hints of this are signs of impatience or irritability with the "lesser mortals" about us, the "I know" response to their statements (as if we were stupid, or something), the self-justifications we use when we're accused or found at fault, our being prone to anger when we don't get our way (especially because of those "lesser mortals"), the "It's all about me" philosophy that's so rampant in our society, in short, we are El Supremo – the Supreme One. We are all "legends in our own minds". This pride is so pervasive and so hidden from our own eyes that even our good actions bear a measure of this self-love with them.

Finally, as if all this weren't bad enough by itself: **We cannot eliminate this pride by ourselves.** We mentioned blindness before and even when we have mastered our hooks to the point of starting to be habitually in the state of grace we are still not able to see the pride within. It will take the Good God to burn it away. In His love for a soul that is beginning to make spiritual progress, He will send the Dark Night of the Soul to purge that love of self away. Please don't be frightened off by what I say here. Driving out the last vestiges of our pride takes God's help and he does it by the Cross. Since "Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery", be happy when God begins to send you crosses instead of candy, it is then that you most closely resemble Our Lord and only then do you really begin to approach Him as a friend and lover.

Those are some of the traits of pride. Now, let's do a comparison on how we see ourselves and contrast it to how God sees us. Then we'll change our discussion to humility. Below you'll see pictures of some famous personages. Without casting aspersions on how they view themselves but only to illustrate the various ways we each admire our own self-excellence, we have: The Witty Man, the

Intelligent Man, the Cool “Man”, the Rich Man, the Holy Man, and the Athletic Man. Even a Casper Milquetoast can find some aspect of his personality in which he takes pride. We all do this. How do you see yourself?

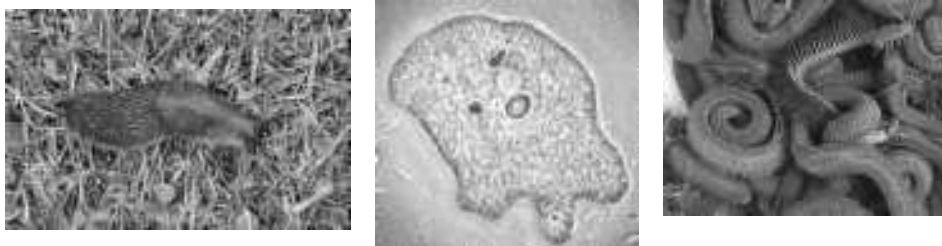
...How we see ourselves!



Pretty impressive, huh? Would that we were all witty, smart, cool, rich, holy, and athletic! It's interesting that even though each and every one of us receives gifts that make us more or less better than others, we forget that they are, after all, gifts. We didn't earn them or deserve them. With pride, we look through a microscope to make our little selves look larger than what we are.

Now, let's take a look at how God sees us. Actually, the following pictures are infinitely greater than how God sees us but I hope they give you at least a better appreciation of...

...How God sees us:



These things are hideous, to say the least! I find these little squiggly, creepy crawler, yucky slugs, leeches, and worms to be absolutely repugnant. I hope you do, too. My favorites are the blood sucking leeches and the garden slugs. I used to go swimming in a creek near my house as a boy and every so often, one of us would “land” a leech on an ankle or leg. You wouldn't know it until a buddy would catch sight of the blood dripping down your leg. Ugh! They make my skin crawl! As another short rabbit trail, slugs leave a slime trail behind them everywhere they go. Several summers ago I was sitting on my back porch watching the sunset. We have a concrete patio stone walkway around the Mary Garden that had the sun at just the right angle that I could see the dried slime trails that the slugs had traced across the concrete stones. They reminded me of how we are; we are dripping with sins and leave a trail of them wherever we go. OK, enough rabbit (slug) trails, let's move on. For our purposes, we will look on the virtue of

humility as seeing ourselves as God sees us. So now we will use a telescope to make our big selves look smaller.

The first point I want to cover on humility is that: **We are dependent upon God for everything:** *“Not that we are sufficient to think any thing of ourselves, as of ourselves: but our sufficiency is from God.”* (2 Cor viii. 6) Even our very lives are dependent upon God keeping us in existence. All of our attributes, our wealth, our talents, these all come from the God. Did you choose your parents or their economic status? Did you choose when you were born or what your race, sex, or nationality was? Of course not, you had absolutely no say in the matter. Everything about our existence is wholly dependent upon the largesse of the Almighty. We can lay claim to one thing only and that is our sinfulness. We should never give to ourselves the credit for anything good that we do or that happens to us. When we begin to realize this important fact then we will begin to have humility.

Humility has been called the virtue of the saints and with good reason. Every vice is countered by a virtue and the counter for pride is humility. Certainly, if pride is the source of all sins, then humility must be the source of all sanctity – and no one gets into heaven that is not a saint. This stands to reason since Lucifer’s pride was the “key” to getting him into hell so the opposite of pride must be the “key” to getting into heaven. Therefore: **Humility is necessary for salvation:** *“Amen, I say to you, unless you be converted, and become as little children, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, he is the greater in the kingdom of heaven.”* (Matt xviii. 3-4) Listen to Our Lord’s words carefully and any time Jesus uses the term “Amen” He means that this is a life-or-death point He’s making. This is scary stuff. The strongest, most athletic, richest man must grow enough in humility that he becomes one of the “little children” in the spiritual realm or he is damned!

Having covered why humility is important, let’s bring up the last two points and these are the most important. When I was in the Army as a private, if the drill sergeant was about to mention something in class that would be on the test, he would take his boot and tap the desk twice with it so that everyone, to include the dullest private, would know to perk up his ears and pay attention. So, tap, tap. These two points explain how we will take our prideful souls that God is displeased with and isn’t inclined to help and transform them to where God is not only pleased with us but finds it impossible not to help us. The first of these is: **Prayers of the humble are acceptable (& irresistible):** *“The prayer of him that humbleth himself, shall pierce the clouds: and till it come nigh he will not be comforted: and he will not depart till the most High behold.”* (Ecclus. xxxv. 21) This passage from Ecclesiasticus has two sub points that I want to draw your attention to. The first is the idea of “humbling oneself” and the second is the part about “he will not depart till the most High behold”. We need to humble ourselves, and once we do, our prayers will penetrate all the way to heaven and will not cease “tormenting” God, if you will, until He “beholds” or responds to

them. “That’s great”, you say, “but I still don’t know how to humble myself.” Fair enough. I’ll answer that through the last point on humility.

Now, remember that pride is displeasing to God, dear friend. Using our line of reasoning about opposites, if pride is displeasing to God, then certainly: **Humility is pleasing to God:** *“A sacrifice to God is an afflicted spirit: a contrite and humbled heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.” (Ps i: 19)* I want to dissect this scripture passage because it really pulls everything together for us.

Certainly “not despising” something is to be pleased with it and this passage from Psalms is the essence of how we are going to get God to listen to our pleas for His assistance. So, if you are suffering from the sin of your hook, I hope that this fact afflicts you. Not being mean or anything but if your slavery to your hook bothers, upsets, irritates, angers, or whatever word you care to use to describe the torment that your addiction to your hook causes you, then you fall into the “afflicted spirit” category and that’s the very first step you need to take to start having humility. The next phrase speaks of “a contrite and humbled heart”. To be contrite or to have contrition is to have sorrow, to be sorry for something. Are you sorry that this hook has mastery over you, that you sin by it repeatedly, that you are helpless against it, and that you are powerless to stop? I should pray to God that the answer is a resounding, “Yes!” Now please let me ask the next question, my fellow addict, “Doesn’t this fact that you are afflicted by something that you can’t control, can’t stop doing, and can’t overcome make you feel just a little bit small or powerless?” Don’t answer the question yet. Let these facts trickle down into your heart, penetrate your mind, and strip away all the layers of self-deception, lies, and excuses that you’ve been telling yourself over the years about your hook. Get on your knees or take a walk, cry or yell, bury your face in your hands or clench your fist, do whatever suits you but stop and think. Now answer the question.

If you’ve gone this far I know what the answer to the question was. You’ve just been given the grace of a contrite and humbled heart. Now I want you to read the words for Step 1 again and say them like you mean them:

I admit that I - me, myself, and I, - have a problem that controls me. I am helpless against it and that I am its slave.

I also have the first paragraph of a prayer that I want you to say now. Find yourself a quiet place away from noise and everyone else. Assuming you don’t have any impediments to kneeling, get on your knees, cross yourself, and fold your hands. Read it slowly, pausing at each comma, period, and at the asterisks. Say it out loud if you can, but say it like you mean it:

The Nothingness Itself Prayer, 1st Paragraph

O God, I, who am nothingness itself, come before Thee, confessing that I am powerless against my sinful habit, my

addiction, my hook that Satan has used * to pull me from the waters of Thy grace * and to make me his slave. I am enchained and prostrate at his feet * without so much as the strength to break these bonds * let alone to rise and return to Thee. I admit before Thee and all the Heavenly Court * that I am in this wretched state through my own fault * and that even with the best of my own efforts * I am powerless in this struggle. I am beaten, I am defeated, and I am damned. In my anguish I cry out to Thee, “Help, Lord, I perish”.

Until you’ve read Step 2 where the second paragraph is given, say this prayer every day. Make it a set time so that it becomes habit so that you start to gain that habit, or virtue, of humility; I prefer you’d say it the first thing in the morning but whatever time works for you is fine. Just make sure your posture is one of humility and that your surroundings aren’t distracting. Memorize it; say it like you really mean it.

STRATEGY SIDEBAR ON LEVELS OF HUMILITY:

Every so often, I like to stop and discuss what our strategy is so that you won’t lose sight of the big picture. In this case, we’ve covered pride and humility, how we are steeped in pride, how we are helpless without humility, and how we can start becoming humble. You’ve also been given the first part of a prayer to say every day that will help get and keep your mind focused on the need to humbly admit that you are a slave to your hook. I want to close this chapter by discussing the three levels of humility and what our goals are –both short term and long term.

According to St. Ignatius of Loyola (the founder of the Jesuits), there are three levels in the virtue of humility. They all relate to our level of love for God. The first is to love God more than our mortal sins, or in our case, to love God more than our hook. This is the most important one because we can’t save our souls without it. It is also what we are aiming at for the short term. To restate it, we are immediately aiming for a love of God that is greater than our love of our hook. The second level of humility is to love God more than our venial sins. This is our secondary goal. Yes, you can get to heaven immersed in habitual venial sins but this is NOT the level of sanctity of a saint. Remember that we are aiming for holiness through the hook, not just slipping through the pearly gates just before they are slammed in our faces! *“Heaven suffers violence and the violent bear it away.” (Matt x. 15)* The third and last level of humility is to love God to the point of wanting to imitate His sufferings. This is our long-term goal, fellow pilgrim - to be “violent”. Anything less is to deny God some of the glory due Him for helping us to overcome our hooks and is a sure sign of our base ingratitude to Our Beloved Lord.

Remember to keep saying the first part of the Nothingness Itself prayer and I'll see you over in Step 2.

Step 2: AN ACT OF HOPE:

OK, my friend. Let me congratulate you on making what should be the first of a long series of Acts of Humility, which you did with Step 1. It is a good beginning but you must realize that, symbolically, you are face down in the mud. If you feel even a shred of confidence in your own ability to lift yourself up, you need to repeat the first paragraph of the Nothingness Itself prayer until you actually begin to believe the words that you are saying. However, let's assume that the sentiments of the prayer are exactly how you are feeling towards yourself at this point. Now, it is time to offer you some hope, not in yourself, but in God and the grace that He will give you to succeed against your hook. Therefore, it is time for Step 2, which is:

2. I will admit that only with God's grace can I succeed.

A very long time ago lived a man named Pelagius. He thought that he didn't need God's grace in order to be holy. He thought that he just had to have a strong-enough will and he would be capable of doing good. The Church didn't agree with him; his belief was labeled the heresy of Pelagianism and condemned in the Council of Mileum II in 416. He never could have been more wrong and so am I if I do not believe that I need God's help. This is true for the simple reason that as soon as I think that I am strong enough to do anything virtuous, the vice of my pride creeps in without my even knowing it and takes over, ruining whatever good I'm trying to accomplish. I can't avoid it because the effects of Original Sin are so strong in me, in fact, in all of us, friend. Our Lord warned us about this, *"Without me you can do nothing."* (Jn xv.5) so it's a forlorn hope to even make the attempt on my own. Actually, such attempts serve to strengthen the pride which is the very opposite of what God wants because, *"God resisteth the proud..."* (1 Peter v.5 and Jas iv.6), meaning that God will actually oppose my efforts since I will be moving away from him by growing in vice and not virtue! You'll see me quote this scripture passage frequently throughout the book since it's so important to fully understand the concept of NEVER relying upon oneself in the war against the hook. In order to do anything of merit I have to rely solely on God's grace for the strength to do it but by the same token I should have confidence that the Good God will be generous with that grace. This is what we will discuss here in this chapter on Step 2: placing our reliance solely on grace to succeed and having the hope that God will grant us the graces we need, when we need them, in the measure we need them in order to defeat our hooks. At the end of the chapter I will give you the second paragraph of the Nothingness Itself Prayer, which expresses our dependence on grace and the hope that that grace will be forthcoming. Both paragraphs of the Nothingness Itself Prayer should be said daily.

When you are finished with Step 2, you don't want to be like St Paul who asked for his "sting of the flesh" to be removed and was rebuked with the words, "*My grace is sufficient for thee.*" (2 Cor xii.9) You want to place absolute confidence in those words knowing that He will be forthcoming with that grace and that it will be "sufficient for thee".

HOPE:

Let's start our discussion by first explaining what "Hope" is. In order to define it, I want to use the Act of Hope that you should have learned when you were making your Confirmation. You remember it, don't you? I hope so.

"O my God, relying on Thine infinite goodness and promises, I hope to obtain pardon of my sins, the help of Thy grace, and life everlasting through the merits of Jesus Christ, my Lord and Redeemer."

Actually, this prayer is just one long sentence. Let's break it down to help us understand this important theological virtue. The opening term, "O my God" is a direct address to Our Lord as the One to Whom we are speaking. The next word "relying" expresses a measure of confidence or dependence upon God. These two sentiments, confidence and dependence, are the two key thoughts that we want to take with us from Step 2. Now we all know that God is infinitely good – otherwise He wouldn't be God. In His infinite goodness He has made certain guarantees to Man – to us. This reliance or confidence is expressed in three of those promises: His forgiving of our sins, giving us the necessary graces, and in achieving our salvation. I want us to focus on the "necessary graces" part so I underlined the phrase, "help of Thy grace" in the prayer text. Next, this confidence is possible because of the meritorious life that Jesus lived here on earth but principally through His Passion and Death. In a manner of speaking, Jesus "worked" for the Father (it was a labor of love, right?) Who "paid" Him in the "coin" of grace. The amount of grace Christ received was infinite and He freely gives from His "account". What we are hoping for is to receive generously of this grace in order to overcome our hooks. Lastly, the prayer finishes with our declaration that He is Lord or King over our souls as well as the One by Whom we are saved. Neat little prayer, huh? It defines the virtue of Hope very well for our purposes in easy-to-remember language. To define Hope as well as to re-state Step 2, I've underlined the important parts: "**O my God, relying on Thine infinite goodness and promises...I hope to obtain the help of Thy grace.**" This Hope is a confidence that the Good God will give us the spiritual help we need. It is not the presumptuous Faith-Confidence of the protestant mentality, but the Hope-Confidence in things unseen but promised to us by One Who will not, can not, let us down.

The Hope part was pretty easy to explain. Grace, on the other hand, needs a bit more development since it will be the primary tool in the combat against our hook and we certainly need to understand a tool in order to make best use of it, right?

GRACE:

To help our understanding on grace and other things that we'll be discussing, I find it useful to pull out the Baltimore catechism and review some of the more important features or aspects of the topic at hand. So let's start with a definition. **Grace is a supernatural gift of God through the merits of Christ.** That was sort of covered in the Act of Hope above but we also have St. Paul's words to strengthen that definition, "*For the law was given by Moses; grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.*" (Rom vi. 23) To me, the definition is still pretty vague since a gift can be given in just about any form, but that's precisely the point. God will give His "gifts" in varied and unseen ways that are impossible for us to catalog which is a good thing since it doesn't limit Him to a fixed response to the infinity of ways in which we need His help.

Continuing our mini catechism lesson, there are two **kinds of grace, Sanctifying and Actual.** Both kinds are necessary in the war against the hook. They are obtained principally through prayer and the sacraments but also through our good actions.

Sanctifying Grace is sort of the yardstick or gauge by which we can measure our success against the hook. **It is the Divine Life in our souls.** In other words, it's a bit of God in us. It goes without saying that we can't supernaturally defeat the hook unless we have the supernatural presence of God within us and it stands to reason that the more of this "Divine Life" we have within us, the stronger our ability to resist the hook and to shorten the length of its line. Using our nautical analogy, ships in the Age of Sail were rated by the number of decks and guns that they carried. It was a measure of how strong a ship was. A first rate ship was bigger and tougher than a fourth rate because it had more gun decks and more guns on those decks. In the same way, our level, or amount of, Sanctifying Grace is a measure of our holiness or how close we are to God by increasing or decreasing amounts of the Divine Life within us. **It has four chief effects** and these are that **it makes us holy and pleasing to God, we become adopted children of God and temples of the Holy Ghost,** and, most importantly, **it gives us a right to heaven.** In other words, the presence of Sanctifying Grace in our souls is the key to getting into heaven. As a small rabbit trail, you can use that last sentence the next time someone brings up being "saved".



Some of this probably needs clarified. If I say to the pantheist that I have Divine Life in my soul, he's going to say, "Certainly. Everything has Divine Life in it

because everything is God." Wrong. If I were God I would be all knowing. Since I don't know everything and half of what I did know I've since forgotten so I guess that can't be right. Instead, because we are born with the stain of Original Sin, we enter into this world as enemies of God, not His friends and certainly not His adopted sons so we have no right to Heaven. I guess the easiest way to explain all four points together is with an analogy. Imagine you are a small child, a homeless waif who has no parents, no home, no one to care for you. You are an orphan. In fact, you have no one to bathe you either so you're a filthy little snot-nose covered in mud so no one can recognize you. Your hair's all knotted up and you smell of filth. Not exactly ready for your picture to be taken. Got the picture, right? Of course you're pretty miserable because you're cold, hungry, and alone so you seek help. This kind old man approaches you and, all the while keeping you at arm's length, asks you if you'd like some help. You have free will and could very easily tell him to "pound salt" but you accept his kind offer. What's the first thing he tells you? "Go wash yourself", I would imagine. You go into the shower and wash all that dirt and odor away, comb your hair, and put on a nice new outfit that he has for you while he waits outside that bathroom. Once you're all spiffed up you come out. He takes one look at you and says, "That's much better. Hey, wait a second", he says with a puzzled look on his worn face. "You must be related to me. You're the spittin' image of Uncle Ned", and he grabs you in his arms and hugs you for the long lost relative that you are. Now this puts the shoe on the other foot. Instead of just wanting to offer you a meal and a bed for the night, he wants you to come home and live with him. No longer does he keep you at arms length but he puts you on his knee and starts to do the things that Grandpas do – reads you stories, gives you treats, buys you the little "do dads" that kids weasel out of their Grandpas, tucks you in at night. His affection for you grows day by day – he holds your hand and rubs your hair when he stands beside you. He starts to worry about your education and your future so he writes you into his will to make sure you're taken care of when he's gone. Hey, you're part of the family now!

That's about the best explanation I can give you. For easy reference, here are the four chief effects of Sanctifying Grace:

- Holy and pleasing to God
- Adopted children of God
- Temples of the Holy Ghost
- Right to heaven: Without it we cannot get to heaven

Actual grace is supernatural help from God, *"My help is from the Lord, who made heaven and earth."* (Ps cxx. 2) Notice again, that it isn't strictly defined as anything other than "supernatural help" so it can take many forms – even unexpected or bizarre forms like having your car break down at just the right moment to keep you from being exposed to some temptation or injury. Popular music and movies are filled with schmaltzy examples of actual graces but please

don't be jaded or fooled by this. God really does work at times in this way. Typically though, actual grace comes silently like a butterfly and is either shooed away or is allowed to land almost unseen and unheard because you cannot feel it – it just does what it needs to do. Although Sanctifying Grace is necessary for us to engage in the fight for our souls (certainly for our salvation), actual grace appears to me to be the more important in the “here and now” or tactical sense in the fight. If Sanctifying Grace is the “rating of our ship”, then Actual Grace is the ammunition, cannons, leadership, favorable wind, and other intangibles that spell the difference between victory and defeat once we engage the enemy. We'll call it just ammunition for short.

This “ammunition” has a number of benefits. First, **it enlightens our minds**, *“For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness; hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, in the face of Christ Jesus.” (2 Cor iv. 6)* Later on in the Catholic 12-Steps, we will begin to work to strengthen our intellects, which is one faculty of our souls. You have to know the good, in order to want to do the good. Actual grace will give us this “light”. Next, **it strengthens our wills**. This is another faculty of our



souls, our free wills. Much of the struggle that you will undergo, my fellow comrade-in-arms, will be to strengthen your will so that it gains mastery over your body. One of the biggest weaknesses in males, especially modern males, is that they have never grown their wills to have mastery over themselves. Their appetites are huge muscular athletes and their wills are wimpy little 97-pound weaklings. If you don't believe me, listen to the women you know complain about the men in their lives and their lack of self-control. It's very enlightening to eavesdrop! **It also enables us to do Good**, *“For it is God who worketh in you; both to will and to accomplish, according to his good will.” (Philipp ii. 13)* Remember Mr. Pelagius from the introduction to this chapter? He thought he was his own source of good actions. Don't repeat his mistake; we bring only one thing to the party – our free will. This is the one thing that we can truly say is our own and since it is ate-up with the effects of Original Sin, it usually slides into sin. Therefore, the only actions you can truly glory in are your sins but what a thing to boast in! The need for Actual Grace is so paramount that not only does it require grace to DO a good act; it takes grace to WANT to do a good act. Read again St. Paul's line to the Philippians above. God works both the will to do the Good as well as the doing of the Good. Continuing our discussion on the aspects of Actual Grace, **it permits us to avoid evil**, *“Watch ye, and pray that ye enter not into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.” (Matt xxvi. 41)* This is the opposite of doing Good. This is important when we try to avoid Near Occasions of Sin or temptations of our hook because temptations become stronger the longer we dwell on them. Better to flee them than to fight them! It will take lots and lots of Actual Grace to avoid the evil of our hook.

God, of course, knows our needs so He is perfectly aware of when the combat gets thickest so He provides us with the right ammunition exactly when we need it. **We receive grace when we need it**, *“And thou hast girded me with strength unto battle; and hast subdued under me them that rose up against me.” (Ps xvii. 40)* If we need to perform a good act, we get the grace to do that good act, not to avoid evil. When our wills need strengthening, He doesn't send us the grace to enlighten our minds! This should give us great confidence; we know with absolute certainty that the God Who loves us is fighting alongside us and His cannons never run out of ammo, so to speak. He is, however, the Great Economizer; He doesn't waste His grace. This is why we need to grow in sanctity. The higher our level of Sanctifying Grace, the greater the level of graces we can make use of. You can't put 74 guns on a rowboat, you know? We get only what we can and will use. Which brings up the next point I need to make about grace, **we can resist it**, *“You stiff necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do you also.” (Acts vii: 51)* Sad to say, He doesn't force grace upon us. We ALWAYS have free will. As this is a serious struggle between our wills and our bodies, there will be times that our bodies will win. That means that we will at times refuse grace. UGH! In effect we will be turning down the ammunition we need to continue the fight but, instead, we will be striking our colors and surrendering. Too bad, but be warned, friend. The defeats that you will suffer are a result of your refusing God's grace, not because you didn't receive it. Read that again; burn it into your memory because, if you fail against your hook, you cannot blame God! Look into the mirror for the one who's to blame!

This brings me to my final point about grace. **It is IMPOSSIBLE to vanquish the hook without grace.** Even St. Paul realized this, *“For I know that there dwelleth not in me, that is to say, in my flesh, that which is good. For to will, is present with me; but to accomplish that which is good, I find not. For the good which I will, I do not; but the evil which I will not, that I do. Now if I do that which I will not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. I find then a law, that when I have a will to do good, evil is present with me. For I am delighted with the law of God, according to the inward man: But I see another law in my members, fighting against the law of my mind, and captivating me in the law of sin, that is in my members. Unhappy man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death? The grace of God, by Jesus Christ, our Lord. Therefore I myself, with the mind serve the law of God; but with the flesh, the law of sin.” (Rom vii: 18-25)* Please let me point out that we tend to think of the saints as being above temptation and how wrong we are. St. Paul could very easily have been describing his own hook and look what God's grace did for him! Take comfort in this. You and I are neither the first ones nor the only ones to have suffered from a hook. If St. Paul can cut the line to his hook so can we!

WHAT DO I NEED TO DO NOW?

If you finish this chapter having forgotten most everything that I've said, I want you to remember two points. The first one is the last thing I said about grace and that is absolute impossibility of defeating your hook without grace. You must develop a total dependence on God's assistance through grace and complete hope that He will provide it to you when and how you need it. I am able to write this book to you after having defeated my own hook (pray for my perseverance, please) only through grace. You are able and willing to read these words of mine only through grace. If you truly desire to defeat your own hook, it will also be only through grace.

The second point that I want you to remember is that your hope is not in vain. Working on developing that complete dependence on God's grace, His merciful smile will be upon you. Have complete confidence in that mercy. He will give you the graces you need. I hoped for the graces to write this book; you hold it now in your hands. I hoped for the graces to defeat my own hook; the testimony of my words is the fruit of that hope. His abundant grace is there for you as well.

Now, to help you to burn these ideas into your soul, I am presenting you with the second and final paragraph of the Nothingness Itself Prayer. This paragraph is an Act of Hope that expresses our own hope that it is only by Jesus giving us the loving "rain of Thy grace" through Mary that we will be "victorious in this mortal combat within me." Add it to the first paragraph that you learned in Step 1 and say the complete prayer each and every day from now on. Memorize it! As with the first paragraph, I suggest you say it upon first waking or when you do your Morning Offering. You can also say it when your hook tempts you, although Hail Mary's aren't a bad idea in those circumstances, too.

The Nothingness Itself Prayer, 2nd Paragraph

But Thou, O Lord, art my hope. Most beloved Jesus, Thou alone canst send the rain of Thy grace * to melt my hook, my chains, and my shackles, freeing me from this terrible bondage. In my nothingness, I am totally dependent upon Thee and Thy good favor. O merciful Redeemer, I beseech Thee, despise not this contrite and humbled heart, but unleash the storm clouds of grace, through Thy Most Holy Mother, that I may be victorious in this mortal combat within me. O Mary, my Queen and my Mother, pray to Jesus for me!

THE NOTHINGNESS ITSELF PRAYER

(If said publicly, pause at * and at commas and periods)

O God, I, who am nothingness itself, come before Thee, confessing that I am powerless against my sinful habit, my addiction, my hook that Satan has used * to pull me from the waters of Thy grace * and to make me his slave. I am enchained and prostrate at his feet * without so much as the strength to break these bonds * let alone to rise and return to Thee. I admit before Thee and all the Heavenly Court * that I am in this wretched state through my own fault * and that even with the best of my own efforts * I am powerless in this struggle. I am beaten, I am defeated, and I am damned. In my anguish I cry out to Thee, "Help, Lord, I perish".

But Thou, O Lord, art my hope. Most beloved Jesus, Thou alone canst send the rain of Thy grace * to melt my hook, my chains, and my shackles, freeing me from this terrible bondage. In my nothingness, I am totally dependent upon Thee and Thy good favor. O merciful Redeemer, I beseech Thee, despise not this contrite and humbled heart, but unleash the storm clouds of grace, through Thy Most Holy Mother, that I may be victorious in this mortal combat within me. O Mary, my Queen and my Mother, pray to Jesus for me! Amen.

Step 3: KNOW THYSELF:

Welcome back, fellow pilgrim. This chapter is on knowing yourself. First of all, to know what your sins are at this moment in your life in order to make a solid confession to the priest and also to take stock of yourself to answer the question, “Who am I?” Let’s restate the 3rd Step:

- 3. I will know myself; both to determine what sins I’ve committed and also so that I know what are my “hooks”. I will examine my conscience and my life so that I really begin to know my sins and myself.**

As I just stated, there are two objectives to this step. The first objective is to simply examine our consciences in preparation for making a good Confession, possibly for the first time in many years so we might need some words of encouragement to have the nerve to actually take that step. We will present a thorough Examination of Conscience in the Appendix so that you don’t forget any mortal sins that might be lurking deep within the recesses of your conscience. The question we will be asking ourselves is, “How have I sinned?” The second objective is starting the process of gaining a real understanding of yourself so that you have an in-depth knowledge of your strengths and weaknesses. Here we will introduce the Classical Four Temperaments from the Middle Ages in order to help you see how Satan has used your own natural weaknesses against you and how you can use your innate strengths in the fight against our hook. Once you have identified your own temperament, you will begin working on a long-term, or strategic, objective that we will all work on for the rest of our lives, to constantly strive to have a more intimate knowledge of self. This will assist us in our journey to holiness to eliminate our sins, both mortal and venial, and then to eliminate our imperfections. We will do this by seeking the answers to three questions: Who am I? What are my strengths? And what are my weaknesses?

AN OBJECTION: WHY CAN’T I JUST EXAMINE MY CONSCIENCE AND BE DONE WITH IT?

I suppose there might be some readers who might wonder why this step isn’t just a checklist of sins for one’s examination of conscience and that’s it. That’s a fair question, as I’ve found most of the objections to the different points of the Catholic 12-Steps to be. In answering it, I think that it’s important to understand that we are in this for the long haul so we need to see the big picture as well as just the “tactical” problem of preparing ourselves to make a good confession. For that matter, I’m sure that a good number of readers haven’t made a good confession in a long time and that another sizeable number have never learned how to make that good confession. In any case, if we are to sever the line to our hooks, we need to take steps to make sure that that line is permanently severed. Now, please keep in mind that Satan is much smarter than any of us and that he will use every weapon at his disposal in order to keep us ensnared. That means that he’s studied who we are from every angle to discover our weaknesses. He knows us better than we do! We need to even the odds a bit and that requires us to use our intellects and memories to learn what he already knows about us. Besides the obvious benefits we’ve already described, this exercise will be helpful to start strengthening our souls. You see, the intellect and memory are two of the three faculties of the soul and, just in the same way that you strengthen your muscles by exercise, the same goes for our souls as well which also needs to be exercised to grow in strength.

DOING A GOOD EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE:

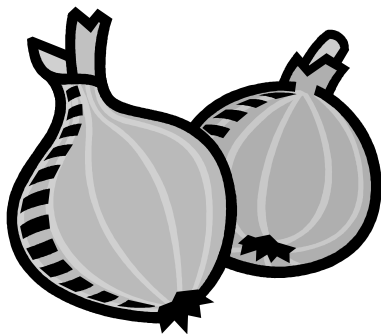
OK, let’s get ourselves ready to get back into the state of grace. To do that, we need to compile the list of our sins and that is what the examination of conscience is all about. It doesn’t need to be a

written list; a mental one will suffice, but you need to “list” them for the priest for confession. Here is where you make it up. In preparing for a good confession, we need to have a good and accurate picture of our sins. We need to confess all of the mortal sins that we remember so we want to try to be as complete as we can. Below I’ve given you a very thorough Examination of Conscience that is reprinted with the kind permission of Angelus Press. Even if you are an old hand at going to confession, I highly suggest that you go through this one, line by line. Be well prepared. Certainly, any sins associated with your hook should be easily recalled. You might also be very aware of certain sins that prick your conscience from time to time. It is also very possible that you might be living in ways contrary to the laws of the Church and not even aware of it (e.g. contraception). No time like the present to enlighten yourself! Don’t be afraid to conduct your examination over several periods; it may take several days for you to completely wade through this whole checklist. Be patient and DON’T BE IN A HURRY! God will most definitely reward your patience with a much better confession. Lastly, after you have gotten the “hang” of doing your examinations, I strongly suggest you do them at night right before you go to bed. In this way you can keep a “running total” for your succeeding confessions. After a while, you will find yourself focusing on several sins that you typically confess as being your dominant faults and this nightly examination will not take more than a few minutes to complete.

Now, to actually do your examination this is what I suggest. Find yourself a quiet place where you won’t be disturbed for a quarter hour of time that you can just think. A sunny fall day and a park bench in a quiet park or cemetery makes a great combination for learning about your "onion" of a soul. <G:\dcannane\My Documents\Blessed Margaret Articles\The Hook and I articles\COMPLETED SECTIONS\Consolidated Book\j0198504.gif> Put yourself in the presence of God. Ask God for the grace to see yourself as He sees you. Close your eyes or stare into space-whatever works. Soon, you will start to see a "parade" of your sins. Continue watching the "parade" until your head is full or your mind wanders. A word of warning: Satan will know exactly what you are doing. Expect some sweet sexy thing to walk into view if you are outside. If you are inside don’t think you are immune to distractions either! Watch out for things laying about the room, too! Fight the temptation! Change your position, close your eyes; don't give up! He who dares, wins. Pray for grace. God will NOT let you down. After you are finished. Tell God, "Thanks" for giving you the necessary graces to get this far and to do a good examination of conscience.

THE ONION:

Got your examination of conscience done and you’re still with me? Good! This next section will also require some mental exercise but it really doesn’t belong in the same time span as doing your examination. In order to fully understand who we are, our strengths, and our weaknesses, so that we can use that knowledge to our own advantage it’s necessary for us to talk about temperaments. I wish I could tell you that this step of learning who we are is done once and then it’s forgotten. Sorry! You will continue this step by coming back to it again and again throughout the rest of your life. Oh, certainly you will make large strides initially but as you gain mastery over your hook and grow in holiness, God will enlighten you one piece of the puzzle at a time so that you are able to see yourself as God sees you. Little imperfections and quirks that you are blind to now but irritate everybody else will become understood as you work to know yourself but, *“We see now through a glass in an obscure manner: but then face to face. Now I know in part: but then I shall know even as I am known.”* (1 Cor xiii.12) St. Paul is talking, of course, of the beatific vision but as you continue to labor for perfection, much of that self-knowledge will be given here on earth as you grow spiritually, enabling you to eliminate imperfections and to anticipate temptations in order to defeat them quickly by knowing what your weaknesses are.



Every one of us who has “cut the line” has learned much about himself and we continue to struggle every day to know more and more about ourselves as well as the state of our own souls. You will too. The process of knowing yourself is kind of like peeling apart an onion. Besides making your eyes water, it's made up of layer upon layer of onion skin starting with the brown paper-like skin on the surface. Peel apart one layer and there's another layer immediately behind it. This series of layers continues until you reach the very heart of the onion.

If you are reading this, than I think it safe to assume that you, like me, are addicted to some mortal sin. Obviously, this addiction is that brown outer layer of the onion. It's easy for us (and sometimes others) to see this side of ourselves. This is the first layer of the onion that you have to peel off in order to get all the way down to the tender center. The outside layers are easy because they consist of your conscious experiences so they are fairly easy to recall. To really dig into the heart of the onion, to gain a thorough knowledge of self, will take a great amount more effort on your part. To give you an assist, however, let's take a look at the classical four temperaments and as you read along, try to see which one(s) describe you. Understanding your temperament will simplify your process of “peeling apart your onion.”

THE FOUR TEMPERAMENTS:

In talking about the temperaments, I'm not going to pretend that I'm an expert – I'm far from it. There are several books that are available that you can read in order to obtain more information. I've drawn from two sources. The first is for the general theory of the subject and that source is: “The 4 Temperaments” by Rev. Conrad Hock. The second source is for the discussion of each of the characteristics of each temperament and is quoted from a series of handouts from a Legion of Mary Senatus conducted by Fr. Helmut Libietis of Kansas City, MO around 1999-2000.

Let's start with some basics. If you asked a number of people, even people who have studied the temperaments, to define “temperament”, you'd most likely find answers ranging, well, all over the map, from “It's your character”, “It's your personality”, “It's your IQ”, or similar types of answers. Actually, it isn't any of these things, which shows that the temperaments are pretty much misunderstood. Instead, one's temperament is a fundamental disposition of the soul and is shown by your reaction to an impression made upon your mind – whether that impression is made by your thinking about something or by some outside source making it. Stated another way, your temperament is your degree of excitability due to some impression or stimulus and this is measured by the speed of your reaction, which can be either a quick or a slow one, and from the time duration of your reaction – is it a short or a long lasting level of excitement? Using the rules of mathematics, if I have two variables with two states for each, I have a total of four different combinations. They can be “quick-short”, “quick-long”, “slow-short”, and “slow-long” and each of these combinations has been given a name taken from fluids of the human body as defined back by Aristotle but please don't ask me why. Let's just take it on faith and accept the titles as they are for whatever reason so that we can use them to our own benefit. For the sake of having a convenient reference list, I've listed the names with the combinations:

The Four Temperaments

- | | |
|--------------------------------|-------------|
| • Quick and Short Excitability | Sanguine |
| • Quick and Long Excitability | Choleric |
| • Slow and Short Excitability | Phlegmatic |
| • Slow and Long Excitability | Melancholic |

Now, unlike all those other definitions we received in answer to our hypothetical question of what are the temperaments, you are born with your temperament. It is God-given and is something inherited from your parents so you can't get rid of it nor can you exchange it for a different one. Also, because it is inherited, your temperament is most likely similar to one or more of your relations. "She carries a grudge, just like her Daddy." You can never eliminate it but you can control it. It is possible, and even likely, that your temperament is a combination of two of them. You might even have elements of a third, but for now, look for having a combination of one extravert and one introvert temperament. Possessing the knowledge of your temperament is the key to knowing what your good elements are so that you can perfect them and also what your bad dispositions are so that you can learn to control them. The result is that herein lays the blueprint for how you can achieve victory over your hook as well as for you to reach perfection (become a saint, in other words). This is the exercise that holds the key. Here is the roadmap. Applying yourself diligently here will pay big dividends that will accelerate your progress. Doing it indifferently will delay or even stop your progress, both in the war against your hook and in working for holiness. Suffice it to say that if you never get past the war, you never get to the peace of holiness.

It's nuts and bolts time, friend. Taking the "quiz" from page 8 of Father Hock's book, let's answer the question, "How do I identify my main temperament?" by posing three questions that I want you to answer. Assume you receive what Fr. Hock calls "a strong impulse", that is, you are rebuked or praised, offended by someone, or in imminent danger. Under any of these circumstances:

- Are you quickly and vehemently excited or only slowly and superficially?
- Do you feel inclined to act at once, quickly, in order to oppose the impression or do you feel more inclined to remain calm and to wait?
- Does this excitement last for a long time or only for a moment and if you think about it later on, are you similarly excited?

You're looking for answers that are Quick or Slow and Short- or Long-lived. If you need help in the Short-lived/Long-lived category, ask yourself whether or not you forgive or hold grudges when you are offended. Once you've given yourself a rating, go ahead and read on to the specific pros and cons descriptions:

The Sanguine - Extravert

If you are a sanguine, then you are most likely the life of the party. You are funny and relish the limelight. You are affectionate, enjoy social activities, and make friends easily. You are imaginative and creative, and are often the one who enthusiastically promotes new ideas on the job. People call you vivacious, generous, and light-hearted. You wear your emotions on your sleeve, but you are always quick to "forgive and forget." You probably struggle with follow-through, are chronically late, and tend to be forgetful. As quickly as you discover a new hobby or pursuit, you can also lose interest--when it ceases to be engaging or fun.

The Choleric - Extravert **Thank God this is only 3% of the population!**

If you are a choleric, you are a dynamic, self-motivated leader who can set your sights on a target and relentlessly pursue it until success is achieved. You are a strong-willed individual who makes decisions quickly and decisively, and who readily and easily grasps difficult concepts and strategies. Learning comes quickly to you, and you like to take action immediately. You think logically and pragmatically, and are sometimes accused of "rolling over" people once you have set a plan in

motion. You do not readily reveal deep emotions—except anger. Choleric are often accused of being stubborn, domineering, and dictatorial. You demand loyalty from your friends, and thrive when you are in control. Franklin Delano Roosevelt was a choleric president: "There is nothing I love as much as a good fight," he famously said.

The Phlegmatic - Introvert (Most common)

If you are a phlegmatic, you most likely possess a dry wit and a steady, amicable demeanor. You are dependable, polite, and even-tempered. You feel more comfortable in a small group of friends or even spending a quiet evening relaxing at home. You are never flashy, belligerent, or self-aggrandizing. You would rather take the blame (even unjustly) than stir up controversy or pick a fight. On the job, you seek neither power nor the limelight, but work steadily, patiently, and methodically. You can work alone or even with the most difficult of personalities. You will prefer job security, working within a structured organization, but can also be a leader of great character and service.

The Melancholic - Introvert

Time alone is vital for this reflective, introspective temperament. A perfectionist at home and on the job, the melancholic is likely the one with the perfectly organized closet and kitchen, the tidy desktop, and the painstaking attention to religious observances, sometimes to the point of scrupulosity. A melancholic longs for a deep soul mate, yet when he is around people, he often finds himself mistrustful and disappointed. Sensing this criticism, others will keep their distance—thus further entrenching the melancholic in his solitary life. In relationships, the melancholic tends to be slow to initiate, cautious, hypercritical, and pessimistic--yet, once committed, they are unwaveringly loyal and self-sacrificing.

Hopefully, you've been able to see yourself in reading these thumbnail sketches of the different temperaments. You might have seen yourself, at least a bit, in other descriptions besides your initial one. That's OK. Most people, I think, have an extravert and an introvert side. I'd be really surprised to find someone that is both sanguine and choleric or phlegmatic and melancholic. You might also have seen other people you know such as your spouse in the descriptions.

That's what I'm hoping you'd see. Besides knowing the pluses and minuses of your own temperament to benefit your own soul, knowing other's temperaments gives you a powerful tool in knowing how best to treat them. HINT. HINT. You do not, cannot, treat all temperaments the same and expect to get good results! Being direct with a choleric will get you an argument but can be effective in keeping the phlegmatic on-course.

I highly recommend that you spend some time reading either Fr. Hock's book or a similar one of your choice. It isn't the psychobabble of the New Age – it's been around since St. Thomas Aquinas was in books! It holds great potential for everyone fighting a hook so that we can begin to understand exactly what strengths we have so that we can use these tools to our advantage in our struggle and it also tells us what our weaknesses are and have been. Satan has already known this and once we possess that knowledge, too, we greatly reduce his ability to use these weaknesses against us. Knowledge is power, as they say and he's had this power for a long time – both from observing men in general since Adam's day and also in observing us in particular. Cancel out his power and beat him at his own game.

CONCLUSION:

You've gained two very powerful tools in this step and also made great progress in the war. You know how to, and have done, a very complete Examination of Conscience so that you should be prepared to face the priest, so to speak, in the confessional very soon. You also have identified your basic temperament so that you now have a more fundamental knowledge of yourself. This gives you leverage over your hook because now you know better what strengths you possess due to the temperament God gave you and you also possess better insight into what inherent weaknesses have aided Satan in landing you into sin because of your hook. Lastly, you might also now hold some additional knowledge about your loved ones that can aid you in dealing with them more effectively. Use this as a springboard, my friend, both to go to Confession very soon as well as to make better use of your own strengths in your struggle.

STEP 4: CONFESSION

Let's continue, friend. Step 4 is a continuation of Step 3's examination of conscience. It is also the second in the three steps in the process of returning to the State of Grace or strengthening our souls against the onslaughts of the enemy in this "conflict with the powers of darkness". Step 3 was probably pretty scary for you since it brought to the surface of your intellect a number of things you've done that you are ashamed of. Well, thinking about your sins is bad enough but now we actually have to tell them to the priest in the confessional so Step 4 won't appear to be any easier – at least not in the beginning. Here is a thought, however, that should help you to stir up that courage that I know you have. It is, to put it bluntly, that each one of your mortal sins is really worthy, all by itself, of condemning you to Hell. Sobering thought! I know that in recalling my own past, I shudder at the huge number of my mortal sins and the times I should have been damned to Hell if not for the patience and mercy of the Good God. So, whether the mortal sins you have committed (and I will assume that most of them, directly or indirectly, are because of your hook) number 1, 100, 1000, 10,000, or 100,000, each and every one of them can be erased by just one good confession. Don't lose heart but take courage – the Blessed Virgin Mary is beside you giving you the grace you need to keep going. Just be docile to it.

So let's get started by re-stating step 4:

- 4. I will sincerely confess my sins to a priest, being genuinely contrite.**

WHY DO I NEED CONFESSION ANYWAY?

I hear this all the time from my Protestant friends. This is understandable since they deny the need for sanctifying grace and therefore, the means necessary to obtain it. However, I hear Catholics uttering the same sentiments all too frequently. I used to visit a nursing home every week to pray the Rosary and I'd have the priest come by periodically to deliver the sacraments. I would always require them to go to Confession before receiving Communion for this very reason. The words of one elderly woman still stick in my head when I placed this demand before her. "Why do I need to go to Confession? I just tell my sins straight to God." Needless to say, her faith was little more than Protestantism with some Catholic sentimentality for flavoring. Fortunately for her eventually she did decide to have Father hear her confession. She has since passed on to her particular judgment (RIP).

You, on the other hand, are now serious about your Catholic Faith. Maybe you weren't in the past but I know you are now (or you wouldn't be reading this book!). I owe you a good explanation so that this woman's words won't echo doubts in the back of your own mind. First, we have Scripture, which tells us to "*Confess therefore your sins one to another...*" (James v. 16) so we have

evidence that the Apostles themselves had Confession. Of course, these words could be interpreted as “just find someone to ‘fess up to”. I know a Christian pregnancy center near my home that believes in just that idea. It could be to your priest, minister, or a confidant. It didn’t matter to whom, just so long as you did it. Certainly, this idea would include Sacramental Confession as being acceptable so it didn’t offend the many Catholics who worked there (you’d be surprised at the number of Catholics that work in Christian ministries!) but it wasn’t necessary. However, the Catholic priesthood has a power that ordinary men do not have, and that is the power to forgive sins. Again, referring to the Good Book: *“Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them; and whose sins you shall retain, they are retained” (John xx: 23)*. Our Lord spoke these words on Easter Sunday to the disciples *who “were gathered together for fear of the Jews” (Jn xx: 19)*. No one else is mentioned as being present, just the disciples who were the first priests and bishops. Therefore, the priest has the power of forgiveness of sins. Fine, the priest has the power to forgive sins. So what compels me to go to the priest and confess my sins? One of the Laws of the Church does, which states that we are obliged under pain of mortal sin to confess at least once a year.

In any case, while we’re asking questions, what makes for a good confession? The first requirement is that we have to humbly accuse ourselves with a conviction of guilt. In other words, we have to have contrition or sorrow for our sins. Second, we have to sincerely tell our sins in an honest and frank manner to the priest. Third, we have to tell the entire number of our mortal sins committed since our last good confession, which can, unfortunately, be a considerable amount if it’s been a good long while since we’ve gone. The last thing you need to do is to perform the penance given to you by the priest (but that’s Step 5 so we won’t cover that here). What happens if you knowingly “forget” to mention a mortal sin? You commit an act of sacrilege and that too, is a mortal sin so no point in adding to the stains on your soul – just confess them and be done with them. How about if you honestly and truly forget a mortal sin? No problem. You are still returned to the state of grace. Just remember to confess it the next time you go.

I want to cover the first of the requirements for a good confession in greater detail since it’s really the key to the whole process of getting your sins forgiven and that requirement again, is contrition.

CONTRITION:

Simply put, contrition is sincere sorrow for having offended God. Without this sincere sorrow, your sins “will be retained.” Remember in the Our Father the line, “Forgive us our trespasses?” Having our sins forgiven is so fundamental a spiritual need that Christ put it as one of the seven requests of “the most perfect of prayers.” Therefore, having a good understanding is something worthy of focusing on to make sure that you fulfill your end of the bargain in obtaining

forgiveness for our trespasses. Now, what we mean by sincere sorrow is two-fold. It means that we have a hatred, an absolute loathing, a repugnance, for the sins we've committed and also that we have a firm purpose of sinning no more – especially by means of our hook. Since we all know that God reads the heart and can tell if you really do have sincere sorrow, know that no forgiveness happens unless we do have true contrition. This doesn't mean you have to go weeping and wailing into the confessional. It means that your will has to be convinced that it hates the sins committed and sincerely desires to stop committing them in the future. If you recall that Act of the Will to Succeed that you made back in Step 0, this is just a continuation of that act. This new act of the will is going to have four characteristics if it is sincere contrition: **1) it will be interior** – it will come from your heart, **2) it will be supernatural** – with grace, it will come from your faith and not from natural reasons, **3) it will be supreme**, that is, hatred for sin above everything else – “Death rather than sin,” said St. Dominic Savio, and lastly, **4) it will be universal** – a sorrow for all of your mortal sins, not just the hook or all but for the hook; it will be for all mortal sins.

Besides being sincere, there are also two types of contrition: perfect and imperfect. Perfect contrition is sorrow because we love God and we've hurt our Beloved. The imperfect variety is sorrow because we're afraid that our Eternal Judge will punish us for our sins and we're afraid of that punishment. In other words, fear of going to Hell. If you remember how you were as a little kid, you probably obeyed Mommy more because you got spanked than because you loved her. That was OK with her; all she cared about was that you did as you were told. It was always nice that you obeyed because you loved her but she certainly settled for your saying you were sorry because you didn't want to get that whipping. It's the same thing with God. He really wants your obedience out of love but He knows that most of us are pretty much in love with ourselves instead of with Him – at least at the early stages of defeating our hook and our pursuit of holiness, so He's perfectly happy to have our imperfect contrition in order to forgive our sins. He knows the love thing will come later – either here or after Purgatory.

Now, before we get into the nuts and bolts of actually going to Confession, I want to make sure you know what to do for those times when you fall back into mortal sin. What do you do? Certainly, you should run straight into the confessional but we need to be practical. There will always be a time delay between when you commit a mortal sin and when you will be able to get in the box. What happens if you should die in the interim? Does that mean you go to Hell even though you have contrition for that mortal sin and have the fullest intention of going to Confession at the earliest, but delayed, opportunity? No, my friend, it doesn't. This is what you do. Make a Perfect Act of Contrition; remember that the “perfect” part means that you say it with contrition stemming from your love of God, not fear of God. Say it in the same way you made that Act of the Will to Succeed so it can be some type of short and sweet statement like, “As God is my witness...” like Scarlett O'Hara's words, but instead make that kind of statement

expressing your sincere purpose of going to Confession just as soon as possible. This will give you Confession by Desire, applicable only in case of untimely death so it's only an insurance policy, so to speak. You CANNOT go to Communion until you've actually gone to Confession, however. Remember, this is only useful in case of an untimely death.

OK, enough of contrition and insurance policies. You've done your examination of conscience from Step 3. You're contrite, at least in an imperfect way but contrite nevertheless. You're ready to confess your sins so screw up your courage and head to church.

CONFESSION: THE NUTS AND BOLTS

Go to a good traditional Catholic priest. Make sure that you've done Step 3 well. Take your list of sins if you wrote them down with you, verify the day and time of the confessions. Make sure you know how to get there if you've never been there before. Dress nicely. Get there early. Screw up your courage! Satan will try every trick he knows to get you to wimp out. Don't let him win. This is YOUR soul we are talking about. If you had cancer you wouldn't be afraid of going to the physician's office would you? The priest is God's spiritual physician. He has the medicine your soul needs but he doesn't make house calls. You have to go to his "office". Once in the church, find a convenient pew, and once again, put yourself in the presence of God. Don't be embarrassed to "talk" to the statues. Tell Him how sincerely sorry you are. Don't be afraid to cry. Ask for the grace to make a good confession, especially if you haven't been to Confession for a while.

Once you are fully prepared, get in the confessional line and wait your turn. Go into "the box", as it's frequently called, when it's your turn and confess your sins. Just as a refresher, it might go something like this:

You: "Bless me Father for I have sinned, it's been 2 years since my last confession. I did the penance but I committed adultery monthly over a period of 3 months, masturbated twice a week for 2 years..." {State your mortal sins first: the sin and the approximate number of times or over what period of time you did them. Next, stating one or more of your venial sins is fruitful, too. You MUST state your mortal sins; stating venial sins are optional but useful for your salvation.} If the priest asks you any questions answer them truthfully. Complete stating your current sins. End by saying, "I'm sorry for these and all the sins of my past life especially sins of murder (or some other sin you've committed but already confessed)". The priest will tell you to make an Act of Contrition - do so and he will give you a penance to do. He'll usually end with something like, "Now go in peace and pray for me". Exit the box. Return to your pew, say your penance if it's one that can be done like a decade of the Rosary and then do what I call a Colloquoy ("call a kwee"). Just talk to God, just like you would if He were standing right there. Tell him how deeply sorry you are. Do a colloquoy with the Blessed Virgin, too, as well as with any of your favorite saints. When

you are finished, bless yourself, and go on back to your business. Let me add before we move on one last thing. Just in case you've forgotten the Act of Contrition, here it is. You'll eventually want to memorize it but for starters, feel free to print out a copy of it:

Act of Contrition

O my God! I am heartily sorry for having offended Thee, and I detest all my sins because I dread the loss of heaven and the pains of hell; but most of all, because they offend Thee, my God, Who art all good and deserving of all my love, I firmly resolve, with the help of Thy grace, to confess my sins, to do penance and to amend my life. Amen.

THE GENERAL CONFESSION:

If you ever get the great privilege of going to an Ignatian Retreat (that is, one modeled after St. Ignatius' 30-day retreat) or possibly other types of retreat as well, you make a general confession. What is that, you might ask? It's a re-telling of all the sins of your life, even those that you've already confessed. If you've already done a general confession, you tell all of the sins since your last general confession (which, believe me, is a whole lot easier!). My first general confession, it took me 3 days to prepare for it and several pages of writing. I had, dare I say it, about 12,000 mortal sins on it. God forgive me! What a cleansing that was! Afterwards, everyone goes and burns his sins in a bucket or stove. The symbolism of this act is very powerful! It's tough but very rewarding. The success of your first retreat will probably hinge on how well you do your first general confession.

THE DRY DOCK AND THE HOSPITAL:

My dear friend, please don't get the idea that going to Confession one time will be the "magic" cure. It won't be. If my life in any way resembles the typical pattern for souls, you will need to go to Confession on a very regular basis – going every week regardless of whether or not you are in mortal sin while you are in the beginnings of your struggle against your hook is an excellent idea! In fact, I personally would recommend going every two weeks but at least once a month. Going just once means nothing to Satan as he figures he can reel you in again easily. It's only after you start to spend longer and more consistent periods of time inside the state of grace that Satan begins to notice that his grip on your line has been loosened. It's only then that he will work to keep you ensnared in your sinful addiction. Expect a counterattack. It will come - I absolutely guarantee it! This is why it is so important for you to make a regular schedule for going to Confession. That way, you will overcome any fear of the Confessional. If you have steeled your will, however, you won't give up the combat. You'll pick yourself up, dust yourself off, and get right back into the confessional.

It is possible that others – your spouse, friends, family, parents, will notice how often you’re now going to Confession. Possibly you’ll think that the priest will start to recognize your voice as: “Oh, that’s Mr. So-And-So. He’s much worse than I thought he was!” Don’t entertain these thoughts for even a minute! Fear of human respect is probably one of Satan’s most effective weapons to keep us away from the confessional. We’d much rather face the possibility of death than the risk of embarrassment. Men bravely go into combat knowing that they will most likely die; parents (especially mothers) dash into burning buildings to save the lives of their children without a second’s hesitation; but put them up to ridicule? The bravest of the brave wilt like morning glories before the possibility of being made red-faced by their fellows. Don’t be afraid! *Esto vir!* Honestly, your family and friends will be edified by your conversion; chances are they already know about your hook anyway but are trying to help you save face by not mentioning it. Also, don’t worry about what the priest may recognize or know. He has the obligation to maintain secrecy of what he learns in the Confessional. He commits a mortal sin and is excommunicated if he reveals secrets from “the box”. Therefore, you have nothing to fear from the same priest hearing your frequent confessions. Essentially, the fear of human respect weapon is only effective if you let it be effective. Now, I will tell you that it is aimed against your pride, which, truth be told, is still pretty considerable with those just starting to conquer a hook. If by chance you do get embarrassed, write it off as good exercise for your humility and move on.

Your goal here in Step 4 is to make the practice of



going to Confession a habit. As I’ve explained before, a virtue is just a good act done habitually. This is your goal, friend. You want to make being in the state of grace the



normal state of the hull of your soul. This will, of

course, strengthen it considerably by repairing the damage that all of your sins, but most especially the sins from your hook, do to your soul. It will also be a significant source of grace that will help you to avoid additional sins but also to improve your level of holiness as the virtues you practice in going to Confession become more ingrained.

Continuing with our barnacles and hull analogy, this certainly means that the flow of barnacles of grace will increase, but the greater benefit is to your hull of a soul. You see, the sacrament of Confession is the naval port’s repair facility and base hospital that your ship sails into when it needs repairing and the members of the crew need healing. This will improve the nature of your hull by removing that sheathing of copper that precludes that increased flow of barnacles from attaching. Without a doubt, it stands to reason that a greater proportion of those

barnacles will find somewhere to attach themselves. In the same way, a barnacle can't attach itself to a hole now, can it? These holes will begin to get patched over and reinforced over repeated confessions. Since you need healthy crewmen, and lots of them, to do the work, once they've been healed and made well, these crewmen of virtue will get to work doing these hull improvements in the dry dock, preparing your ship to sail once more out to sea. Since there's lots of work to be done and since every improvement and repair can't be done all at once – there are only so many crewmen to go around, expect that in the beginning, your ship will make lots of “port calls”. Why? Well, you sail again after each trip to the dry dock. Being still weak, chances are good that the repairs will spring leaks or work themselves loose. Unfortunately, there's also the chance for additional damage from the ravages of the sea of temptation. Therefore, until your hull and crew are completely repaired and brought up to strength, you are going to want to return to port frequently. Spring a leak? Go to port. Waves break loose a davit? Go to port. Do it soon; do it often.

This sailing in and out of the port of grace will produce 1 of 2 possible outcomes: either the sin will leave meaning that you will have severed the line to your hook or you will stop fighting it and surrender to it. Them's the choices, buddy. God can't stand to be in the presence of sin and Satan can't stand to be in the presence of grace. One will leave. For the sake of your soul: Persevere! Persevere! Persevere! Make it be Satan the one who leaves. Regardless, I am praying for you and I have the utmost confidence in you. I know you will persevere (if you've tolerated my blathering to this point - I know you can persevere through anything!).

STEP 5: PENANCE AND RESTITUTION:

OK, my dear friend in Christ, if this is your first time following along with the Catholic 12-Steps and you're doing it in order, you've just walked out of the box of the confessional, possibly for the first time in many years. Let me congratulate you for your courage. It took a lot of doing on your part in responding to the grace He gave on His part. This is something definitely worthy of giving thanks to God; that was an important step to accomplish. Now, in Step 5 we are going to cover what comes next in the process of repairing the damage done by your hook. This isn't just about repairing your own soul due to the last batch of mortal sins but also to the deep-seated damage done to your soul by habitually being in mortal sin as well as healing the damage done to others because of those mortal sins. Besides incorporating the following advice, I want you to make sure that you are doing The Nothingness Itself Prayer daily and dealing with each day's temptations one day at a time – each pot hole on the road needs to be avoided by itself before you worry about the next one. Anyway, here again is Step 5:

5. I will do the penance that the priest gives me during confession and I will begin to make restitution to God and man for my sins; both in the particular case and in the general case.

You might be asking yourself, "Why does the priest give me a penance to do at all? Isn't asking for forgiveness enough?" Well, you see, we receive a penance after Confession for three reasons. The first is atonement. That's just another word for making satisfaction for or reparation for the injury we've done because of our sins. It's a way of making amends for our wrong. Our penance can be simply saying some prayers like five Our Fathers or it can be to return the money we've stolen or to make an apology, by way of examples. It's really only limited by the imagination of the priest hearing our confession. Back in the Middle Ages there was actually a book that prescribed certain penances for certain sins but that's no longer the case. Anyway, this atonement is not meant to be complete. It is only a token. The second reason is to help us to avoid committing the sin in the future. When we have to return stolen goods to somebody, it tends to cause a great deal of embarrassment. For many of us, we'd rather die than face that kind of ordeal a second time, so sometimes we have a natural reason or boost for avoiding sin but more typically the graces from our penance are spiritual helps so the evidence of their effectiveness is more subtle. Still, take advantage of the natural helps whenever and wherever you find them. You'll hear me say this elsewhere; we will make use of all natural tools that are not anti-Catholic to help us defeat our hook and given that we get the penance from the priest, I think it goes without saying that this definitely falls into the "not anti-Catholic" category. The third reason we receive a penance is to remove a portion of the temporal punishment due to the sins we've just been forgiven.

"What's temporal punishment?" you ask. When we sin we incur two types of punishment: eternal and temporal. If the sin committed is a mortal sin we have

angered God by committing it so then the eternal punishment is to be cast into the fires of Hell forever. In fact, any and all unforgiven mortal sins at the time of our deaths bear this eternal punishment. Our souls stay “frozen” in the state they are in at the time of death and we either stay angry or in love with God eternally depending on the state of our souls. As an aside if you haven’t picked this up: dying with at least one unforgiven mortal sin on your soul is the only way that anyone can go to Hell. Now, if you go to Confession before you die and confess that mortal sin, the eternal punishment is removed because God forgives us those sins and restores sanctifying grace to our souls. For venial sins, there is no eternal punishment since we are still in the state of grace and the bond of love still exists between God and us.

To actually answer the question now, temporal punishment is that punishment that God gives us for having sinned; it is the debt we have to pay. This is the way in which God’s justice is satisfied, it teaches us a lesson in the evil of sin, and it warns us not to do it again. Just because we tell Mommy we’re sorry for having broken the vase doesn’t mean we don’t get spanked anyway! A biblical example is when King David had Urias killed in battle so that he could marry Bethsabee, Urias’ wife: *“And David said to Nathan: I have sinned against the Lord. And Nathan said to David: The Lord also hath taken away thy sin: thou shalt not die. Nevertheless, because thou has given occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme, for this thing, the child that is born to thee, shall surely die.”* (2 Kings xii: 13-14) In fact, this temporal punishment applies to all sins, both mortal and venial.

Please don’t let the term “temporal” confuse you. Although we think of something that is “earthly” or “of earth” with the term, temporal, we can make restitution for the temporal punishment either here or in Purgatory; I would like to add that it’s a whole lot easier doing it here on earth since, *“...charity covereth a multitude of sins.”* (1 Pet iv. 8) In fact, what’s not forgiven or made up here will need to be taken care of in Purgatory. There are several ways that this can be done but we’ll go into that later on. Instead, I want to focus on the difference between forgiveness and penance first. Here is an example to illustrate.

Let's say I'm a mean little kid and I throw a brick through the windshield of your car. Bad little me, I did it on purpose 'cause I thought it'd be fun! The cops catch me and bring me to justice. You, being sweet and lovable, are willing to forgive me if I say I'm sorry. I do, so you forgive me but that still doesn't take care of your busted windshield. I have to make restitution for it by paying you the value of the windshield or fixing it myself, insofar as I am able. Now, my being a little kid means that I don't have the skills or tools to fix it so I'll have to pay for it. As my allowance is not large, I could do it in installments by giving you all or a part of each allowance for a while until my debt is paid off, or I just pay the remainder off somewhere in the future. In this case, I make a down payment of a couple dollars of what's left of my birthday money and I promise to pay you back some

time in the future. We shake hands and part friends - maybe not bosom buddies but at least we're now on speaking terms again.

My asking for forgiveness is the equivalent of going to Confession. Your forgiving me is the same forgiveness that I obtain in the confessional when the priest, acting as God's agent, forgives me and this removes the eternal punishment. Good, I'm not going to go to Hell for my crime. My making a down payment is my doing the penance I received from Father during Confession. It might actually BE the penance of paying for the broken window or it could be saying the 3 Hail Mary's that he told me to say. Either way, I have made some



token act of atonement and paid for part of the temporal punishment. Now, we could add that because of the spanking and/or stern lecture I received that I really intend NOT to go throwing bricks through people's windshield and that would be an example of contrition and having a firm purpose of amendment to make this example complete but that's part of Step 4. The only thing left for me to do is to make restitution for the remainder of the debt but I don't necessarily have a fixed time for doing it. If I pay it back in installments it would be an example of how we work off our temporal punishment in this life such as by gaining an indulgence or doing a good work such as one of the Works of Mercy. If on the other hand, I pass away before paying it off so you would bring the IOU to the executor of my estate. The debt would be paid by my estate (probably with interest) and resolving things this way would be like me having to serve time in Purgatory after my particular judgment. I would hope that you would agree that this is all very logical and it agrees with our own natural sense of justice. Remember that the natural world is a parallel of the spiritual world so what makes sense here better make sense there as well.

OK, dear reader, let's go back and talk a bit about the penance we receive after going to Confession. You've just gone through the entire process of confession. You've done the "Bless me, Father...", the stating of your sins – especially all the mortal ones since your last good confession, answered all of Father's questions as truthfully as you can, received your penance, said the Act of Contrition, and responded to the priest's words, "Your sins are forgiven" with something appropriate like a simple "Thank you" or "God bless you", and blessed yourself before leaving the box. You've gone back to your pew, and now what?

Well, the very first thing you should do is say any prayers you've been given to say. Do a colloquy with Our Lord and Our Lady. Read the After Confession Prayers from the Confession section of your missal. Bless yourself and you're done. Simple if your penance is just some prayers. On the other hand, if you've been given a different type of penance (e.g. speaking to someone), some planning on your part might be required and that's what I want to talk about next – making restitution because of the hook.

RESTITUTION: TO GOD, TO NEIGHBOR, AND TO YOUR SOUL

The results of my sins cause a debt to three parties, two of whom are wounded by my sins. The first debt, of course, is to Almighty God who obviously isn't "wounded" by our sins – just angered. The other two parties are other souls who have been affected either directly or indirectly by the sin and also my own soul.

Let's speak about my own soul first. It is wounded each and every time that I sin. All the faculties of the soul are impacted but my will is healed by the sacrament of Penance itself. The other faculties are healed by the temporal punishment, which proceeds for an indeterminate length of time since we are not privy to the depth of God's anger, His justice, or His mercy. Therefore, we never know when we're "paid off". We can and should (and will if you are truly attempting to do the ultimate objective of this book - to make your hook your springboard into holiness) perform as much of the temporal punishment here on earth to heal our souls so that Christ may use us as a "channel of His peace" if only for the sake of the salvation of other souls but also to skip over the Purgatory time entirely. Complete healing of the soul is guaranteed only in Purgatory. Well, why not just put off the temporal punishment until Purgatory? Well, I'd like to point out here that according to some saints, the average length of time in Purgatory is 40 years! Spend 40 years in the equivalent of Hell? That's a fool's bet, pardner! No, thank you, ma'am! Since nothing imperfect sees the beatific vision, every bit of dross will have to be burned away before you actually get to Heaven so you might as well get a good head start before you die. This process of healing the wounds of our souls will go on for the rest of our lives, my friend. As a sneak preview into the future, at some point the need to heal your soul will pretty much stop because it will become quite healthy and doing restitution will take on a life of its own, which is Step 12: Performing the Works of Mercy. That leads us to restitution to the other party affected by our sins.

That other party, of course, is the other souls around us who have been affected by our sins. Since you've examined your conscience and begun to think about who you are from Step 3 in preparation for going to Confession in Step 4, you should have a decent idea of some of the people you've hurt because of your hook. Using this knowledge as a starting point, it's worthwhile for you to spend a good amount of time meditating on just exactly whom you've offended and also a measure of the degree of that hurt. This will help you to determine the most important people to reach out to first. Dimes to donuts it's the loved ones who are closest to you: your spouse and your children. God forbid, but is there anyone you've killed or caused to die? Have you ruined anyone spiritually or materially? These people, too, you owe a tremendous debt to.

Now, if you're anything like me, my dear friend, the length of time that you've been hooked can be decades long and the number of mortal sins, either directly or indirectly due to your hook can conceivably run into the tens of thousands! Therefore, this isn't "a brief pause" between songs on the radio during your ride

home from work, but "the whole ride" to work over many days to get a real feeling for the depth of the hurt caused. Let the magnitude of the debt sink in! Don't despair but let it press upon your soul so that how much you owe these people is really understood – and many of these folks are people you supposedly love. It's extremely important that you to realize what you need to do and for whom. If you come away from Step 5 thinking that a simple apology and a few extra bucks in the poor box are enough, you have missed the point of Step 5 entirely!

Once you've meditated on this such that the situation is clear in your mind, make up a list, at least a mental list, of whom you have wronged and also what actions you can do to make restitution. First on the list, of course, is God - the God who loves you so much. How do you make it up to God? In a strategic way, follow the Catholic 12-Steps and become a saint – just for Him. From a more down-to-earth approach, let me suggest the following ways: 1) Do additional penances (I'll have more things to say about this in Step 9), 2) Prayer (more on this in Step 11, part A), 3) Attending the most efficacious prayer that there is, the Mass, 4) Fasting (again, see Step 9), 5) Almsgiving or giving to charity (e.g. like the Blessed Margaret Family Help Center, Inc.), 6) Doing the Spiritual and Corporal Works of Mercy, (which I cover in detail under Step 12), and 7) Gaining indulgences (see Step 11). All of these methods are ways for you to reduce your temporal punishment, and hence, make restitution to Our Lord for your sins. Several of these are directed solely to God while others require you to interact with your neighbor. The nice thing about these is that you get sort of a two-for-one benefit; you get to make it up to God and neighbor all at the same time. As a biblical point of reference, let me refer you to Matthew Chapter 25 when Christ returns at the end of the world. Too long to quote at length here, He tells both the sheep and the goats (the saved and the reprobates): *"And the king answering, shall say to them: Amen, I say to you: as long as you did it to one of these, my least brethren, you did it to me."* (Mt xxv. 40) Because these actions are so important, I'm going to list them for you for future reference:

Ways of Satisfying Temporal Punishment

- Penance (Step 9)
- Prayer (Step 11A)
- Attending Mass (Step 6)
- Fasting (Step 6)
- Almsgiving (like to the Blessed Margaret Center) (Step 12)
- Works of Mercy (Step 12)
- Indulgences (Step 11)

I gave you references to later chapters for each of these because I didn't want to repeat myself by discussing topics both here and later in their own particular chapters. You will notice, however, that each and every one of these ways to satisfy temporal punishment is covered somewhere in the Catholic 12-Steps. I guess I would have thought that if anything had NOT been covered, it would have been proof that there was something missing in the program. Deo Gratias,

that doesn't appear to be the case. Moving right along, now, I am going to list the all of the Works of Mercy here because I anticipate that not many of us have memorized them. Step 12 has the discussion on them so flip back there for a more in-depth explanation of them. Actually you'd be surprised at how easily you can fulfill many of them in your day-to-day ordinary routine as long as you do them for love of Our Lord. In any case, here are the Works of Mercy:

Spiritual Works of Mercy

- Admonish the sinner
- Instruct the ignorant
- Counsel the doubtful
- Comfort the sorrowful
- Bear wrongs patiently
- Forgive all injuries
- Pray for the living and the dead

Corporal Works of Mercy

- Feed the hungry
- Give drink to the thirsty
- Clothe the naked
- Visit the imprisoned
- Shelter the homeless
- Visit the sick
- Bury the dead

Please keep all of these ideas in mind while we move on to the next tier on your list, which is probably headed by your spouse, if you have one. Especially for men, saying, "I'm sorry" to wives is really tough to do but you need to do it. Find the right moment, set the atmosphere just right so she knows the depth of your sorrow. Don't be afraid to cry. You will find that your spouse will be your biggest natural ally; she will sacrifice and pray 'til she's losing weight and got the biggest and ugliest calloused knees you ever saw. It's also easy for us to rationalize that "it's her fault". It's not, so get over it. Good spouses take a lot of abuse before they run out of patience and on us (that's what love is, you know) so expect that your spouse has put up with a lot of lies, deceit, broken promises, emotional stress, neglect etc. You NEED to make this up. The four of the Spiritual Works that I think would most apply in a marital relationship are: Comfort the sorrowful, Bear wrongs patiently, Forgive all injuries, Pray for the living (that is, for her). Speaking from first-hand knowledge, having a hook means having spent a whole lot of time being in love with my hook instead of my wife. Exercising patience and forgiveness with someone else who has had to exercise those same virtues with me - "El Supremo", is a wonderful role-reversal; it takes grace and effort but seriously give it a try. Lastly, do the "Works of Love", too. You know, the usual things that lovers say and do to express their love for one another, like little pecks on the ear, holding hands, getting the door, short love notes, saying "I love

you” for no reason at all, buying little gifts, etc. I assume that you did all this kind of stuff when you were courting so just resume and expand on what you did then.

Next on your list are probably your children. Depending on the nature of your hook and their age level you may or may not want to say any words to them at all. Instead, you may have to let your actions speak for you. For example, if your hook is gambling, you may have seriously neglected your small children to the point where they don't know who you are anymore or are deathly afraid of upsetting you while you are at the computer doing on-line gambling. Rather, make it a point to spend that former computer time with them doing things they like to do like simple wrestling on the floor. Words can be worthless here but frequent big hugs say “I love you” better than the words do sometimes. As the old saying goes, “Actions speak louder than words”. Let your spouse help you here by asking for areas that the children want/need your involvement. She probably knows where you've hurt each and every one of them in different ways so she help you tailor what's right for each one.

Regardless of whether or not you're married and whether or not you have any children, your family is probably the group of people closest to you that have been wronged most egregiously. These are the parties to whom you owe the biggest "restitution". You must make it a high priority to constantly look for even little ways to show charity to them since “Charity begins at home.”

Outside of your nuclear family is probably the next circle of “IOU holders”. These might include your friends, colleagues, and neighbors for example. Circumstances will dictate who they are and what charitable works you can perform that are most appropriate for them. It could be money, time, words, or whatever. Certainly if you've caused anyone's death you have a debt to the survivors. Much of this will be obvious to you but if you are in doubt as to what course of action you should take ask a priest. He will have a supernatural perspective on what your soul needs and he is in a great position to advise you – he's seen and heard it all. Or, you can contact someone else you hold in confidence. If all else fails, you can contact me in all confidentiality through the Blessed Margaret website's Contact Page.

In closing this chapter, I think it only fair to tell you that I would anticipate that making restitution to everyone harmed by your hook is going to take the rest of your life. However, you will find that at some point you will stop doing these acts as restitution but will continue to do them because, out of charity for both God and neighbor, you can't help yourself. It will become so much of who you are that they will become second nature and almost seem to “drip” off of you automatically. But let us start today at the beginning, for "Now is the acceptable time". Begin today. If we can't "make it up" directly, find another party in similar circumstances or do it for Holy Mother Church or another charity. The key to restitution is to do whatever is "within our means". God does not expect the impossible, just the possible. Besides the hook, God gave us, each and every

one of us, talents, be they money, skill, or whatever. You know what they are; use them. As I quoted St. Peter before, he tells us, "*Charity covereth a multitude of sins*". He wasn't joking; if we are serious about cutting the line of our hook - neither will we. Let's get to work.

STEP 6: I WILL ATTEND MASS

My dear friend in Christ, if you've made it to this point, I have to congratulate your perseverance. It is my sincere prayer for you that you have started doing the Nothingness Itself Prayer every day. Also, that you have gone to Confession at least once, done the penance, and are now in the state of grace – maybe for the first time in a good long while, maybe even years. If that is indeed the case then you are doing a fine job and Our Lord is edified by your labors. Keep fighting the good fight and let's go on to Step 6, which is the first of the steps that is aimed at increasing the amount of grace with which God showers you. If you've been keeping track of my metaphors, you'll remember that it is a “barnacle” step; it is designed to help us gain an increase in the flow of grace, which is the ammunition that we need to wage war against our hook. Here it is again for review:

- 6. I will begin to attend Mass – the True Mass; I will attend more regularly and more devoutly. I will always try to go to Communion if I am able.**

SIDEBAR: WHAT DO YOU MEAN BY “THE TRUE MASS”?

Before we discuss the Mass in general I want to clarify what I mean by “The True Mass”. This is a good question because the Mass is the principal means by which we obtain the graces necessary to defeat our hooks, so we want to get this part right. By the term “True Mass” I am speaking of the rite of St. Pius V or, the Tridentine Mass, as it is popularly called. It is reverent and shows very clearly its sacrificial nature. Countless saints have slaked their spiritual thirst from the oceans of grace that have flowed from it. It is the Mass that I recommend because I have absolute confidence in its efficacy at providing the necessary graces we need to save our souls. For those who don't know Latin, and I think that includes virtually all Catholics, missals with translations are available so that makes ignorance of Latin a moot point. Also, with Our Holy Father's *motu proprio*, *Summorum Pontificum*, on the Tridentine Mass, finding a nearby Mass should not be difficult and I promise you that any inconvenience you suffer in getting there will be more than made up by the graces you will receive.

SACRIFICE: WHAT THE MASS REALLY IS

Enough preaching. The Blessed Margaret Family Help Center is about souls, not the Crisis in the Church! If you are still reading this, I assume you've accepted my premise to attend only the Tridentine Mass (or at least tolerated my recommendation to do so) and that from this point on we will be talking exclusively of the Tridentine Mass (or a traditional rite Mass for those not in the Roman rite).

Now let's get to the heart of this Step. In this chapter I'm going to cover a few topics that will help you build a fundamental understanding of why attending Mass is so important for everyone but especially for those of us who are struggling to overcome our hooks. We will begin our discussion with what the Mass is. Since it's really a sacrifice, we will explain the principles of religious sacrifices during Old Testament times with a focus on the victim, which will lead us to an in-depth explanation of how the Mass follows those same principles. In



that discussion we will talk about what everyone's role is in the Mass as well as cover the fruits of the Mass. We will conclude our explanation on the fruits of the Mass by explaining it in a general form but more specifically, how it is of key importance for the sinner (you and me, brother).

To begin, let's put the definition of the Mass right out on the table, so to speak, since there is so much misinformation and disinformation concerning it – even amongst knowledgeable Catholics. It is not "the work of the people" or "the commemoration of the Last Supper" as you will frequently see written in today's press. It is the continuation of the bloody sacrifice of Calvary in an un-bloody manner. In other words, it is Our Lord's Passion and Death on Calvary continued. That's right; Our Lord's sacrifice of love on the cross has not ended and will not end until the end of the world. It is the sacrifice of the New Law.

Previously I had explained how many things in the Old Testament serve as a "type" or forerunner of things that are perfected in the New Testament. Sacrifices are one of those types. In the Old Law they had the sacrifice of animals so it was imperfect but it foretold of the need for a perfect sacrifice to come in the New Law. That perfect sacrifice, of course, is the sacrifice of God – of Christ Who offers Himself through the priest in an unbloody manner in the form of bread and wine. In outline form, it looks like this:

What is the Mass?

- The Sacrifice of the New Law
- Where Christ offers:
 - Himself
 - Through the priest
 - In an unbloody manner
 - Under the appearances of bread and wine

Since I assume that you, dear reader, are at least some stripe of Christian, if not a Catholic, I don't think I need to go into any details to show that the Passion and Death on the cross of Our Lord to obtain forgiveness for sins is the sacrifice of the New Law. We should all be able to agree on that fact without any further discussion. Instead, I want to concentrate on proving that the Mass is also that same sacrifice on the cross and to do that I want to explain the general principles of sacrifices in Old Testament times and how they serve as a "type" or

foreshadowing of the sacrifice of the New Testament. Please understand that the type in the Old Testament is always completed or perfected in the New and always to a greater degree than in the Old.

I cannot overstate this idea of the Mass being a Sacrifice because it is crucial to your understanding. You see, I for one never really understood the connection of sacrifice as a means of worship and its connection to the Mass until I read Fr. Laux's book, "Catholic Apologetics", which is part of a series published by TAN Books and is the basic source used for this section. In it, he pointed out that all religions practiced some form of sacrifice and that there were principles that all religions practiced, not just the Jewish ones, followed during Old Testament times. Because these principles were so enlightening for me, I am going to assume that other souls will benefit from this approach as well. Now, these principles were common to the sacrifices of the Greeks, Egyptians, Romans, Aztecs, everybody. In fact, every culture had a belief in some form of a "Supreme Being" (although it was usually more than one) and they all offered sacrifices of some sort to it (for the sake of brevity we will stick to the singular). In each of them, some sort of **a victim was offered**. It would frequently be some type of animal. For example, Mary and Joseph offered up turtledoves when they presented Jesus 40 days after His birth in the Temple. In the Passover Feast, it was a male lamb without blemish. It could be other items as well; if you've ever read Homer's Iliad, like when you were a freshman in high school, you'll remember the libations that the Greeks offered whenever they drank wine, so in this case, wine was the "victim", so to speak. We would probably use the term "offering" nowadays but the "victim" was "offered" and the "offering" was the "victim" so for our purposes these terms are really synonymous. Melchisedech, the forerunner of the Catholic priesthood, offered bread and wine as his victims. Now, there were strict rules as to who was authorized to conduct the ceremony. It could be the male head of the household as in the Passover Meal but for public sacrifices it was someone who held **the office of priest** who was authorized to do the sacrifice. No ordinary Joe Blow could perform the rites. He also had to **offer the victim to the "god"**, never to anyone or anything that wasn't considered "divine". Regardless of the form of the ceremony, in this sacrifice, **the victim was destroyed**. Using our Greek example, the wine would be poured out onto the ground so it was obviously "destroyed" for purposes of human consumption. In the case of animals it would be slain, frequently by having its throat cut and the blood poured out. Then **it would be completely consumed**. It could be burned up by fire on an altar or eaten by the priests and/or the people who were offering the sacrifice. In this way, everyone concerned shared in the fruits of the sacrifice. This was at least a symbolic way of showing who was receiving the benefits of the sacrifice. The book of Exodus makes for interesting reading to see what was done to each



part of the bull during the sacrifices of the Old Testament. The last link in the chain is that the sacrifice had to be accepted by the “deity”. Remember Cain and Abel? Abel’s sacrifice was pleasing to God and the smoke rose up to Heaven. Cain’s, on the other hand, was not pleasing to Our Lord so the smoke hugged the ground. This fueled Cain’s jealousy of Abel and caused him to commit the first murder. This is significant because it shows that public sacrifices must conform to God’s desires and not our own notions of how they ought to be. Nadab and Abiu were slain because they used a “strange fire”, which was an unauthorized fire, in performing the rites. Now, for what purposes were sacrifices done? It was always **done for one of four religious purposes** and they correspond to the four reasons why we ourselves pray today: **adoration, petition, thanksgiving**, and the most important reason of all – **to atone for sins**. For future reference, here are the universal principles of sacrifices:

Principles of Sacrifices:

- Offering of a victim
- Victim destroyed (frequently by being eaten)
- Priest necessary to perform public sacrifices
- Sacrifice offered to God
- For one or more religious purposes
- Sacrifice had to be accepted by God to have merit

Let’s take these general principles of Sacrifice to see how they are perfected in our Mass of today through the participation of Our Lord Jesus Christ. This results in the Mass being the PERFECT sacrifice since it is God Himself Who is both giving and receiving the actions of the sacrifice. In the Mass, He performs the roles of both Priest and Victim. Although with our eyes we see the man who is the priest, supernaturally, it is Jesus Himself who is performing the actions. Therefore, there can be nothing added to the Victim to make It a more perfect victim and nothing can be added to the Priest to make Him more perfect.

Why is that? It’s just that we have no supernatural “radar” to see with so, God, knowing our limitations, gives us men as priests that we CAN see in order that our senses can perceive (with the help of Faith) what exactly is going on. Imagine that there were no priests. Our Lord would still be changing the bread and wine into His body and blood but everything would just sit on the altar. After some specified time we would just assume that He was finished and we’d consume the host and wine. “But He could move the host and the chalice so that they would rise all by themselves into the air at the consecration and they could float over to us at the communion rail”, you might suggest. If that were to happen at every Mass, this would kill the virtue of faith and the entire notion of free will. What more incontrovertible, or totally complete evidence would anyone need of the existence of God and the proof of the Catholic Church’s place as His One True Church? What’s to believe in? This would be like needing “faith” to believe that the sky is blue! Since Faith and Free Will are crucial elements in God’s desire for us to love Him FREELY this would be impossible. Therefore, since our

intellects only learn what comes to us through our senses and there has to be a physical or human agent to cooperate with God's work, there MUST be a priest who is physically present but, likewise, because transubstantiation is a supernatural act, there must also be a supernatural Agent or Priest. That Priest, of course, is our High Priest, Jesus Christ.



Now, as far as Christ being the Victim is concerned, it is obvious that He died on the cross at Calvary, so far so good and no argument there. But how do we know that these two events, Calvary and the Mass are connected? And as a corollary, what's the Last Supper got to do with all this? Why isn't the Mass just a commemoration of the Last Supper? Remember that two of the principles of Sacrifices are that the victim has to be offered and that the victim has to be consumed by those who are to share in its fruits? These two are key. Nowhere in the Gospel accounts do we hear of anyone, not Our Lord, not Caiphas, not Pilate, no one, offering up Jesus as a victim while on Calvary. Where then, is He offered? Actually, we have two places. The first is the when, "...Caiphas, being the high priest of that year, said to them; You know nothing at all. Neither do you consider that it is expedient for you that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not." (Jn xi, 49-50) so we have the Jewish high priest himself offering Jesus as a victim although he doesn't know what part he's playing. The second time is at the Last Supper when Jesus performs the same actions that our present day priests perform in offering up both the bread and the wine. He wasn't going to lift Himself up but, instead, offered up the material that He would have us consume.

As an aside, He chose food as the form because of His great desire to become physically part of us and that's what food does to our bodies. It literally becomes part of us. He chose bread and wine as opposed to tacos and tequila because of their universal availability as staples of diets throughout the world and consumption of this Staple would become the supernatural diet of the world, too.

Okay, back to the main point. When Jesus died on the cross, there were no cannibals present to consume His body. For that matter there were few faithful present to receive Him then. Instead He was placed in the tomb of Joseph of Arimethea "and all withdrew". This raises the question of how the consumption of the Victim was to be performed. In addition, if His sacrifice was to be until the end of the world, how were later generations to partake of the fruits of His sacrifice? Well, space and time mean nothing to God, so He performed the first consecration at the Last Supper BEFORE His Passion so that His Apostles would partake of the fruits of His sacrifice and would be strengthened for the dark period from then until His resurrection on Easter. Remember that little rabbit trail I just talked about? Well, the Apostles being Jews meant that blood was unclean to them so some other means besides flesh and blood was necessary and the most practical way for this "sharing of the fruits" was through what they would

have wanted to consume without a moment's hesitation – bread and wine, since this was everyday fare for them. This is also the most practical means for later generations, you and I in other words, to be able to share in the fruits of Jesus' sacrifice on Golgotha. That's why the Mass is NOT a commemoration of the Last Supper, even though the Last Supper was a key part of it, and why the Sacrifice of Calvary and the Mass are one and the same. If they weren't, then the sacrifice of Calvary is NOT perfect according to the principles of sacrifices since some parts are missing and, therefore, there are defects in His Passion and Death (God forbid!).

The last two principles that we have to show are that the sacrifice is for one or more religious purposes and that Jesus' sacrifice was accepted by God the Father. In Step 11A we will discuss prayer in more detail but here let me mention that there are four reasons to pray: 1) Adoration, 2) Expiation, 3) Thanksgiving, and 4) Petition and all four of them are included in each Mass. You will see this if you simply read through the text of the priest's prayers that he says during Mass by looking them up in your missal. Lastly, how do we know that the Father accepted Jesus' sacrifice? Our proof is His resurrection from the dead on Easter Sunday and His Ascension into Heaven. If the Father were displeased in the least, neither of these two events would have occurred because the Father would have prevented both from happening and Jesus' prayer in the following words would have been in vain. *"These things Jesus spoke, and lifting up his eyes to heaven, he said; Father, the hour is come, glorify thy Son, that thy Son may glorify thee. As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he may give life everlasting to all whom thou has given him. Now this is life everlasting, that they may know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent. I have glorified thee upon the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do: And now glorify thou me, O Father, with thyself, with the glory which I had with thee before the world was."* (Jn xvii. 1-5) Well, my friend, I can't think of anything more glorious than Christ's Resurrection and Ascension into Heaven. These two events are historic facts and proofs that the sacrifice of our High Priest was certainly accepted by His Father showing that His words were not in vain and therefore, neither is our faith.

My dear fellow soldier in Christ, I trust that you are convinced that the Mass is the continuation of Calvary as well as that each of the Old Testament Principles of Sacrifice are present and perfected on Calvary. Since you'll want to refer to this sometime later, below is an outline of how Our Lord Jesus Christ's Sacrifice on Calvary meets each principle:

Christ's Sacrifice on Calvary Fulfills the Principles of Sacrifices:

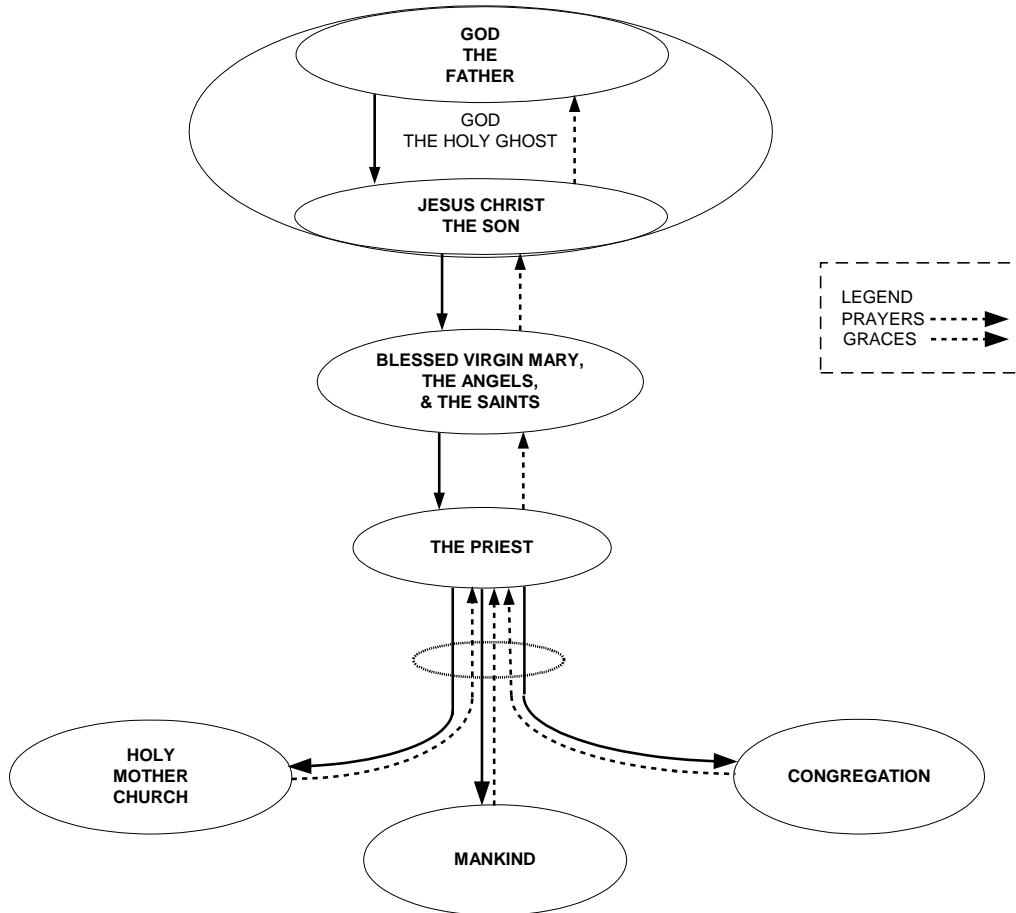
- Christ was the Priest
- He was also the Victim
- The Religious reason was the Redemption of Man by obtaining forgiveness for sins
- God the Son offered Himself to God the Father

- Our Victim was utterly destroyed by His death on the cross
- The Father accepted Jesus' sacrifice and our proof is Our Lord's Glorious Resurrection and Ascension

FRUITS OF THE MASS:

Well, friend, we've covered quite a bit of the "sacrificial" aspects of the Mass, the fact that it's a continuation of Our Lord's Passion and Death on Calvary and that He is the High Priest in the person of the priest, etc. Let's complete our background discussion before we address the question I know is on your mind: "What's all this mean to my struggle against my hook?" This last discussion is to explain a bit about prayers and graces during the Mass. To do that, I want you to look at the following diagram, that I've called the Prayer and Grace Flow Diagram. It explains, in a highly simplified manner so it doesn't show , the pathways for both prayers and grace at Mass. The solid arrows are prayers, which are directed heavenward from the priest through the intercession of the saints up to Heaven. These prayers come from the Church herself, the congregation, and from all mankind in general. All of these prayers are bundled together with the priest's prayers and ascend to God. If you check the prayers in your missal, you will see that sometimes we pray to Christ, sometimes we pray to the entire Blessed Trinity, and at other times, to the Father. When we pray to the Father, notice how there's always an ending like, "Through Christ Our Lord" so I've drawn arrows within the "Trinity" balloon to show this intercessory path from Son to Father. I've also shown that the paths, both up and down, go through the Mary, the angels, and the saints since the prayers frequently invoke them as well so that they have a participation in the Mass as well. The solid arrows are graces descending down from Heaven through the saints through the priest to earth. The priest is the conduit, or pipeline, if you will, through which both commodities flow and that's the real point of the diagram, to highlight the priest's role. Without him we starve spiritually. Our prayers, especially for forgiveness of sins, wouldn't reach the Father without him and the graces we need to grow in sanctity wouldn't be delivered without him. The end result is that, without the priest and the Mass, we all would quickly fall into mortal sin (no doubt by our hooks) and would die in sin, destined for eternal damnation. Expressed another way, without the Mass, we all go to Hell! With it, we have our prayers answered and we receive the graces we need to conquer our hooks and to grow spiritually. I certainly hope that you can see now why the Mass is the most important prayer that there is. As an aside, since the priest is the crucial natural participant, we most assuredly need to keep our priests in our prayers – daily.

Prayer and Grace Flow Diagram

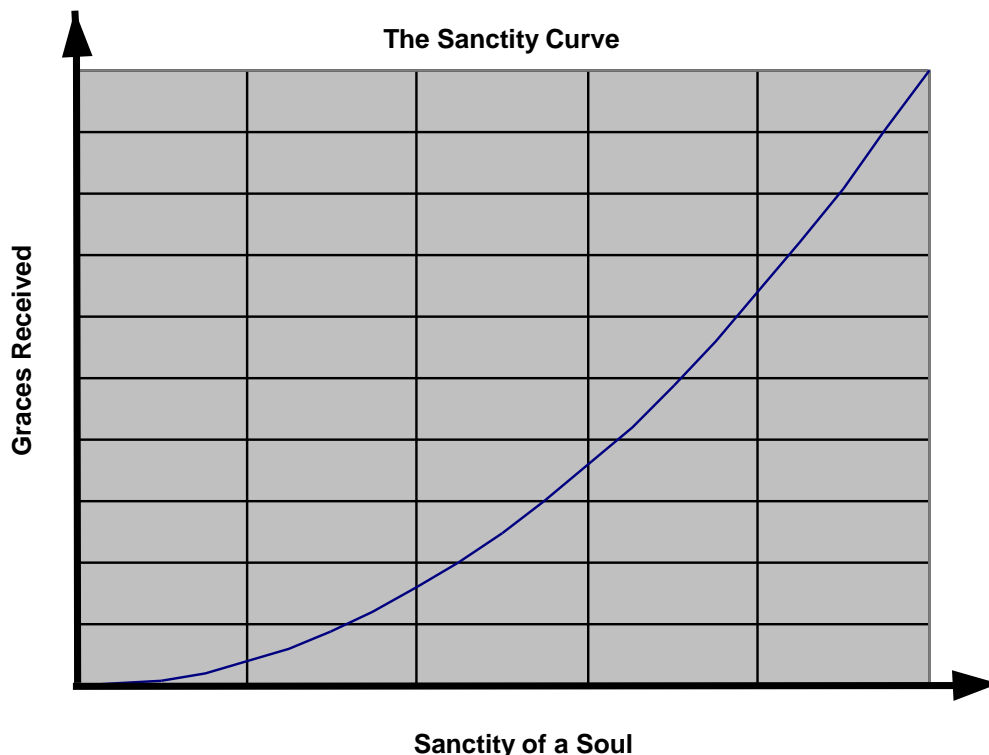


Let's talk about the graces received from any Mass. As I stated above, without the Mass we don't receive grace, but conversely, with the Mass, we receive a veritable tidal wave, a tsunami, no - an entire ocean of graces to nurture our souls. This ocean is what we are going to tap into in Step 6. This step is the MOST important one with respect to strengthening our souls since it is ONLY through grace – and lots of it, that we can succeed against our hooks and the Mass is the single greatest means to acquire that quantity of grace. It follows, then, that we need to be extremely devoted to the Mass and to put extra effort into our attendance at Mass.

So we have these huge quantities of grace coming from each Mass – who gets it? There are three classes of recipients and they are: 1) those present. These are the priest, the servers, and the congregation. That is, anyone who is actually in physical attendance. 2) Next come the members of the Church. All Catholics are prayed for in each and every Mass so, in a manner of speaking, you are at every Mass. 3) Last comes the entire human race - all men throughout the world, both living and dead, receive some of the graces from the Mass. Everybody has a soul, right? If we try to get inside the thinking of God's One True Church, isn't it perfectly logical that since she is the Mother of all Men,

wouldn't she feel a Mother's need to pray for all of her children – even those to whom she is estranged or on bad terms? As a brief aside, I for one count it a comforting thought that when I die and assuming I die in the State of Grace, that ALL Masses said after I am dead and gone include at least some graces for me to get out of Purgatory. Therefore, as Catholics in the state of grace, we each receive a portion of each Mass's graces.

This gives rise to the two-fold question: "How much of a portion do I receive and how do I improve on that portion?" The answer, simply put, is that the amount of grace received is a function of our good or bad dispositions to receive those graces. In other words, if you attend Mass with good intentions, in the State of Grace, assist as devoutly as you can within your office (celebrant, server, choir, etc.), stay recollected, receive Communion worthily, as well as other factors, you will receive vast quantities of grace. If, on the other hand, you barely get inside the door on time, stare at the girl in front of you throughout the Consecration, snore through the sermon, etc. you get the minimum amount. I can't put a number to the amounts but there's a huge element of truth to the saying, "You get out of it what you put into it." In other words, "the rich get richer and the poor get poorer" when it comes to our allotment of grace. This means that the holier you are, the more pleasing your good actions are to God and the more He rewards you for your love and friendship to Him. So this means that we who are still strongly attached to our hooks shouldn't expect miraculous changes in our lives just because we go to one Mass. Expect that it will probably take a long time of persevering effort. This is particularly true in our society of the 10-second sound bite. We want our prayers to be just like our computer toys: "Plug and



Play” with instant results because we don’t have patience and perseverance. The trouble is that God wants us to demonstrate our love for Him through that very same patience and perseverance and it takes time for those virtues to grow in us. Therefore, please don’t expect anything instantaneous. What this step is going to do is to get you started on the Path of Holiness by teaching you how to take best advantage of “the most beautiful thing this side of Heaven”. You have to go from there to take greater and greater advantage of the opportunities for grace that each Mass offers.

Now, to help you understand this concept, please look at the picture of the exponential curve to the left for a second. It’s what I call The Sanctity Curve. The horizontal line at the bottom is the x-axis and represents the Sanctity or Holiness of the Soul – it’s the amount of Sanctifying grace within our souls. Values of sanctity that are towards the left-hand side are small values of sanctity. As we go further to the right, the value of sanctity increases in size just like we would count numbers on a number line. Now, the vertical line to the left is the y-axis. This represents the amount of Graces Received from doing a good action, whatever it might be but in this case it is for devout assisting at Mass. The y-axis starts at the bottom left corner just like the x-axis did but the numbers increase as we travel up towards the top of the page. You read this curve by picking a value of sanctity and finding it on the x-axis. Now go up on the chart towards the top of the page until you intersect with the curve shown. That would be the value of the graces received and you would travel horizontally to the left back to the y-axis to read the value of those graces. I want you to know that I didn’t print any numbers on the chart because, well frankly, I have no way of giving numerical values to souls. Just get the idea that the holier you are the more you are rewarded for your good actions. In the lower left-hand corner is the Origin or where both sanctity and graces are close to 0. Here we have small values of sanctity and we get small amounts of graces. The farther we move to the right in sanctity, the larger the increases in the values of graces received such that at the far right hand of the x-axis, very small increases in sanctity give HUGE increases in graces. **THIS IS OUR OBJECTIVE (BOTH FOR THIS STEP AND IS THE WHOLE PURPOSE OF THE CATHOLIC 12-STEPS): TO GET AS FAR TO THE RIGHT ON THE SANCTITY CURVE AS WE POSSIBLY CAN!!!!** When we begin the Catholic 12-Steps, we, you and I, dear friend, are pretty much on the left of the Sanctity Curve. We put in a little – we get out a little. Saints are somewhere in the middle of the x-axis and the Blessed Virgin Mary is all the way to the right with her least little actions meriting FANTASTIC amounts of grace. By the way, Christ is way off the scale to the right.

You might be asking yourself the question, “By looking at the curve, if I’m so far to the left that I get little out of my good actions, what’s the point of trying?” Fair question. The answer lies in knowing what is best for our soul at a particular moment in time. When I’ve just begun to combat my hook and am only now spending more than a few days in a row in the state of grace, do I need the graces to bring the dead back to life or do I need something more “mundane” like

the grace to go three days in a row without being pulled out of the waters of grace into sin because of my hook? You see, God is the Great Economizer – He NEVER wastes grace. He always provides us with the level of grace and the kind necessary to do the most good for our souls. Just like when we were babies. Mama didn't feed us steak, did she? No, she offered her breast to us so that we could suckle the nourishment that we needed as infants, easily digested and perfect for little bodies. As toddlers, she weaned us from her breast but did she then offer us that T-bone? Nope! Not even then. We wanted soft finger foods like hot dogs and French fries (or "dog-dog" and "fry-fry" as we might have called them), which we found easier to eat. Besides, if we had been offered that steak, we wouldn't know what to do with it and would have cried until we got our dog-dogs. Do you see? In the beginning of the Catholic 12-Steps we are spiritual babies – regardless of how old we are chronologically or even how long we've been Catholic or even what our office might be. I'm not speaking about how much we know about our religion but how well we live our religion. Like the baby's body with the beginnings of organs, the beginnings of muscles, the beginnings of maturity, our souls are more potential than anything else, with only the beginnings of the virtues, the beginnings of mastery of our will, and the beginnings of our sanctity. We need gentle graces that slowly build up the foundations of our souls just like we need milk, fry-fries, and other "kid-friendly" foods at certain points in our lives to build our bodies for each stage of development. Anything stronger is "indigestible" just like that T-bone is to the baby, the toddler, and even the young adolescent. It isn't until we become teenagers that our pallets learn to appreciate the finer foods and this is no different spiritually. So, even though this means that we don't have the graces to raise the dead, win the battle of Lepanto, or convert whole nations by our preaching, this doesn't mean that God isn't rewarding our least little good actions done for Him. It's just that the graces given will be more for foundation building in our souls and that's exactly what we need. It's only later when our level of sanctity is strong enough "to eat steak" will He give us steak. Until then, it's important for us to begin at the beginning – at the nursery so to speak, so that we eventually become strong Soldiers of Christ in the war against our hooks but also in the war for our souls. Certainly it takes large amounts of food to raise a baby to manhood. In the same way it also takes large amounts of spiritual food, or grace, to raise a soul from infancy to maturity and that thought segues very nicely into the whole reason behind why it is necessary for us to be frequent and devout attendees at Mass.

OUR ATTENDANCE AT MASS:

Let's finally dig into this on a personal level – what devout attendance at Mass mean to us. We're going to keep with our naval motif that was introduced earlier that described God's grace as barnacles in the ocean current flowing past our souls, which are the hulls of our spiritual ship. I've already explained that in the fight against my hook I need as much grace as possible. In other words, I want to maximize the number of these "barnacles" attaching to my "hull" and to do that

I have a few choices. I need to either increase the flow of barnacles that come into contact with my hull or I need to increase the capacity of my hull to hold on to more barnacles or I need to do both, that is increase the flow AND increase the capacity. Devout attendance at Mass does both. Increasing the flow of barnacles increases the number of “hits” of grace and increasing the capacity of my hull by either making it “larger” or by improving it’s “robustness” means that my soul will accept and hold on to more of the graces that I do receive.

“What is this grace good for?” you might ask. To this point, the parts of the Catholic 12-Steps we’ve covered have been about healing our souls from the wounds of our sins and preparing the groundwork to enter into combat. The graces we have received have really been gratuitous, or free, graces from the



Good God Who has had mercy on us because in His love He has given us this chance to return to Him. Since we’ve been habitually, or even continuously, in the state of mortal sin, we haven’t done much of anything that has merited a supernatural reward. Truth be told, we probably deserved Hell. But now through the mercy of God I hope we are in the state of grace and determined to stay there forever. At Mass, we are going to bend our wills to performing a very good action that is no longer a “repairing” action such as the sacrament of Penance, but an action that mostly “strengthens”. Keeping with our naval motif, the Mass is the armory in that safe harbor where our ships are at anchor and where we can obtain new supplies of spiritual weapons and ammunition to wage our war against the hook. Because we will be working at being DEVOUT attendees at Mass, this will serve to further increase the flow of those “barnacles” of grace that we need both now and in the future. In addition, our devout attendance will strengthen our “hulls” to make them stronger by additional repairs and reinforcement to the damage done by our sinfulness, but more so, it “upgrades” our souls to move us further up that exponential Sanctity Curve so that each of our future good actions merits an even greater share of grace than before. Think of it in the same way that an old Man o’ War might be upgraded to have more or better cannons put on board or it might have the latest technological improvement installed and the ship’s crew trained in its use. Even if nothing new were added, it would have the magazine replenished with kegs of powder and bags of shot for the next voyage out to sea, ready to face the enemy once more. We are doing the exact same thing but to our souls.

This strengthening will improve our natures by four things that I can think of. First, **we form habits of virtue** – the virtues of religion and piety, to be exact. Yes, Virginia, religion is a virtue. Remember that virtue is a good action that has become a habit and continued practice of any virtue ingrains that virtue in our souls to the point that we automatically exercise that virtue as it becomes more and more ingrained in us. Besides making us want to perform virtue it also keeps us from exercising the virtue’s corresponding vice automatically. If you fill

a box with white marbles there isn't any room for the black marbles. Second, **it strengthens our ability to resist temptations.** Think of how the strong wooden sides of the USS Constellation caused British cannonballs to bounce off instead of penetrating? As our souls become stronger, we won't necessarily find the temptations becoming weaker. In fact, you may find them actually becoming stronger. But I guarantee you that if you are faithful to the struggle, you will eventually find yourself at a point of resisting temptations that before you would have easily fallen for and you will notice this. Third, **our wills become strengthened.** In the beginning, you will find just going to Mass or the Sacraments to be a struggle, the I-just-don't-feel-like-going-right-now temptation will be strong and you'll be surprised at how many vague excuses and rationalizations you can come up with to NOT do what you know you should do. Fourth and lastly, **it will occupy our minds with the things of God** and not the hook. Possibly it will cut into the time that you would have indulged yourself in your hook, but most likely, it will be that you are filling more of your waking moments with the things of God and that helps you to stay recollected on the supernatural more *"Pray without ceasing."* (1 Thess iv. 2) In this way you can begin to fill up your consciousness with holy things as opposed to unholy things. "Idle hands are the devil's playground" and "Nature abhors a vacuum", they say. If we are to replace our obsession with the hook, we have to replace it with something else – not just nothingness. Being busy is a good way to limit the amount of time that our minds are free to wander to thoughts of the hook and what better thoughts can we have than thoughts of God?

Now, in outline form, devout attendance at Mass strengthens and enlarges the hulls of our souls by:

- Forming habits of virtue to replace habits of vice.
- Strengthening our ability to resist temptation.
- Strengthening our wills.
- Occupying our minds with things of God instead of the hook.

SO HOW SHOULD WE ATTEND MASS?

In order for you to take maximum advantage of Step 6, you want to do a number of things. Don't expect that in the beginning you will necessarily be able to do all of them or to do them well but with your consistent effort, you will begin to see improvement. The first thing you want to do is to assist at Mass as often as you possibly can. If you are a "working stiff" like me you may not be able to go to daily Mass unless you are fortunate enough to live where a very early Mass is said so that you can still get to work on time. If that's not possible, try to attend on Saturdays as well as on Sundays. If that's not practical than at least regularly attend at Sunday Mass.

When you do assist at Mass, do so with **reverence, attention, and devotion.** What that means is that you don't make a distraction out of yourself to those

around you and that you have a mental picture of in Whose presence you are. Pay attention and when your mind wanders pull it back to the actions and prayers of the priest. Read the prayers in your missal at the same times that the priest is reciting the same prayers. This “reading” is praying and in this manner your prayers are united with his. This is the way that all of your prayers at Mass will be “bundled” with the prayers of the liturgy so that they rise to heaven just as the smoke of the incense rises to heaven as I showed you in the Prayer and Grace Flow Diagram. Join your mind and your heart to Our Lord so that He will answer our petition to “Make our hearts like unto thine” by taking our shriveled up raisins of hearts and swelling them to overflowing with the Precious Blood from His Sacred Heart. Sing along with the choir. If you’re not familiar with the chant, listen attentively at first and then pitch in with what you’re comfortable with. Don’t sing like you’re in your shower at home and make a nuisance of yourself but sing within your capabilities and comfort level. Or just hum along. Last, and most assuredly not least, RECEIVE OUR LORD IN HOLY COMMUNION EACH AND EVERY TIME THAT YOU ARE ABLE!!!!!! This is so not because we are the least bit worthy of receiving Him Who died for us but simply because He desires it of us. Notice the “...that you are able” part. If you aren’t in the state of grace or haven’t fasted properly beforehand, don’t make a sacrilegious communion – that’s a mortal sin and “...whosoever shall eat this bread, or drink the chalice of the Lord unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and of the blood of the Lord.” (1 Cor, xi. 27) Do, however, get yourself into the “box” and go to Confession as soon as possible – preferably beforehand!

Perform worthy thanksgivings – both after you receive Communion and at the end of Mass. Thanksgiving after Mass is a habit most modern Catholics have forgotten. Resurrect this practice! These are excellent times for both formal and spontaneous prayers. Your spontaneous prayers should be heartfelt thoughts to your Beloved. Thank Him. Confess your unworthiness. Tell Him you are sorry for your sins; tell Him you love Him. Express the sentiments of the moment however the Holy Ghost inspires you. Use your imagination; visualize. Don’t be in a rush to finish either. Pray to Mary and your other patron saints. This is a good time to recite the Nothingness Itself Prayer. No one else is going to hear your words; just speak straight from your heart. One last thing – cover or close your eyes while doing it. Satan will use this time to destroy your sense of recollection if he can – especially if your hook tends to the visual side of things. Sight of other members of the congregation, however innocently they may appear, can completely ruin this time with Our Lord. Close down this temptation; see with the eyes of your soul instead. You’ll be surprised at what you see.

Let me give some words of encouragement to those who've never attended the Tridentine Mass before. Please don't expect to be entertained! If you are expecting lots of interaction with your neighbor you will be disappointed. It is God-centered, not man-centered. All the emphasis is on Him, not on your being catered to or with whom you are attending Mass. I suggest that the first time you simply go and observe. Don't attempt to follow the missal. Watch in all

humbleness and piety. Compare the actions of the priest with your own frame of reference of the Masses you've known so that you can keep abreast of the actions occurring. Dress in your very best clothes. If you are a woman, wear a long dress – no slits or anything tight, and cover your head/hair with a hat or veil. If you are a man wear a suit and tie. No blue jeans, sneakers, shorts, and tank tops for anyone. Listen. See. Absorb. **If you have not gone to Confession to a traditional priest recently, don't go to Communion until you have done so.** Ask questions of the priest or the faithful after Mass. Be a sponge - absorb everything you can. If someone doesn't seem particularly interested in answering your questions continue to ask around. There will be people who will be happy to help you "get your sea legs." After a few Masses, pick up a missal and begin to read along. This is your active participation with the priest as he says the Mass. Just like moss on a rock, it will begin to grow on you. Don't try to understand it, just chalk it up to God's grace. If you are docile and sincere, I promise that this is exactly what you will experience. If you "don't get nothin' out of it", I respectfully submit that the problem is one of pride and the defect isn't in the Mass (know what I'm saying?). Attend every Sunday. Go to as many daily Masses as you can.

Attendance at Mass is the lifeblood of the spiritual life and the primary source of ammunition that you need to combat Satan and your hook. Without it, your soul will wither under the stress of the fighting and you will sink deeper into your addiction. Therefore, **it is key that you make Step 6 an integral part of your life and that you strive manfully to make a solid habit out of going to Mass and garnering every possible grace from it.** It has been called "the most beautiful thing this side of Heaven" and it is – once you are able to see the Mass for what it really is, in the supernatural realm.

'Nuf said. Let's move on to Step 7, Pilgrim.

STEP 7: ATTEND THE SACRAMENTS REGULARLY:

My fellow pilgrim-in-this-valley-of-tears, I am pleased that you've kept up with me to this point and I know that Our Lord is pleased with your efforts. Step 7 is going to continue the coverage of the sacraments that we began in Step 4 with Confession and a bit with Step 6, which encouraged receiving Holy Eucharist. In this step we will complete the discussion of those two sacraments and we will cover the other ones as well. God, being God, knew everything that our souls would need so He left us the tools that will heal and also those that will strengthen – but each of these gives us grace. Since the Catholic 12-Steps is designed to be an integral package to overcome the hook, we need to know what these tools are and how we can reap the fruits of each one to the best effect. So let's begin with a restatement of Step 7:

- 7. I will attend the Sacraments more regularly; completing any once-only ones such as Baptism or Matrimony, which are necessary to the state of my soul and circumstances, but more importantly going to Confession - especially when I have fallen back into my addiction but at least once a month and also regularly to receive Holy Communion.**

Once again, it's worth repeating: we cannot overcome our sinfulness, our addictions, our hooks, or anything else without God's grace. Our Lord rightfully stated, "*Without Me you can do nothing*". (Jn xv. 5) By ourselves we are zip, nada, nothing - no, less than nothing without God. The problem isn't that God won't give us grace. The problem is that we don't accept it. In other words, the problem isn't God. We are!

Using my little analogy of barnacles and hulls, here we are primarily concerned with greatly increasing the flow of those barnacles of grace past our hulls by more frequent reception of the sacraments. Later steps will focus on the job of making use of those barnacles to further enlarge and strengthen our hull but Step 7 is mostly a barnacle step since you can't make those improvements unless you have the raw materials to begin with. The Sanctifying Grace will increase our sanctity, which is just like increasing the rate, or size, of our ship enabling us to move further down the Sanctity Curve that I showed you previously. The Actual Graces will enable us to be healed and strengthened, depending on what God sees that we need moment by moment. Along with the Mass, the Sacraments are the most powerful sources of God's grace. Now, did you forget what a sacrament is? It is an outward sign instituted by Christ to give grace.

Here are the seven sacraments (just to refresh your memory in case you've forgotten what they are):

The Seven Sacraments:

- Baptism
- Confirmation
- Holy Orders
- Extreme Unction
- Matrimony
- Confession or Penance
- Holy Eucharist or Holy Communion

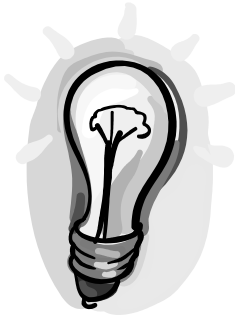
AN OVERVIEW: THE SACRAMENTS

When I was running the La Misma Nada Men's Support Group, I didn't need to go into much detail on the Sacraments because the men involved were well catechized, or taught, the truths of the Faith. Hopefully, this book will have a wider ranging audience so I believe it is necessary to cover some of the more basic points of the Sacraments for the benefit of those with a lesser level of understanding. As I stated above, a sacrament is an outward sign of an inward grace instituted by Christ. That means that Our Lord Jesus Christ Himself instituted, or began, all of the sacraments; they weren't some afterthought from Constantine or anyone else as the enemies of the Church pretend. As I've stated several times before, nothing gets into our intellects except through our senses. We have to feel/see/taste/smell/hear an action in order for our intellects to perceive or understand that action. Since we can't feel/see/taste/smell/hear grace there has to be something that our senses can perceive in order to realize that a grace, in this case the sacramental grace, is being conferred.



To further help our understanding, I borrowed an explanation from "The New St. Joseph Baltimore Catechism". We can think of how we get electricity in our homes. The source of the electricity is the dynamo or generator at the power generation station. I could go into the details of how motion in the presence of a magnetic field gives an electric current and draw you vector diagrams or show you the right-hand rule because of my electrical engineering background but all you need to understand is that this is the source of the electricity. The motion is obtained by any of several means whether coal, nuclear, photovoltaic, water, or whatever but this is just the means by which the generator produces the electric current, or electricity. There's a distribution network of substations, high-tension wires, transformers and the like. We see these visible signs when we drive down the street but we don't really care how it gets to our homes – just so it's there when we flip the light switch. Lastly, the electricity produces light, heat, or some other effect. Regardless of what the effect is, it is visible to us at least in the sense that we can see the light, feel the warmth, cook the food, or any of an almost limitless number of possibilities in our lives.





Analogously, in the sacraments, we have a source and that Source is Jesus Christ. He is the Dynamo that “created” the sacraments. His Passion was the means by which He did this. The electric current is the graces that we receive from the sacraments. The distribution network is the rituals, matter and form, and ministers of the sacraments. We can see the priest, hear his words, feel the water and oil, and taste the host. We probably don’t understand all of what he’s saying but we don’t care – his intentions are inherent in his actions and words. We know we need to go into the confessional to receive confession not baptism. We go to the communion rail to receive the Eucharist not Extreme Unction. All we need do is to “plug” into the “distribution network” in the right way and “flip the switch” in order for the “light” of the sacraments to “turn on”.

SACRAMENTS OF THE DEAD:

Now the Sacraments are broken down into two categories: Sacraments of the Dead and Sacraments of the Living. In this case, we mean “Spiritual” Death and “Spiritual” Living. We’ll talk about the “Living” sacraments in a bit. But those who are dead in sin by either having the stain of Original Sin (the way we are born) or the stain of Mortal Sin (e.g. the way we are when we are slaves to our hook) on their souls need the Sacraments of the Dead to obtain or restore Sanctifying Grace in their souls. They are “spiritually dead” at those moments in time. There are two Sacraments of the Dead: Baptism and Penance. As you’ve already seen, Penance is so important that it takes up three steps, at least indirectly, all on its own so I’ll only have a little to say about it here. You’ve already seen how Confession restores life to souls who are dead through mortal sin so instead I will focus on how Baptism gives spiritual life to those who have never had it.

In order for these dead souls to obtain Heaven, they need to be given spiritual life, or another way to say it is that they need to be reborn. As this is the only means by which this occurs, Baptism is ESSENTIAL to salvation. This is a moot point if you are a Catholic since Baptism is what makes you a Catholic to begin with but if you have never been baptized, get a hold of the nearest traditional priest and take the necessary instructions so that you finally become a member of the Mystical Body of Christ, that is, become a Catholic. Everything else that I have been telling you about the Mass, Confession, Communion, is TOTALLY WORTHLESS unless you have been baptized so, first things first, get baptized if this is indeed a requirement unfulfilled. “Why is this essential?” you might ask if you are a non-Catholic or maybe you just might have forgotten.

When we are born we do NOT have Sanctifying Grace in our souls. Instead, we have the mark or stain of Original Sin on our souls. Original Sin is the sin committed by Adam in the Garden of Eden when he disobeyed God’s command to avoid the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Besides having

his nature wounded and being kicked out of Paradise, all of his children lost the right to Heaven.

“Wherefore as by one man sin entered into this world, and by sin death; and so death passed upon all men, in whom all have sinned...But death reigned from Adam unto Moses, even over them also who have not sinned after the similitude of the transgression of Adam, who is a figure of him who was to come. But not as the offence, so also the gift. For if by the offence of one, many died; much more the grace of God, and the gift, by the grace of one man, Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many. And not as it was by one sin, so also is the gift. For judgment indeed was by one unto condemnation; but grace is of many offences, unto justification. For if by one man’s offence death reigned through one; much more they who receive abundance of grace, and of the gift, and of justice, shall reign in life through one, Jesus Christ.” (Rom v.12, 14-17)

There’s more that could be said about Baptism but it isn’t really needed for our discussion. Just “check the box” by getting it done and move on. I’ll save my comments on Penance for a bit later in this chapter. This brings us to the other category, the Sacraments of the Living.

SACRAMENTS OF THE LIVING:

As the name implies, these sacraments are for those who are spiritually alive. These are the remaining five sacraments: Confirmation, Holy Orders, Extreme Unction, Matrimony, and Holy Communion. The first one on the list, Confirmation, is not absolutely essential to your salvation but, since you’re reading this, you’re probably addicted to something just like I am and you can’t miss out on every opportunity for grace so make sure that you get confirmed the next time one of the traditional bishops is in town. What good does it do? Confirmation makes you a soldier of Christ and you receive the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost. You remember that line from the Book of Job, *“The life of man upon earth is a warfare.” (Job vii, 1)* don’t you? Sounds like just what anyone fighting a war against his hook would want to enlist for! Basically, it equips you with all of the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost, which are necessary helps you need as an adult to start to live a more virtuous life. Again, if your goal is to maximize the flow of God’s grace to strengthen your soul in order to overcome your hook and if Satan is using supernatural weapons in order to drag you into Hell, it only stands to reason that you need to use every supernatural weapon in God’s arsenal in order to get into Heaven. So don’t shortchange yourself by going into combat with only half of a basic load of ammo - get confirmed if you haven’t already.

I won’t mention Holy Orders or Extreme Unction, as these really aren’t germane to our discussion.

Matrimony, or the marriage between one man and one woman, on the other hand, needs a bit of a discussion. It is quite possible in this day and age of

widespread promiscuity that you might be living in a relationship that is, shall we say, defective with respect to the Church's teaching on marriage. It might be that it is adulterous or living in sin (shacking up) or one of the two of you is "divorced" and remarried. This is a touchy subject and if you have any questions about the legitimacy of your current relationship, you need to get in touch with a priest who will give you, maybe not the answer that you **want** to hear, but it will be the answer that you **need** to hear in order that you know exactly where you stand in God's eyes. Once you have that answer you'll need to act on that answer, my friend. Sorry, I told you it was touchy. If you've got your hackles raised over this, again, please contact a good solid priest. It's better that you go through life with your eyes opened rather than discovering things later down the road when you might find it more difficult to rectify the situation. **I say this purely out of charity for you, my friend! Please, please, please note:** If you are in one of these "defective" relationships, it is critical that you rectify that situation because the relationship is a most serious impediment to God's grace. In fact, it can be the relationship itself that drives the addiction. Once again, I apologize if what I'm saying is a bitter pill to swallow but, "*We ought to obey God rather than men*" (Acts 5: 29) and I have to make 100% sure that nobody gets the idea that he can "keep" the relationship and "lose" the addiction. Without doing so will, so to speak, leave a gaping hole in your ship's hull, so that any idea of growing in holiness while in the midst of a sinful relationship is akin to trying to make headway while you're taking on water. It just won't happen, matey.

MORTALLY SINFUL ATTACHMENTS WILL PREVENT GOD'S GRACE FROM REACHING YOUR SOUL; YOU MUST TREAT THESE ATTACHMENTS AS THE FIRST ADDICTION TO CONQUER BEFORE ATTEMPTING TO TACKLE THE "REAL" ADDICTION. AT THE MINIMUM, YOU MUST ADDRESS THIS ALONG WITH ADDRESSING YOUR HOOK. IF THE SITUATION IS TOO ENTANGLED FOR YOU, CONSULT WITH YOUR PRIEST AND HE WILL GIVE YOU THE GUIDANCE ON HOW YOU NEED TO PROCEED!

THE REVOLVING DOOR:

I don't want to belabor that point so let's move on. The sacraments mentioned to this point have been one-time deals. You receive them once and that's it (Matrimony being the exception in some cases but I think you get the idea). The remaining two sacraments, Confession and Holy Eucharist, are NOT meant to be received once. They are meant to be received very frequently - no less than monthly for Confession and weekly or even daily, if possible for Holy Eucharist. These two sacraments, used in tandem, will be the "hospital" and the "armory" in your combat against your specific hook.

CONFESSION – THE HOSPITAL:

Why is frequent Confession necessary? Friend, overcoming my addiction was a lot like trying to stand up on an ice-covered pond - I did more falling down than

standing up! You too will fall - repeatedly. This is not to discourage your efforts but just to let you know what you are in for. Satan wants your soul in Hell and he's had that hook in you for a good long while. Do not think that he's going to admit defeat easily and just stop tugging on your hook. **He's a sore loser and he will fight you tooth and nail to keep you right there on the ground with his foot on your neck!** Expect it! You have to fight and I mean exactly that - you will fight him. Confession is the hospital where you get your wounds healed so you can enter once again into the fray. Accept the fact that in this combat you will be wounded but steel your will to continue in your resolution to overcome your hook and, over time, God's grace received in the Confessional will begin to make itself felt in your life. I know because I've seen its effects in my own life. Persevere, my friend, persevere!

Here let me add some advice on two tricks that Satan uses to get us to stop going to Confession. The first trick is to make us feel embarrassed. "What's Fr. So-and-so going to think if I have to confess that I committed such-and-such sin again and again and again?" Look, the priest doesn't know who you are, and if he did, he doesn't care. He's acting in the place of Christ, the Divine Physician, and he's only interested in healing your soul. Any feelings of embarrassment are just Satan trying to use your fear of human respect to keep you out of the "box".

The other thing to be on guard against is despair. That's the feeling that it's pointless or hopeless to keep going to Confession because you keep committing the same mortal sins. "*Many say to my soul: There is no salvation for him in his God*", (Ps iii, 3) is a thought that may very well enter into your mind, especially after having relapsed into your hook for the umpteenth time. My advice here is that this is a wonderful moment to exercise the virtue of the saints - humility. The problem here is one of pride - that we are leaning too heavily on our own strength to overcome our hook and not enough on God. He wants us to rely on Him and when we don't, He permits us to fall into despair in order to humble us. These are the moments to act as the publican in the temple who said, "*O God, be merciful to me, a sinner*". (Luke xviii, 13) They are also critical times because you are on the crest of either victory or defeat. You see, my fellow comrade-in-arms, prayer and sin cannot peacefully co-exist. Either the sin will leave or you will stop praying. Humble yourself, admit your weakness, and let God carry you.

HOLY EUCHARIST – THE ARMORY:



If Confession can be looked upon as a "healing" operation, Holy Eucharist or Communion, can be looked upon as an "arming" (as in "to arm or load a weapon with ammunition") operation. It is true that the Mass itself is loaded with graces but receiving Our Lord in Holy Communion is where you can really capitalize on the grace. This is what really gives you access to the base armory, so to speak, where your soul will receive new spiritual weapons to

raise you in sanctity giving you greater strength against your hook. We talked before when we were discussing virtue how a ship returning to port would be strengthened with newer and more powerful cannons, powder, personnel, and equipment so I don't need to cover that again. Just understand that the "Admiralty" knows what the SS My Soul needs and He will provide it to me.

At this point, I need to stress that because the Mass is the greatest prayer and the Eucharist is the greatest Sacrament it only stands to reason that attending Mass with worthy and devoted reception of Holy Communion must be the greatest source of graces we can obtain for use against our hooks. Therefore, it is CRITICAL that you maximize the frequency that you receive Holy Communion. With it, you will grow in sanctity to become a large and powerful 1st Rater, bristling with spiritual "cannons" and capable of sailing the "Seven Seas". Without it, you will stay a spiritual "dinghy" that will be capsized by every wave so it can't even leave the dock. Let a word to the wise be sufficient.

Well, in the beginning this "rearming" at Holy Communion will mean that you will achieve very small victories over your hook. The Admiralty doesn't install a huge 100 pound Parrot onboard a small boat, you know? Take it one day at a time. Each one of these small victories will make you just a little bit stronger for the next battle against it.

This increase in grace is like the paint on The Rock that also I talked about when we were discussing virtues. Each layer of paint adds an imperceptible increase in the overall thickness. It's only with frequent and repeated coats can you perceive the growth with the naked eye. The same thing applies with the growth in your sanctity due to Holy Communion. Remember the Sanctity Curve and how low we are on it at the beginning? You will not (barring a miracle, of course) be able to "see" a growth in yourself right away but give it time. As long as you are a consistent and frequent communicant you will be growing spiritually.

Now, to be sure, you will suffer defeats to your hook but consider them as temporary setbacks; pick yourself up, dust yourself off, and get right back into the

fight. You want to establish a regular cycle of going to Confession (even when you are NOT in mortal sin) to heal your soul and then receiving Holy Communion to strengthen your soul on a regular (read that as “at least weekly”) basis you will find that these defeats will come farther and farther apart. This regular cycle will serve to both add to your strengths and to heal your weaknesses with the end result of additional victories. The number and size of these victories will continue to increase to the point where you will start to gain mastery over your hook. You will know that you are at this point when you are more often in the state of grace than in the state of sin. Finally, as you persevere in this routine, your attachment to your hook will be broken; the line will be cut. You will hardly, if ever, succumb to the hook. Now please understand that the hook will **ALWAYS** be there but the attachment or overwhelming pull from it will be broken. To be certain, you will suffer the temptations of your hook throughout the rest of your life, but they will become opportunities where you will gain grace and give glory to God instead of opportunities where you will fall into sin.

So much for the pep talk, let’s dig into the details of Holy Communion. Now, in Step 6 I went into considerable detail about the Mass and much of that information applies to the Eucharist, too. Although closely united, the Mass is not the Eucharist and the Eucharist is not the Mass so I need to tell you some things that I didn’t cover there that are unique to Holy Communion.

Let’s begin our discussion by restating a point I made a few paragraphs back - that Holy Communion is the greatest of the Sacraments. Baptism is the most important because without it we have no chance of salvation but the Eucharist is the greatest because we actually receive God in it. Oh, to be sure, we receive an increase in sanctifying grace in all of the sacraments but it is **ONLY** in Holy Communion that we physically receive Him and here we receive Him complete and entire: Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity every time we communicate. Now that’s a point worth pondering over. Our Protestant friends, regardless of their “Communion Service”, do NOT have this. They will talk about “symbolically” or “for those who believe” but when it comes down to brass tacks, they don’t really and truly receive Our Lord – and they will admit it. Too bad for them! This is one of the greatest benefits we have as Catholics because with our Holy Communion Christ is contained, offered, and received. He is truly Emmanuel, or God with us, because how much more “with us” can He possibly get than to be “within us”? There is no symbolism or “if I just have faith enough” about it. Here, under the appearances of bread and wine is Our Lord, *“I am the living bread, which came down from heaven.” (John vi: 51)*



Certainly we should all know that Christ is present in the appearance of bread and wine but this brings up the question of how does Christ get “into” the host and the wine since they don’t change in appearance at the consecration? It’s

true that, with miracles excepted, there is no physical change to either the bread or wine but in order to answer the question, it's necessary for us to talk a bit about substance and appearance. I'll only skim the surface on this topic so I hope I don't confuse anyone on this. It's pretty deep stuff actually and there are others who can give a much better explanation but, since they're not writing this book, I guess you'll have to be satisfied with this one.

Anyway, every object has a nature or what is called its "substance". It answers the question, "What is it?" It's those qualities that make an object a writing pen and not a pencil or a chair, for example. That means that this object has the nature of "pen-ness" for lack of a better term. Its substance is being a pen. It answers the question, "What is it?" It is a pen.

Although many objects are pens by virtue of their substance, they all have unique characteristics. They have differences about them in their appearance that identifies each one. Even if they are made from the same lot in the factory there will be at least minor differences between them. This one has a scratch at one spot and that one has a bit of dirt clogging the roller, etc. These are their physical characteristics. We say that these are their "accidents" or "appearances".

The bread and wine used at Mass also have substance and appearance. The bread is made from wheat flour, molded in the shape of a circle, and is flat. These are its appearances and it is the substance of bread. The wine is made from grapes, contains alcohol, and is a fluid. These are its appearances and it is the substance of wine. That is, until the consecration. At those wonderful words "*Hoc est enim corpus meum*", God changes the substance of the host from being just bread into being His own Body and Blood. It's what It is. The same goes for the wine when its words of consecration are said when it also becomes "It". Nothing about the accidents change; the entire miracle occurs because the substance has been changed. We call this action "transubstantiation". Think of "trans" as to "change or cross-over" like in transportation where an object is changed from one location to another or it crosses over from one place to another; think of "substantiation" as referring to the substance of a thing. Therefore, we get a "change of substance" during transubstantiation. Big word. Bigger miracle.

SACRAMENT OF LOVE, SACRAMENT OF STRENGTH:

So much for technical explanations, I hope it wasn't too deep for you because now we get to the heart of the Eucharist and by that I really mean the Sacred Heart. Understanding all those fancy terms is only important for you to comprehend the serious differences between the Eucharist we receive and other religions' (save the Orthodox) Communion Services. What I'm really driving at is for you to realize the intense love that Our Lord has for us; a constant love of such yearning that, not only did He die for love of us but, He ardently desires to

become one with us. That's what lovers do – they seek to be intimately united with one another in every conceivable way. I don't just mean in the sexual way; sure, a man and a woman fall in love and they get married. Their most intense physical expression is the marital embrace but there are other ways that lovers become intimately united. They share their innermost thoughts and dreams with each other. In many cases they even begin to take on one another's appearance! Don't believe me? Take a look at all of the older married couples you know and see if you don't begin to notice how they begin to look like brother and sister – as if they were related by blood as well as by marriage. Love demands intimate unity as completely as possible.

Christ does the exact same thing with our souls. He is the Lover Who always deeply desires to be united with His beloved, that is, us. Of course He can do this in a purely spiritual way but we would never know it since we can't feel grace. Remember the part about the intellect knowing only what the senses perceive? Therefore, this union has to be performed in a physical way, so He chose to become food that we eat since food unites itself with us by literally becoming a part of what consumes it. Bread and wine being universally available staples of every diet, these are the means by which our Beloved chooses to come to us.

I have heard from many people throughout the years either a lament that they never grow holier or that they really get nothing out of receiving the Eucharist. In other words, they see it only as a mechanical aspect of going to Mass – they're just going through the motions. I suppose many couples go through this type of feeling as well. The problem, and that's what it is, is not due to some defect on Our Lord's part or even on the part of the priest saying Mass. Like all couples of lovers, there can be a difference in the level or amount of love felt between the partners. You could call it a difference in ardor or strength of our love. In this case, the problem is ourselves. We are the ones that, maybe not have fallen out of love, but we are the ones who lack the ardor that Our Beloved has for us. If this is sadly the case, my friend, we should really examine ourselves to see who or what we really are in love with. In the beginning of your struggle against your hook I would certainly expect that you would notice this "lack of ardor". That's OK and nothing to be worried about. If you weren't in love with your hook and therefore yourself, you wouldn't be reading this, now would you? Looking forward into the future, as you progress further and further into sanctity, you should, and you will, strive to have the same desire for this intimate union between your soul and Christ's due to your own ardent love for Him. Call it "devotion". Through your increased devotion you will be able to draw on the gifts that your Beloved will bestow on you, for certainly lovers give gifts to one another. One of these gifts will be a greater measure of His strength in proportion to your own devotion to Him. This will be the barometer, so to speak, of your spiritual progress against your hook and your rise up the Sanctity Curve.

In closing out this chapter on Step 7, I want to share with you some of my devotion to the Blessed Sacrament. In the beginning my love of the Eucharist was paltry at best – simply going up and receiving a small wafer with my thanksgivings being mechanical to say the least. Since beginning this voyage, however, I hope I've at least gained something beyond just an intellectual understanding of the Sacrament of God's Love. I wish I could express in words my yearnings as I approach the communion rail and I wish that I could maintain the plateau of the closeness of my best thanksgivings upon returning to my pew but this fool lacks the skill. Instead, let me quote two portions of the Sequence for the Feast of Corpus Christi (Body of Christ), called the Lauda Sion. It sums things up as best as I have been able to find:

1. Sion, lift thy voice and sing: Praise thy Savior and thy King.
Praise with hymns thy Shepherd true.
2. All thou canst, do thou endeavor, Yet thy praise can equal
never Such as merits thy great King.
3. See today before us laid, The living and life-giving Bread!
Theme for praise and joy profound.
4. The same which at the sacred board
Was, by our incarnate Lord, Giv'n to His Apostles round.
5. Let the praise be loud and high; Sweet and tranquil be the
joy Felt today in every breast.
- ...
23. Jesu! Shepherd of the sheep! Thou Thy flock in safety keep.
Living Bread! Thy life supply. Strengthen us, or else we die: Fill us
with celestial grace!
24. Thou Who feedest us below! Source of all we have or know!
Grant that with Thy Saints above, Sitting at the feast of love, We
may see Thee face to face. Amen. Alleluia.

This is what it's all about, folks - especially verses 23 and 24 and most especially "Strengthen us, or else we die". This is why it is necessary, nay, mandatory, that you worthily receive Holy Communion as frequently as possible. **With it - you will conquer your hook. Without it - you will die.**

That completes Step 7. If you've made it to this point I don't doubt your patience and perseverance. Now, pay attention because I want you to do something a little bit different in reading this book. Instead of going in the usual fashion in book reading to the next page, which is Step 8 on Near Occasions of Sin, I'd like you to go to *STEP 11: INCREASE MY SANCTITY THROUGH PRAYER*. If you remember back in *OVERVIEW OF THE CATHOLIC 12-STEPS: THE HOUSE BY THE SEA*: I had listed the first part of Step 11 as 11A and it was grouped with Steps 6 and 7, which are "Barnacle" steps, that is, steps to maximize the flow of grace to your soul. In Step 11A you will begin to start doing the fundamental daily prayers necessary for the war against your hook. I'll see you there; in the meantime, know that my prayers are with you. God bless!

STEP 8: NEAR OCCASIONS OF SIN

Welcome back, my fellow Prodigal Son, from that little excursion to Step 11A. I congratulate you on keeping up with me to this point. It's been an intense struggle I am sure, but we both know that Our Heavenly Father is pleased with your efforts to return to Him and is even now "preparing the fatted calf and placing a ring upon your finger", so to speak with His graces. I pray that you have had your share of consolations and are beginning to feel that you can succeed at snipping the line to your hook right up next to your "gills". You're saying the Nothingness Itself Prayer daily, going to Confession and Mass frequently, receiving Holy Communion whenever you possibly can, have started doing daily prayers – especially the Rosary, still have a strong resolve to succeed, and are beginning to know a bit more about your temperament and your weaknesses. If this is indeed the case, that is excellent because for the next three steps we are going to work on strengthening your soul itself. Just as the growing pains you experienced as a child caused you a bit of discomfort, I suspect that this growth will also cause you some discomfort – even pain. I'm not going to sugarcoat this, my dear friend. The process of building up your soul by strengthening all three faculties is going to be the real test of your resolve to beat your hook because here you will be fighting against the enemy who is always with you – yourself. Step 8 is geared to strengthening that faculty of the soul, the memory. This step, along with Step 9, are what I consider to be the combat steps of the entire Catholic 12-Steps because of the intense personal struggle that you will have to wage in order to win. Don't despair, however. God and His grace are with you. Having an iron will determined to succeed as well as a humble and contrite heart, will make you irresistible to Our Beloved Lord Who will pull you along through every battle. Step 10, which you should find to be not nearly so difficult, will complete the trio of steps designed to strengthen your soul. But now, here is where the struggle begins; here is where you begin to transform your soul from its subjugation to your appetites, to where it has mastery over them. Here is where God will get His glory from your hook. Here is where your victory lies against your hook. Here is where your salvation lies through your hook. So, take a deep breath and let's plunge on in with a restating of Step 8:

- 8. I will identify my own near occasions of sin; I will work to avoid them. I will begin to immediately avoid those that I can now and I will strive to be able to avoid the difficult ones in the long term.**

STRATEGY FOR STEP 8:

In order to be successful in Step 8, I think it's important to outline our strategy before we actually get started. Simply put, the ultimate objective of this step is to strengthen the memory so that it no longer provides the mental stimulation of past sins. We will do this by first identifying the near occasions of sin (from here on, "NOS" and I say it with a short o as in "noss", whether it's singular or plural) that cause us to fall to our hook. Next, we will mentally categorize these NOS as

to whether we can overcome them quickly and easily or if it will take time and effort to overcome them. Then we will begin the lengthy and difficult process of altering our behavior so that we have as little contact with our NOS as possible. This will require us to maintain constant guard over our minds, our hearts, and our senses (especially the eyes). All the while, we will be striving to stay in the state of grace for longer and longer periods of time so we are not pulled into the state of mortal sin. Because we are so weak, it's important that we work to AVOID temptation as opposed to FIGHT temptation because the strength of our wills is no match for the strength of our bodies; this is the only way that we can win against our hooks. Staying in the state of grace for increasingly longer periods of time will be our yardstick by which we measure whether we are winning or losing this war. St. Paul does a pretty good job of summing up our strategy when he says, *"I say then, walk in the spirit, and you shall not fulfil the lusts of this flesh. For the flesh lusteth against the spirit and the spirit against the flesh; for these are contrary one to another; so that you do not the things that you would."* (Gal 5: 16-17)

I can imagine what might be going through your head, "This all sounds logical but it also sounds pretty wimpy. Why is this so difficult?" Well, I suppose you might call this a "wimp's" strategy but I think it's necessary to understand how formidable an opponent we're up against. If you remember our discussion awhile back about Original Harmony and how the soul is supposed to be master over the body, we are now starting the process of re-establishing that mastery of the soul over the body – more likely, of the sissy over the bully. So the first difficulty we have is that we now have the weak "spiritual man" going into total "mutiny" against the strong "carnal man". Hmmm, a mutiny against the mutineer! Don't think for a second that the carnal man is about to give up possession of the ship without a struggle! Remember that the hook has given us very pleasurable memories of our past experiences involving it. In many cases, these memories can trigger release of chemicals into our bloodstream meaning that we are literally fighting our own bodies! There are also certain people, places, and things that lead us to the sins of our hook and they may be integral parts of our daily lives so we can't just snap our fingers and "Poof!" they just disappear. This process may require changing fundamental aspects of our existence such as how our family lives, who our friends are, what we do for a living, or even having to move away and these are not private actions but public ones. And because they are public, other people will be affected. There will be some reaction from them - either positive or negative, and you must be prepared to deal with these reactions. These three reasons make this a very intense ordeal that, without grace, is completely impossible. I hope you can easily see why I've used the term "warfare" to describe the battle against our hooks. As a brief aside, our bodies and the world around us are two of the three sources of temptations. The third is Satan and we won't see much from him until The Counterattack is launched. That only comes after we've had some success.

TEMPTATIONS:

Speaking of temptations, let's talk about them for a moment. If you remember back when I was discussing the Soul and Original Harmony I brought up the situation of the camel's nose trying to get up under the tent being like temptations. The only way to keep the camel out is to fight him from the very beginning when he first attempts to slip his nose up underneath the wall. This is when the camel is weakest and we are our strongest. If we resist him at that moment we can prevent the tent from getting flipped over but if we delay, we are certain of defeat by Mr. Camel. Truth be told, the absolute most effective way of keeping the camel out of the tent is to not pitch the tent near any camels to begin with.



This is the idea that we are going to follow – we're going to move our tent away from the camels! Once we have learned the ways in which we are tempted, in other words, when we have learned what Satan and our concupiscence already know about us, we are going to do everything we can to minimize the temptations that we experience by avoiding the sources of those temptations. This is the crucial aspect of our strategy for Step 8; the enemy's cannons can't sink you if you don't come into range! Now, we can't avoid them all but we will avoid those that we can so as to have the least number of temptations possible. The fewer combats we have to engage in against our hook means the fewer are our chances for defeat. The fewer the chances for defeat equates into longer periods of time that we are in the state of grace and as long as we are in the state of grace we continue to grow in sanctity meaning that more barnacles of grace flow past our ship's hull and more of them become attached to our increasingly stronger and larger hull. This buys us the time necessary to make us even stronger for the temptations that do occur. Therefore we need to do everything possible to keep in the state of grace for as long as possible. The hardest part is to recognize our own vulnerability to the temptations of our hook – even the slightest ones, and to instantly run from them when they occur – maybe even literally. We have to resist all temptations of our hook - preferably by not being tempted in the first place. That may sound like a coward's way but please understand, friend. Because these temptations are pleasing to us in a carnal sense, there is always the carnal side of us that delights in them and doesn't want to avoid them. It is extremely easy to delay flying from them or because we want to revel in "just one more glance". In underestimating our weakness we will fall: *"He who loves danger will perish in it."* (Sirach iii. 25) Don't expect God to help you when you go ahead and pitch your tent near any camels.

This brings up one last point on temptations. What do I do for temptations that I cannot avoid? These occasions are going to occur. In our licentious society

these types of temptations are part and parcel of our everyday lives. In these cases you can rightfully expect that God will give you the necessary graces provided that you cooperate with them: *“And God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that which you are able: but will make issue, that you may be able to bear it.”* (1Cor x: 13) Notice the “...may be able to...” and not the “...will be able to...” so there’s still a certain amount of effort required on our parts even for these unexpected situations.

NEAR OCCASIONS OF SIN (NOS):

That’s enough on temptations and camels in general. Let’s get specific. We need to be able to identify our own camels, so to speak. We need to know what are our own circumstances that cause us to sin with our hook. That way we can be better prepared so that we don't get "reeled in" so often. Let's get precise for a moment and define what a "near occasion of sin" is. According to The Concise Catholic Dictionary, "It is an external circumstance or condition which gives one the opportunity and inducement to sin". That is, it is any person, place, or thing that tempts us to commit a sin by giving us the opportunity to sin, and for our purposes, to sin in our hook. Essentially, NOS are the situations that give Satan the opportunity to "set the hook" of our addiction by tempting us, and then for him to "reel us in" to the state of sin when we do, in fact, commit that sin. Let's look at an example to help everyone understand the concept.

Let's say that I'm an alcoholic and that I have a brother John who likes to drink beer. He has no qualms about drinking beer in front of me any time I go over to his house and he always offers me one any time when his wife Cathy isn't around. Because my will is weak, any time he offers me a cold one I always accept it and end up getting drunk - which is my hook. Now in this case, going over to John's house when Cathy's not around is a NOS to me because I know it sets up the situation where I will be tempted and most likely end up committing the mortal sin of drunkenness. Now let’s say that even if Cathy's around, John will probably get me drunk over at his house. The NOS changes slightly and it is just simply my going over to his house at any time. Lastly, we'll put one last wrinkle into the situation and that is that John gets me drunk any time I see him. Now, the NOS is my brother John!

In each case, I have to avoid the NOS - whether it's visiting John's house without Cathy, visiting John's house at all, or just visiting John. If I know that a NOS will likely cause me to commit sin, then I must avoid that NOS. In fact, it is a sin for me to unnecessarily expose myself to my own NOS to the same severity as the sin that I will probably commit. In our example of John and Cathy, as drunkenness is a mortal sin, so is engaging in each NOS listed above.

So, if I'm addicted to masturbation/pornography and I can't resist the peep shows, going near the adult bookstore is a mortal sin. If I'm addicted to

gambling, going to the racetrack is likewise a mortal sin. I hope that clarifies what a NOS is and the absolute importance of avoiding them.

Next, each of us needs to identify what our own particular NOS are. Let's be honest with ourselves, my friend. If you've read to this point, whatever your particular addiction is, I'll bet that you have a pretty good idea of what persons, places, and things lead you to commit your own particular sin. If not, spending some serious time in assessing your own circumstances are definitely in order. In fact, take that as an order to do just like you did when you were examining your conscience for your first confession. Find some quiet time and place, put yourself in the presence of God and ask for His guidance, and, without making this exercise itself a NOS, meditate on what persons, places, and things enable you to sin because of your hook.

To give you a better idea of the level of detail that we're talking about, I'm going to use some examples from La Misma Nada in outline form of NOS for someone whose hook is pornography or masturbation:

Potential NOS for Pornography/Masturbation

- Pornography itself
- Being alone (home, business trips)
- Shower/naked or exposed (always wear pajamas)
- Internet/computer (especially being alone)
- Visual stimuli: Very strong in men (in public places like malls or gyms, TV, newspapers, women's clothing catalogs)
- Pacifying emotions (Anger, frustration, boredom)
- Friends/Colleagues/Spouse
- Idleness or too much free time
- Locations (clubs, stores, theaters)
- The "Sexy Secretary" at work
- The "Cycle"

What's the "cycle"? The "cycle" is a man's semen production, which fills a man's seminal vesicles to capacity in about 72 hours. Physiological pressure builds for release and hormones are also released to increase sensitivity to stimuli. Remember I told you about having to physically fight your own body in some cases? Now, permit me to go down a small rabbit trail for those who profess that masturbation is "necessary" and therefore, "normal" so it can't be a sin. I reply that this pressure naturally relieves itself through nocturnal emissions or in the urine as well as over time the impact of the physiological pressure and heightened sensitivity diminish so it's not like your head is going to explode if you don't get "relief". This is similar to having a craving for a certain food that is unobtainable. This craving also diminishes the longer it remains unsatisfied.

From this example of potential NOS, it should be clear that they occur in many varied ways so our attempt at avoiding NOS requires us to remain constantly on guard. We have to be vigilant over our memories as well as the affections of our hearts. In addition, we will need to guard against the stimuli that our senses receive from our everyday lives. Expect parts of this to be difficult, my friend! Sometimes in order to avoid NOS, this may require us to change the friends we hang around with, our usual "haunts" or the places we frequent, and it will almost certainly require us to change our personal habits.

BREAKING UP IS HARD TO DO

Having determined what your principle NOS are you may have come to the conclusion that there are certain people that are the instigators or "enablers" who cause you to fall into your sinful hook. This can create a sticky situation since these can be family members, friends, or work colleagues. "How can I give them up?" you might very well be asking.

Don't forget that when we are addicted to a sinful hook, we love the hook more than we love God. Jesus tells us, *"For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a man's enemies shall be they of his own household. He that loveth father or mother more than me, **is not worthy of me**; and he that loveth son or daughter more than me, **is not worthy of me**. And he that taketh not up his cross, and followeth me, **is not worthy of me**. He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that shall lose his life for my sake, shall find it."* (Mt. x: 35-39)

Remember that I told you that this was combat! What Our Lord is saying in this passage is that we cannot love ANYTHING more than we love God if we want to save our souls. He includes the things that we have a normal and natural affection for (e.g. family members) and they are NOT excluded from His demands that He be the first beloved of our hearts. He is also telling us that we can expect that there will be a tension or conflict between the natural affections of man's life (the "finding" of the carnal things of "life") and the salvation of his soul (the "losing his life" in order to obtain the spiritual things of eternal "life"). Lastly, He admonishes us that if we do not "take up" the cross of combating our sinful selves, we are not worthy of heaven. That's pretty heavy stuff but *"He that hath ears to hear, let him hear."* (Mt xi: 15) I hope that this serves to strengthen all of us in making this, and other, difficult resolutions in our lives. We'll get back to the actual making of your resolution in a moment but for now let's continue our discussion of those hard-to-eliminate NOS.

There is a good likelihood that one or more of them cannot be eliminated immediately, either because you have an attachment to them or there is some overriding "political" reason that you cannot cut them from your life - at least not right away. Fine. I'm simply asking you to make the resolution; I'm not asking

you to figure out how to carry it out! Instead, I want you to work on those NOS that are easily done, either by virtue of their being "private" NOS that others won't notice or ones that you might be able to enlist others, say a spouse, to help you with. Remember that this is a combat for your soul. A wise general knows the objectives that he can seize and the ones where the enemy is too strong to overcome. Pick your battles wisely. It is better to begin in a small way that grows to success than it is to begin in a grand way and lose heart because you try too much. In this, I strongly urge you to get the advice of a good spiritual director who knows your soul and can provide you with the objective guidance you need. If you don't have one, please feel free to contact us through the blessedmargaret.org website with your zip code and we will provide you with contact information for a traditional priest who will be happy to assist you.

The point here, and you'll hear this again and again, is to: BEGIN SIMPLY AND SIMPLY BEGIN!!!!!!

WHITE RABBITS

In the last section I spoke of "attachments" to NOS that we weren't ready to give up. So what, exactly, is an "attachment"? Well, in the 5-day Ignatian Retreat circles, this is termed a "White Rabbit" and we all have one or more of them. The story of why they are called White Rabbits is the story of Little Johnny. Now I'll probably miss some of the details that my retreat masters have told but this is my version, which I hope captures the essence of what an attachment is:

Little Johnny went to Mass one day with his family and the sermon was on giving up toys for the missions. Little Johnny's Mommy asked him if he was ready to give up his toys to help the poor children overseas who had no toys and Johnny said that he was ready to give them up to please God and to help the children. "Great", says Mommy, "We can gather them up when we get home". Johnny, still full of enthusiasm from the sermon nods his little head. They get home and Mommy says, "OK, Little Johnny, go get your toys" and Little Johnny goes to the bedroom and brings back a big armload of his toys. There's the broken GI Joe, the old books, even a ball bat and glove. "Looks good, Little Johnny", says Mommy, "Go back and empty out your toy chest". Little Johnny dashes back into the bedroom while Mommy boxes the first batch into bags and boxes. This time, Little Johnny comes back a little slower with the second batch. Mommy takes these and proceeds to box them up while asking, "Do you have any more, Little Johnny?" "Nope, that's it, Mommy", he replies, dropping the last armload. "Are you sure?" she asks. "What's that you're holding behind your back, Little Johnny?" she inquires, noticing that Little Johnny has both hands clutching something. Little Johnny sheepishly pulls out his little stuffed white rabbit - his favorite bedtime buddy. "Aren't you going to give him up too to help the poor children overseas?" asks Mommy with that look that mothers give to their children when they already know the answer to the question asked. "I can't", mutters Little Johnny, "I can't give up White Rabbit".

Just like Little Johnny who, in spite of his desire to do good, could not get himself to give up the thing that he prized most, we all have our own White Rabbits that we are not prepared to give up. I sincerely suggest that you do not try to give up your "White Rabbit" at the start. Give up another toy. Because this is so critical, you need to start with the easy ones and work up to the harder ones. In other words: **BEGIN SIMPLY AND SIMPLY BEGIN!!!!**

RESOLVE TO AVOID YOUR NOS:

You've made fine progress here, my friend. You've determined who, what, when, where, and why are your NOS; now it's time to make a resolution to avoid them whenever possible. I am confident that you are filled with zeal to amend your life and to conquer your hook, so this resolution is easy for you. Do it just like you made your Act of the Will to Succeed where you resolved to quit committing the act of the hook itself completely. You can make it in any way that suits your style or temperament just so long as it is done with humility, conviction, and permanence. You can write it out as a contract to yourself, tell it to your spouse, throw out or burn the offending objects, or whatever. You can commit yourself to doing things in stages if you want to, declaring certain NOS to be avoided immediately and possibly asking for His assistance on the difficult ones, which you will add to the list as God gives you lights to see how they are to be accomplished. You might commit to only the here-and-now ones leaving the future ones to a second, future resolution. Whatever works for you. I suggest you repeat your resolution periodically when you are in Church before the Blessed Sacrament or at home in front of a crucifix or favorite saint's statue like the Blessed Virgin. Maybe others have ideas on a "best" way to make this resolution. I'm open to suggestion but I think you just need to do it and really be ready to give up whatever is necessary.

Once having made your resolution to avoid your NOS, it becomes time to implement breaking free from them. This will be an on-going activity and I think that you will find that, as time goes by, the God's grace will make this NOS-avoidance a habit, just like the virtues that you have been working on making a habit. Also, you will find that beneath the NOS that you initially identified is a secondary layer, if you will, of NOS that aren't directly connected to your hook but are connected to the NOS that are connected to your hook. These are the hidden means by which Satan can use to re-establish the line to your hook, if you fail to persevere to the end. This means that this step never really ends. As you grow in sanctity you will recognize these secondary NOS and will want to avoid these as well.

Lastly, let me recap this step. Because our memories are filled with the experiences of our past sins, there are associations between those experiences and the persons, places, and things that enabled those sins. Whenever we encounter those NOS, our memory stirs up desire for the hook. This means that this faculty of our soul is a participant in those sins. In order to free our

memories we have to keep the conscious part of our memory free from thoughts about our hook. It would be convenient if we just had to fill our memories with new holy experiences that drove out these sinful thoughts but this is unfortunately not the case. Instead, we have to struggle against them, not by fighting them but by avoiding them so that they come into our consciousness as infrequently as possible. We cannot hope to fight temptations head-to-head because our souls are still subjugated by the carnal man and we will lose every time we openly confront him. Our hope is to avoid our NOS as best we can so that the graces we gain through our activities in the other steps has time to bear fruit within our souls. This only happens when we are in, and stay in, the state of grace. The length of time staying in the state of grace is a good yardstick on your progress and developing strong habits of avoiding your NOS is one of the two most important (and difficult) steps you will take that will bear the fruit of ever-increasing amounts of time continually in that state of grace. However, this leaves us one little problem. I've told you to avoid your NOS...

...BUT NOW WHAT DO I DO WITH MY TIME?

This is a good question that very well might be running through your head at this very moment. As they say, nature abhors a vacuum so if you empty out your life of your NOS, what's to replace them?

Certainly you don't want to replace one hook with another and you will use a certain amount of time doing the spiritual activities of the other steps. Besides, those things however, to answer this question we're going to go back to the basic philosophy behind the Catholic 12-Steps, as I've discussed them here in "The Hook and I". I've tried to present a program that is a spiritual solution to a spiritual problem but does that mean that I want you to start dressing in sackcloth and ashes, whip yourself with cords, and do nothing else all day but pray? Far from it! Remember that you have a physical body and that only through your physical senses can anything get into your intellect, which is part of your soul. Another way of putting that is that the physical realm is the means of influencing the spiritual realm, or as it's more commonly put, grace builds upon nature.

In this case, **we are going to use every natural means at our disposal that is not anti-Catholic to occupy the "space" left by avoiding our NOS.** I go into much more detail in the chapter on Step 10 about Catholic Culture and how you need to start incorporating elements of that Catholic Culture into your life. You should get a lot of ideas there but for now, let me simply state this general principle: **you should substitute other activities and routines into your life to break the habits that you have from your NOS so that you can replace them with new habits that are good, if not virtuous.**

Let's have some examples. You're an alcoholic who walks past a favorite tavern on the way to the bus stop when going home after work. This is a NOS you need to avoid. Change your routine by going a different path. "It's the only way to get

there,” you retort. Take the subway, drive your car, carpool, or re-arrange your workday so that another alternative exists. See? Where there’s a will there’s a way.

Here’s a second example. Your hook is overeating and you’re lonely because you are retired with lots of time on your hands. Get out of the house more. Take up bicycling or walking. Go to the pool or gym (unless temptations of the eyes will be a problem there). Get a job. Volunteer at the hospital, crisis pregnancy center, library, school, etc. Join a club and become active there. Like to cook and that’s part of the problem? Volunteer at a soup kitchen or meals for the elderly so that your talent is put to good use but you’re too busy to stuff yourself.

For a general example that I think should apply to all of us, **get busy and get tired**. Having too much time and energy on our hands is pretty much akin to pitching your tent right next to the camel. Do things that are physical insofar as your health allows; do things that are productive and not time-wasters. Be creative and don’t be afraid to be a copycat of someone else’s good ideas. Get the help of a trusted “buddy” to work with. Maintain a Catholic focus ever before your eyes so that your substitutes will take on a spiritual aspect and you’ll be fine.

What not to do? Never anything that is sinful. Never anything that is “virtual”. You’ll see why in Step 10. Don’t substitute one hook for another; get immersed in your substitutes to inculcate new and better habits but don’t become obsessed with them or you run the risk that you will replace one master for another.

Lastly, **NEVER TAKE COUNSEL IN YOUR OWN “GOOD” IDEAS**. Satan will catch you by your pride here. He will convince you of the “goodness” of some crazy ideas but you won’t see it because they will feed your pride or some other weakness. Bounce them off of a confidante – someone whom you trust who doesn’t have a vested interest; someone who will give you an objective “yea” or “nay” on your ideas. Your spiritual director is an excellent choice here. Or you can use your spouse or someone who is wise. However, once this person tells you that an idea is bad, listen to him and don’t do it. This will be a good act of humility for you and will stop you from doing something stupid.

Well, that concludes our discussion of Step 8. I want to close with the following words of encouragement:

- With God all things are possible. This includes successfully cutting the line to **your** hook. Lean on Him in all things but most especially here, in avoiding your NOS.
- Pray to the saints who are the patrons for your hook for the grace to succeed. Their intercession is powerful with God.
- Periodically renew your Act of the Will to Succeed. Keeping your will committed is the key to success.

- Keep up with the actions that I've already given you to increase barnacle blow and hull strengthening.
- Begin simply and simply begin. Avoid the NOS you can right away and develop alternatives to fill the space in your life.
- Work on the means to avoid the long-term NOS as time and circumstances permit. God will guide you in His good time.
- Persevere, persevere, persevere!

Lastly, rest assured that my prayers (along with everyone else associated with the Blessed Margaret Center) are with you and I am confident in your success.

God bless!

STEP 9: MORTIFICATION

Once again, congratulations, my fellow comrade-in-arms, you've made it this far. Your perseverance is commendable. Step 8 saw the battle really begin to rage and Step 9 will continue that battle against your concupiscence where we will focus on strengthening your will. As I've said before, these two steps are the hardest parts of the Catholic 12-Steps so you need to seriously apply yourself to the task in order to be successful; there are no half steps here. Only a full-out offensive on your part will win victory over your hook. What makes Step 9 more difficult than Step 8 is that typically we can fly from external NOS but we can't fly from ourselves! In order to be able to say "No" to our hook we must first gain mastery over our wills and that is what this step is all about.

The steps prior to Steps 8 and 9 have, for the most part, been taking measures to maximize the flow of grace to our souls while here we will maximize the acceptance of that grace by strengthening the hulls of our souls. We are going to cash in, so to speak, all those graces that we have acquired from the work we have done in the previous steps to do a major refit to our hull. This will minimize the impediments that we ourselves present to God's flood of grace due to our pride, *"God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble."* (Prov iii, 84) We are going to tear off the copper sheathing, tear out all the old wood (like taking off the old man that St. Paul refers to), and completely renew the bracing, the planking, the oakum – everything that isn't in the top-notch seaworthy condition that the Admiral desires in one of His ships-of-the-line, and we are going to rebuild it. In some of our cases, this will be all the way from the keel up, and in others not quite so much, but in every case, we are going to do a complete overhaul of the most important faculty of your soul in this struggle against your hook: the will. So let's get started with a restatement of Step 9 and begin:

- 9. I will strengthen my will by mortification and penance. I will work to gain mastery over myself by practicing virtue. I will begin with simple, easy-to-win battles over myself and progressing to more difficult ones.**

REVIEW OF THE SOUL: ORIGINAL HARMONY

Back in the chapter on the soul, I discussed the concept that when God first created man, there was an order and harmony in all of creation. As first created, Adam's intellect was in harmony with God's will. His will was in harmony with his intellect. His body was in harmony with his will and, finally, all of creation was in harmony with his body. This harmony existed because each subordinate element was obedient to the element above it - intellect above will above body above creation. Original Sin destroyed this harmony. As the first sin was a rebellion of man's intellect against God, disorder was introduced into creation from the point of the rebellion, his intellect, on down. His intellect became

defective, his will became weak, his body rebelled against his will and nature rebelled against his body. Now maybe I haven't explained this with the greatest theological exactness but I think it's clear that the faculties of man's soul, and in this step we will be referring primarily to his will, no longer work as God had first created them, because they are now in disorder. As if having his soul all messed up wasn't enough, to further complicate things, his body is now in complete rebellion against his will. St. Paul tells us this:

"For that which I work, I understand not. For I do not that good which I will, but the evil which I hate, that I do. If, then, I do that which I will not, I consent to the law, that it is good. Now, then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. For I know that there dwelleth not in me, that is to say, in my flesh, that which is good. For to will, is present with me; but to accomplish that which is good, I find not. For the good which I will, I do not: but the evil which I will not, that I do. Now if I do that which I will not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. I find then a law, that when I have a will to do good, evil is present with me. For I am delighted with the law of God, according to the inward man: But I see another law in my members, fighting against the law of my mind, and captivating me in the law of sin, that is in my members. Unhappy man that I am: who shall deliver me from the body of this death? The grace of God, by Jesus Christ, our Lord. Therefore, I myself, with the mind, serve the law of God: but, with the flesh, the law of sin." (Rom vi, 15-25)

So even the Apostle to the Gentiles suffered these same effects of Original Sin. Despite the fact that his intellect had learned what God expected of him and what he desired to do, his will was weak and struggled against his own body, which desired to remain carnal. Step 9 is to train the will to master the body and its desires. This will take some time so please don't get the idea that I'm going to give you some magic formula that will instantly give your will mastery over your body. Once again, my friend, I need to emphasize the point that we are now in combat so you need to check the strength of your Act of the Will to Succeed, continue daily to do the Nothingness Itself Prayer along with the Rosary, and continue all the previous 8 steps with the emphasis on Step 8 where you are working to avoid your NOS. But here we're going to add what amounts to spiritual exercises of the will to make it strong enough to keep the desires of the flesh in check. Now, when I speak of "desires of the flesh" I am considering it in a broad sense to include all of the appetites from all of the senses and not just the "bedroom" variety or just your hook, whatever it may be. Broadly put, this process consists in performing two things: committing acts of mortification and penance as well as practicing acts of virtue.

OUR STRATEGY:

This two-fold strategy has both a negative and a positive part. The negative part, mortification and penance, is going to train the will to keep the body under control for "what not to do". The positive part will train the will to keep the body under

control for “what to do.” This situation is like taking a young midshipman on board the ship who knows absolutely nothing about the sea and sailing. He’s a boy and a “grass combing landsman” to boot. He has to be trained in his own behavior and knowledge but he also has to learn how to lead the crew in the performance of their duties as well so he’s put in situations where he’s forced to exercise leadership – despite the fact that he’s a young and inexperienced lad and even the cabin boy probably knows more than he does. How is this done? By small increments and progressing to harder tasks only after he has demonstrated mastery over simpler ones. He’s not given control over the whole ship on the first day and told to take her out to sea. No, he’s given trivial tasks with only one or two sailors at a time and then only for short periods. In this way, he builds up his confidence because he’s not intimidated by “all those men” nor are the consequences grave if he makes a mistake. Even his own training is built on this same incremental building block process so that he masters the fundamentals of mathematics and knot tying before he learns how to use the sextant and to set a course.

We are going to use the same approach. Everything will be done on a small scale at first and in such a way as to avoid going against the strength of our hook but going against such aspects of our appetites where we are certain of success. This will build up our confidence by giving us the consolation of “victories”, though small, against our bodies. We won’t be taking on the “whole crew” of our concupiscence directly but only one or two sailors, so to speak, until our level of mastery grows to the point of being able to handle “the whole crew”. Since our appetites are in every one of our physical senses, we will focus on all the five senses to pick out ways that our wills can exercise that early leadership of the young midshipman against easily mastered situations. For most of us, this focus will probably begin by mortifying our sense of taste and progressing to the other senses as well and in greater measure as our young midshipman of our will grows in strength. When we fail we will punish ourselves using small penances to, again, force our bodies to submit to our wills. This is the negative aspect of our strategy.

The positive side is performing acts of virtue. You’ve already been practicing some acts of virtue by doing your daily prayers. Saying grace before meals is practicing the virtue of religion so this is really nothing new. What we want to do here is to make this practicing of virtue automatic so that you don’t have to consciously think about being virtuous; it will become your new way of life. To put it in a nutshell, If you want to be a saint you need to start acting like one; you need to start developing the habits of a saint and you do this one step at a time and one virtue at a time. Going back to our young midshipman, he has to sit through classes about all the aspects of seamanship and then go practice them so that his reactions to the situations that arise while he’s at sea become automatic – he doesn’t even think about them, he just does them. When he hears “Beat to quarters” where does he go, what does he do? He’s trained in all of these drills daily so that they become entirely automatic. That way, when he

does face the enemy and his heart is racing so fast that he can't even think, his response doesn't depend on conscious thoughts but automatic responses to commands. So, when he hears "Beat to quarters" he goes immediately to his battle station and does whatever actions are called for. In these combat situations, if he's to function properly, the ONLY way for him to be effective is to make his responses a habit. That's exactly what we are going to do. We are going to make our responses to the "combat situations" of our lives virtuous and no longer sinful. You won't have to think about not cursing in the wrong company because you won't be cursing as a rule and you'll do this for two reasons. First you will learn to utter other words, but secondly and more importantly, you will develop the patience and humility to not need to curse under the same situations in which a curse was your first response.

I'm sure you're asking yourself, "How do I do this?" for both acts of mortification/penance and for virtue. Well, you'll see. Let's just dig right in now and cover the mortification and penance part first because it is so much more difficult.

MORTIFICATION AND PENANCE:

As I know this will be difficult for you, my dear brother, I want to open this discussion with a mention of one of my patron saints who I also happened to take my confirmation name from, St. Francis of Assisi. This great example of poverty



used to call his own body "Brother Ass" as in "Brother Mule" because, as holy as this Doctor of the Church was, he knew that the flesh of even his own body was stubborn and cooperated with his will only so long as it was under the "bit" of his will. You would think that this extremely popular saint, this man who lived so perfect a life so as

to be blessed with the stigmata would have had no trouble whatsoever in controlling his passions. NO! Even he had to wage war against himself. The same thing is also absolutely true for us lesser souls. I would hazard to guess that for just about anyone reading this book, that it is our wills that are controlled

by our bodies and not the other way around. This situation is worsened by our living in a society that preaches instant gratification and self-indulgence wherever we turn. We are so blessed (cursed really) with material goods, foodstuffs, clothing, toys, widgets, excitement, romance, whatever in such overwhelming abundance that it is no wonder that we have absolutely no self-control. It is no wonder that we fall for our hooks so easily - virtually without even a fight. We are pulled out of the waters of grace as if we were tiny crappie and not battling with everything we are worth like the swordfish that is landed only after exhausting every ounce of strength it possesses.

Therefore, anything that calls for us to reverse course on what has been our way of life for our whole lives is going to be difficult. From a purely natural standpoint, it is impossible. But, my good friend, we aren't focusing on using just the natural but using both the natural and the supernatural together so we stack the odds in our favor. We will rely solely on God's grace and that is the key to our future success, since nothing is impossible with God.



And since we plan on being successful, it helps us to know what it is we are talking about so let me give you two definitions. The first one is mortification. Using the Concise Catholic Dictionary, Mortification is: "Acts of fasting or self-imposed corporal punishments performed for a pious intention and for the spiritual good of the soul; acts of temperance; works performed often despite the repugnance of the will which are in themselves good and of spiritual value; acts usually connected with some bodily pain or contrary to the ordinary wishes of a person." The other term I want to define here is Penance. The same Concise Catholic Dictionary defines Penance in terms of the sacrament of the same name: "...(2) Some act of mortification imposed on one confessing his sins as a condition of completely fulfilling the requirements of confession made by the confessor, usually some prayers." For our purposes, we're going to modify this so that it isn't something imposed by the confessor as a result of our going to confession but will be imposed by ourselves when we fail at some aspect of our resolutions in performing the Catholic 12-Steps.

In a typical sense, mortification and penance are pretty much the same thing. But for our purposes, mortifications are going to be according to the definition I

gave above; they will be imposed by ourselves (hopefully with the guidance of a good spiritual director) as exercises of our wills to master our appetites. They will stand on their own as means of forcing the body to submit to the will and not as “punishments” for the failures that we will experience from time to time. Our mortifications are going to be planned out, scheduled, and performed over relatively long periods of time like months or seasons. Penances, on the other hand, will be used to punish ourselves when we do have those failures. They will be over and above the mortifications that we will undertake and only for short periods of time.

Let me give you an example of each so that I will hopefully clear up any confusion over how I’m using these two terms. Let’s just say that I’m giving up the cream in my coffee and drinking it black instead from now on except for Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation (or at least until I develop a liking for black coffee when I’ll have to come up with something else). This is a mortification. I fail to drink it black on Tuesday either because I forgot or because I was weak. On Wednesday I punish myself for the previous day’s transgression by not allowing myself to have coffee at all on that day. This is a penance.

I hope that clears up the difference between the two. Now above, I just parenthetically mentioned the guidance of a good spiritual director but I’m really very serious about this. Getting the objective advice of someone properly trained and with experience in guiding souls and who also knows your soul will go a very long way in avoiding the mistakes that beginners make. He will guide you as to how best to mortify yourself and at what levels you should do it. He will be the



sanity check, so to speak, so that you hit the “sweet spot” or “golden mean” between excess and defect; this is the balance point between the two extremes. As a beginner, we are sorely tempted to wear hair shirts, walk barefoot over glass shards, and eat only locusts and honey – all in the first week! This is a ploy by

Satan to get you to attempt to do way more than you are capable of so that you will quickly fail, get discouraged, and give up. Chalk another soul up for Satan! Don’t be so prideful (and that’s what it is) that you think you know what’s best for your soul. Look! Any doctor who thinks he can operate on himself has a fool for a patient! Don’t be stupid; find and use a spiritual director. Generally this is a good traditionally minded priest who is experienced in guiding souls and with

whom you can “connect” with. Seek him out. If this, after due diligence fails, find the next best thing. This person should most definitely be a good traditionally minded Catholic who is wise, discreet, experienced, and disinterested. The first three points are probably obvious, but what do I mean by “disinterested”? This is someone who has no stake in the situation, someone who will give you good objective advice that will be best for your soul without having a hidden “agenda” to push. In other words, it will be advice from someone who has no axe to grind about whether you should do or not do any particular action. Lastly, this person must be a confidante or someone you can tell your innermost secrets to or the advice you receive will be misdirected. If he doesn’t know all the details, to include the “secret” ones, his advice will be remiss. If all else fails, feel free to contact me at the Blessed Margaret Family Help Center, Inc by phone or email and I’ll get you in touch with someone who can help. I don’t promise that this someone is in your local area, however. In any case, regardless of who your spiritual director turns out to be, when it’s all said and done, what’s crucial to the whole process is the quality of the advice that you receive even if that means dialing long distance at 2 in the morning or sending emails to get it. If after reading this you still don’t think you need a spiritual director, Doctor, *“He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.” (Mt xiii. 43)*

Moving right along, there’s another word that I’ve already introduced that I want to give you the definition and that’s concupiscence. Once again, using the same dictionary, it is: “The appetite tending to the gratification of the senses.” This appetite, or desire, exists in all five of our senses. You know from your fifth grade science class what they are: our senses of taste, touch, smell, hearing, and seeing. On the plus side, these are the means by which our intellects understand our environment. On the minus side, they are our means of committing acts of sin. Here is where we will attack.

Our game plan will be to identify the weakest of our senses and make a resolution to deny it in some small way at the start. Which is that sense? This will vary from soul to soul but in general, the strongest sense is usually associated with our hook. Don’t attack here! Instead pick on a different sense. If Our Lady of Fatima is correct (and I know she is) that most young people would go to Hell by sins of impurity, then the sense of touch in most of us is the strongest. The sensations felt in those sins of impurity mean that our sense of touch is highly developed and strengthened. Secondarily, would be sight or hearing. For a glutton or alcoholic, on the other hand, the sense of taste would be strongest with the sense of smell being in second place. Your spiritual director can be an excellent guide in helping you identify your weakest appetite, and in his absence, the only advice I would hazard to make is for you to identify, from your knowledge of your own NOS that you acquired during Step 8, to identify which senses are associated with those NOS. Having done that, take the remaining senses of the five and that is where you begin your attack against “Brother Ass”. Here is where you begin.

Having identified this weakest sense, you need to determine ways in which this sense is gratified, that is, pleased. Also determine how it is displeased or frustrated. Determine in some small ways in which you can deny it either its satisfaction or cause it to be displeased. Choose one for the initial mortification with the others in some sequence to start those later on. Set yourself a goal of a time span of a week, a month, or a season for the first one and a vague idea of when the other ones might be undertaken. Get the approval of your spiritual director that this isn't some cockamamie idea, make a firm Act of the Will to carry your plan through just like you've made your previous acts of the will, and then go implement it. Simple enough? Yes, and with those words let me remind you once again: **BEGIN SIMPLY AND SIMPLY BEGIN!!!**

I can just hear you screaming for examples so let me give you some. First example: let's say my hook is pornography. My strongest sense is of course touch closely followed by sight. Certain smells like perfume and certain sounds are somewhat associated with my hook but eating and pornography are pretty much disconnected so this is where I attack. I drink three cups of black coffee every morning along with a can of my favorite pop at 10, one at lunch, and another at 3 where I buy my favorite candy bar from the vending machine. There are a number of ways that I can use this situation to mortify myself. First, I could cut back on the coffee to 2 cups but Brother Ass isn't going to like being denied. Probably better would be to put cream or sugar in it instead, whichever one I find less desirable than having black coffee but not the one that I'd find repugnant. With the pop, substituting a different drink like water for one of them would be good. When to do it? If I need the pick-me-up of the caffeine at lunch, that would be a bad choice. Instead, sub a bottle of water for the 10 o'clock pop. Next, we have the candy bar. Are there lesser choices in the machine? Choose the potato chips or a less favorite candy bar instead. Do all three at once? Nope! Do one for a month or until it becomes habit, then add a second one until it becomes habit and then add the last one. When you add the last one, alter the first one to be just a little more difficult. So, in this example, we're going to add a packet of sugar to each cup of coffee for our first mortification. Not exactly right to our pallet but I can drink it. After talking to Father and getting his OK, I start. First week I do fine. Second Monday I don't do it. Mad at myself I impose the penance of cooling it down before I drink it on Tuesday. Ugh! Wednesday I'm back on track and by the third/fourth week, I'm starting to get the hang of coffee with sugar. Now I add the bottle of water instead of the pop along with the sugared coffee. That works out through week six but I'm starting to get to where I like coffee with sugar in it so I go back to black coffee but only have 2 cups but I sub a small chocolate kiss instead of the candy bar. See how it works? Good.

Another example: let's say I'm an alcoholic. Here we have probably the reverse ranking from my first example. Taste is the strongest followed by smell with touch most likely the weakest. Depending on the season of the year, we can make sure that we feel just a little bit of bodily discomfort. Let's say it's fall so the weather is sometimes hot and sometimes cool. So, on the commute home, I

decide not to run the air conditioning in the car when it's Indian summer and not to turn the heat on when it's cooler. I still have my jacket on so I'm not endangering my health in any way but it's still just a little cooler than I like it. I do this coming and going to work for the entire season. When I'm weak and run the air conditioning, I punish myself by not having as many windows on the car open the next day. When fall's about to end, I keep the heat on a little lower than I'd like and don't wear gloves or a scarf around my neck so that I'm just a wee bit cooler than I like to be.

Again, you should be able to see the incremental, or bit-by-bit way that we start with something simple that avoids going directly against the strength of Brother Ass and go after our weakest concupiscence. No great big earth-shaking mortification here, just something simple to begin with. As we develop the habit of the first mortification, we add on additional ones that continue to put pressure on this sense. This is our beginning phase. Let me point out here that it is perfectly acceptable to use natural reasons to reinforce our strength of will to stick to our mortification resolutions. If I am attacking my sense of taste and I want to lose a few pounds anyway, it is extremely useful to use mortifications that also fall into the "diet" category. Remember to use every non-anti-Catholic natural means to aid your supernatural struggle and wanting "to lose a few" is a perfectly good example of this. This will only aid your resolution.

The second phase is to branch out into the secondary senses that are indirectly associated with our hook. Do this ONLY once you are starting to be successful in mortifying yourself with the first phase. But once you are successful, don't be bashful! When you see one of these opportunities, form an additional resolution, get it approved, and then act on it as well. Once you've gotten the hang of self-denial, you will easily see additional ways, especially in your imperfections, in which you can gain mastery over Brother Ass. At the point of nagging, just begin slowly and continue with it to the point of it becoming a habit.

Let me be a little bit more concrete on penances. When you fail, and you probably will at least through thoughtlessness, give yourself some penance for the next period of time. It might or might not be related to the mortification but it is good if it is in some way. Because I think that as beginners, most of you my dear friends, will tend to overdo the penance thing so I'm reluctant to recommend any type of physical punishment but, since I know some of you will be tempted to anyway, leave this as no more than a couple/three whacks on the palm with a wooden ruler. Nothing more. It is dangerous for beginners to get into mortification by physical pain so I DONT RECOMMEND IT! Leave this to the spiritually perfect and at the discretion of a really good spiritual director. Those who are learning to walk need to crawl first and forget about running marathons. "He who has ears to hear..."

Let me close this "negative" part by giving you two outlines. The first list is some ideas for mortifications against each of your senses. The second outline is a

recap of our mortification strategy. This will help you stay focused on the principles, which will aid you in making sure that your mortifications are done prudently and with much greater chances for long term success.

Here are some thoughts on how to attack each of the senses. I don't pretend to know everything that can be used since this is limited only by the number of the different types of hooks there are, the infinite variety of souls that God has created, and by the imagination of all the spiritual directors in the world. In other words, I'm only scratching the surface and what does this old fool know anyway? Well, these are but my ideas; I know that others will have additional and better ones that are more effective. With their permission I'll include these in later editions (should there be any, with the grace of God).

Taste:

- Reduce eating in general: e.g. portions/snacks.
- Cut back on what you like: e.g. ice cream.
- "Spoil" favorites: e.g. sugar/no sugar in coffee.
- Introduce what you dislike: e.g. eat rice cakes.

Touch:

- Be uncomfortable!
- Celibacy for the married: e.g. periodic abstinence.
- Cold: e.g. turn down heat/turn up AC.
- Heat: e.g. wear long sleeves.
- Creature comforts: e.g. aftershave and deodorant.

Smell:

- Cut back on favorite odors: e.g. flowers, cologne, and perfume,
- "Enjoy" repugnant odors: e.g. skunk, stink bush, diapers.

Hearing:

- Cut back on pleasant sounds: e.g. favorite music.
- Listen to irritating things: e.g. blue grass.
- Listen to "silence".

Sight:

- Reduce: e.g. videos/TV/newspaper/magazine/"eye candy".
- Look at "ugly" or less appealing things.

- As a twist, if you enjoy being looked at, reduce your own visual attractiveness by dressing more plainly, less jewelry, less flashy.

And now here's the recap of the Mortification Strategy:

Mortification Strategy outline

- Start by attacking the weakest sense, if in doubt, attack taste.
- Start small and simple – no hair shirts and flagellation.
- Get the consent of a good spiritual director before beginning.
- Make an Act of the Will to succeed at your resolution.
- Punish yourself if and when you fail.
- Branch out only when the mortification becomes habit.
- Seek opportunities for new mortifications as they arise.
- Repeat the “consent” and “act of the will” for each.
- Begin simply and simply begin.
- Persevere persevere, persevere!!!

VIRTUE

That concludes the negative aspect of Step 9, which, I suspect, you will find a struggle to maintain. It's a good thing for us that all those prayers, Masses, and sacraments gain us copious quantities of grace so that we are faithful to our resolutions! But now, let's speak about the positive side of Step 9, virtue. I pray that you'll find forming habits of virtue to be a bit easier although, it too, requires grace in order to keep up with the effort. Back to our ship analogy, doing all that construction work on our ship's hull is bound to cause a few blisters, some splinters in our hands, and a sore back as we labor incessantly to really get our ship seaworthy but it certainly has its rewards. In fact, each of our acts of virtue becomes its own source of grace for us against our hook so there's kind of a multiplier effect. Remember the Sanctity Curve; the graph that started off slowly but then quickly rose higher and higher? Yes, the more we do, the more we are able to do.

So, let's start our discussion of virtue with a discussion of our strategy and to do that I need to give you one definition. Back in Step 1 I talked at some length about virtue to lead you into seeing the necessity of balancing the virtue of humility against the weight of the capital sin of pride. Here we're going to go into more depth on virtues in general so now I want to give you a more formal definition of the word and I'm sticking with the tried and true Concise Catholic Dictionary, which defines virtue as, “An essentially good habit giving one the power and the inclination to do good acts; briefly, a habit of right conduct.”

Once again, there's that reference to habit and that is precisely the point. If we want to beat our hook, we can't just plan to defeat it because we will always run short of our goals. Doing that just leaves us too close to the line we've severed; we will always have the temptation to re-attach the line because it is so near. Instead we need to move away from the line as far as we can but, because of the effects of Original Sin in us, we never really know for certain how near or far we are from the fishing line in terms of our sanctity. The tides that press against our hull and the winds of temptation that fill our sails make it impossible to gage what is "far enough" or "holy enough". Disabuse yourself of the notion that you are as holy as you need to be. That thinking is based upon pride and the unwillingness to give up our love for our white rabbits and anything we keep based upon our pride means there's a distance between God and us. Consequently, that means that there's a "nearness" between us and the line. The end result of all this is that we need to be on constant watch to chart a course to constantly narrow the distance between the Beloved and us. The only way to do this is to grow in virtue – to become more Christ-like with each passing day. This calls for a radical change in ourselves so that instead of doing sin habitually and good acts only on occasion, we do good acts habitually and sin only on occasion. Anything less is a cheat to God Who so generously gives us the graces we need to cut the line to the hook in the first place and "tempts" Him to withdraw that grace because of our base ingratitude.



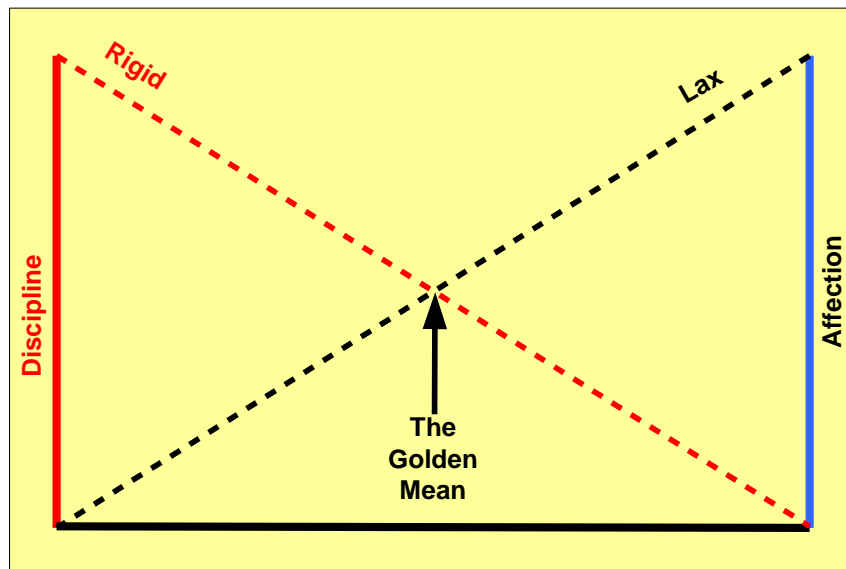
WE HAVE TO BECOME SAINTS! Anything less leaves us subject to tides and winds that will run us back up on the rocks where we will grab the only line that we know of to "save" ourselves and we will willingly retie that line to our hooks: *"...and the last state of that man is made worse than the first."* (Mt xii.45)

I hope I've convinced you, my dear friend, of the absolute necessity of striving for sainthood and the corresponding demand for us to practice virtue, or more precisely, develop ever-stronger habits of performing good acts. But, I can almost hear the question, "If I try to become a saint, won't I become a big sissy?" In order to answer that, I'm going to use a term that I threw at you when I was discussing mortification, and that term is, "the golden mean". This is a term taken from the Greek philosopher Aristotle. A modern day philosopher would probably use the term, "sweet spot" as in you hit home runs in baseball by contacting the ball with a certain part of the bat, called the "sweet spot" where you get the most energy imparted to the ball causing it to go the furthest distance possible. In our case, think of "golden" as the most desirable, which gold is of all valuables the sweetest to possess. By "mean" we mean another term for the average between two numbers or values, as two is the average between one and three. It's the halfway point between the two. In our case, then, the golden mean is the most desirable point midway between two behaviors. We will mean

this in two senses. The first is the mean between ways of expressing or living a virtue and these two ways are “excess” and “defect”. The second sense we will come to in a moment. Now, all of the virtues have a golden mean. When practiced insufficiently, we are at the one extreme of defect and when we practice it too much, we are at the opposite end of the scale, at excess. Let me give you one example to help clarify this idea.

Let’s talk about the virtue of fortitude, which is the virtue that disposes us to do what is good in spite of any difficulty, such as being a soldier under light fire from the enemy. If I cower in my foxhole, burying my head in the dirt in spite of all my buddies around me firing back at the enemy whose fire is ineffectively aimed way over heads, then I don’t have enough fortitude to do my duty, which is to fire back at the enemy. In this case, I have a defect in my virtue of fortitude. You’d call me a coward and such I would be. Let’s take the opposite extreme. We no longer have light ineffective fire over our heads but we’re receiving everything the enemy has to throw at us. All my buddies are pinned to the dirt and I decide to play the hero and charge the enemy lines all by myself. I rise up and run helter-skelter towards the enemy blazing away with my rifle. I go about two steps, am shot with too many bullet holes to count, and fall lifeless to the ground having accomplished nothing save the need for one more body bag and a funeral back home. In this case, my act of charging the enemy was reckless, not brave, and you would label my act as being foolhardy. I wasted my life with no good coming from it. This was excess.

The Golden Mean



The second sense of the golden mean is the balance point between two opposing virtues. A good example here is your behavior towards your children. You can be a really firm and strong disciplinarian because you know your

children need good discipline if they are to be good Catholic adults for God. If you go too far in this direction, however, you become rigid and cold. On the other hand, you also need to show affection to them so that they know you love them. Practiced to excess you become a lax parent and your kids are spoiled. As you can see in the figure, the lines of Discipline and Affection cross at a point and this intersection is the golden mean between two virtues.

Regardless of in which sense we are considering virtues; seeking to operate at the golden mean will be your goal when trying to practice any virtue. You will do this always relying solely on God's grace. You will practice patience but not past the point where righteous indignation should have kicked in. You will practice temperance, but not to the point where your mortification leads you to starve yourself to death. You will practice justice but not without mercy. Strive always for this balance. **Always work to stay at the golden mean.**

It is impossible for me to dictate to you where the golden mean is for you in every circumstance but, then again, you're going to rely on the Holy Ghost, and not me, to guide you. Naturally speaking, the golden mean is invisible to us. It is only through grace that we will arrive there and tend to stay there. Reliance on ourselves will always cause us to eventually fall into either excess or defect, depending on our natural inclinations; reliance on grace, on the other hand, will have a marvelous effect that I call the "rubber band effect". This effect is as if we had a spiritual "rubber band" attached to our souls so that any time we veer too far into either excess or defect the graces we have received will pull us back to the golden mean just as if we had pulled the rubber band too far in one direction so that it snaps us back into position. If you are still doubtful, "*O ye of little faith.*" You'll just have to trust me on this because I can't explain it any better than this. And if, in having faith in me you still find it hard to believe, just trust in God and you will find this to be true. **Always place your complete reliance on God's grace and not on yourself.**

The next part of our plan is that **we have to practice ALL the virtues, not just a few.** Think of the planking on the hull of our ship. All the way round the hull are wood planks. The upper ones overlay the lower ones so that there's a watertight barrier between the hold and the sea. Take out any one plank and the briny deep pours right through, sending the ship down to Davey Jones' locker. Neglecting any of them is a recipe for disaster.

Make all of your good actions virtues by doing a Morning Offering each and every day to get the benefit of your actions, so that you gain grace from all of them. Remember that all actions done for love of God are virtuous so even the most mundane chores of your duty of state are grace-gaining virtues if you do this. You've already read Step 11A so you better already be doing this (alongside of the Nothingness Itself Prayer) when you first get up. Don't be a fool and neglect this, my friend!

Strive to be consistent in practicing virtue. You don't form a habit by doing an action only once or twice or only on occasion. Habits are formed by doing them over and over just like our young midshipman is drilled over and over in the drills he's expected to do automatically. The proof-of-the-pudding of your consistency is what do you do when you're not thinking about it? When you hit your thumb with a hammer, bang your head, drop your car keys in the mud, what do you say, a curse or "Thank you, Lord"? You know you're "there" when you surprise even yourself by practicing the virtue instead of the vice in those unexpected moments.

The last principle to consider is to **practice virtue towards everyone but especially towards those who are your enemies.** It's easy to be charitable to your spouse and those you love. The highest form of love you can show to your neighbor is to return love for hate so the best means for you to practice charity is to perform it to those who hate you, in other words, your enemies, *"If thy enemy be hungry, give him to eat: if he thirst, give him water to drink: For thou shalt heap hot coals upon his head, and the Lord will reward thee."* (Prov xxv.21) Your returning love for hate does two things besides helping you develop the habit. The first is for your own benefit; you are forcing yourself to act other than how Brother Ass would have you act so you have additional grace from mortifying your flesh and the second benefit is that the "hot coals" are a burning conscience that will force your enemy to think about his actions, and possibly be the cause of the two of you being reconciled. This is a good example of trying to get "multiple hits" of grace for doing one action. Seeking out these opportunities is worthy of your effort.

That wraps up the general principles of our plan on developing habits of virtue. I want to end Step 9 with some practical ideas, just to get you started on how to go about doing this. We've already defined what a virtue is, let's talk for a bit about the types of virtue. There are two. The first are the theological virtues, so-called because they have God for their immediate object. In other words, they are directed towards God. These are Faith, Hope, and Charity. We've all received them when we received the Sacrament of Baptism but from here on, we plan to grow them to a much greater degree in our souls. The greatest of these, of course, is Charity. Now, just because a virtue has God for its object doesn't mean that it is only aimed at God. Anything done for our neighbor because of our love for God is still the supernatural virtue of Charity. God is the end but the neighbor is the practical means by which we express that love. The best ways, but not the only ways, of performing the virtue of Charity are the Works of Mercy, both spiritual and corporal. I listed them for you in Step 5 when we discussed performing the Works of Mercy in making restitution for our sins, especially by our hook. I go into greater detail on them in Step 12 and you can read more about them when you get there but here I will just repeat the listing of them so you don't have to go flipping pages back and forth.

Spiritual Works of Mercy

- Admonish the sinner
- Instruct the ignorant
- Counsel the doubtful
- Comfort the sorrowful
- Bear wrongs patiently
- Forgive all injuries

Corporal Works of Mercy

- Feed the hungry
- Give drink to the thirsty
- Clothe the naked
- Visit the imprisoned
- Shelter the homeless
- Visit the sick
- Bury the dead

Going through the two lists you can see that there are plenty of opportunities of different sorts so no one has an excuse that, “I can’t do any of these!” You’ve been doing a lot of soul-searching lately so it shouldn’t be a big stretch for you to see yourself beginning to do one or more of them. Another means to practice Charity is to give alms, that is, donations of money or objects, to charities. May I brazenly suggest the Blessed Margaret Family Help Center, Inc as a possible recipient for your alms? The Center is a tax-exempt 501c3 organization so your donations are fully tax-deductible.

You’ve already been practicing the virtue of Hope since the first time you read the second paragraph of The Nothingness Prayer so I don’t need to go into any further details there. The next step, Step 10, which focuses on developing the intellect, will go a long way in helping you to develop your Faith. You’ll just have to exercise the virtue of patience until you get there, friend!



After the Theological Virtues comes the second type, which are the Moral Virtues. They dispose us to lead moral or good lives. There are four special Moral Virtues and they are called Cardinal Virtues. Cardinal, taken from the Latin word for “hinge”, they are the “hinges” or pivot points upon which all the other virtues “swing”. **These are Prudence, Justice, Fortitude, and Temperance.**

Let’s talk about them briefly because I don’t think most folks really understand them. Prudence disposes us to form right judgments about what we must do or not do. This goes back to our spiritual “rubber band” that keeps us operating at the golden mean. Modern usage has a connotation of not doing or refraining from doing something. The Catholic

definition is not that at all. Instead, we're talking about how to employ all the other virtues. Prudence is the "nuts and bolts" virtue because it tells us how and when to employ the others. Quite a difference from the modern usage, I would think. Justice is the virtue that disposes us to give to everyone what belongs to him. It isn't just restricted to punishment of criminals or sinners but to give to my neighbor whatever it is that I owe to him. This tells me to pay my bills on time and to obey just laws. If I've received a service like electricity, then, my paying my electric bill on time is an act of the virtue of justice. Serving my time in the military when called to defend the country when attacked is also performing an act of justice since I owe my country a certain willingness to defend the "Patria" or homeland. Fortitude disposes us to do what is good in spite of any difficulty – and in our cases, to do what is good in spite of the difficulty of our hook, so doing the Catholic 12-Steps is an act of Fortitude. The last of the four, Temperance, disposes us to control our desires and to use rightly the things which please our senses. Hmm. Also sounds important with respect to our hooks. In many cases, what got us into trouble in the first place with our hooks was that we took pleasures that are not always wrong but we didn't exercise control over our desires for them or we used them in illicit ways. For example, God gave us certain things, *"and that wine may cheer the heart of man. That he may make the face cheerful with oil: and that bread may strengthen man's heart."* (Ps ciii.15) Our misuse of alcohol and food has led us to alcoholism and gluttony. Creating habits of all four of the Cardinal Virtues are critical in the growth of our sanctity in general but I hope you can see the overriding necessity of Fortitude and Temperance in our immediate struggle against our hooks.

So, now's a good time to answer the question about becoming a sissy, "No!" Practicing virtue, especially for men, will only make you more virile. Once you've progressed farther down the path of virtue, ask your wife. She'll tell you how attractive you've become!

This isn't a book just about virtues so I can't try to cover all of them. I'm not educated enough to do that and I don't really believe that you'll have much difficulty in knowing inherently whether or not a given action is an exercise of virtue or not. For that matter, I'm not sure you need to really care which one it is just so long as you're working at creating habits of virtue. Just do good acts and let the Holy Ghost shake it out. With that thought in mind, I'm going to close out Step 9 with an outline listing of some of the significant Moral Virtues, their definitions, and some quick ideas on how to incorporate them in your lives. I'll follow this with another listing of your five senses with some suggestions on which virtues might apply to them.

Some Other Moral Virtues:

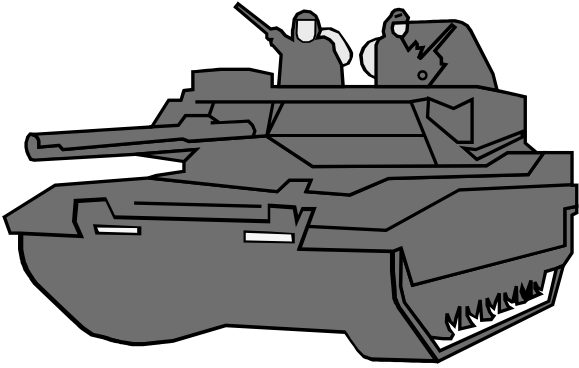
- **Filial piety** and **patriotism**: Disposes us to honor, love, and respect our parents and our country. Do things you'd do on Mother's Day to the mothers in your life on days NOT Mothers Day.
- **Obedience**: Disposes us to do the will of our superiors. Willingly obey traffic laws – drive slower.
- **Patience**: Disposes us to bear up under trials and difficulties. **Suffer in silence the stupid!** Patience is the “great expression”, if you will, on developing the next virtue:
- **Humility**: Disposes us to acknowledge our limitations. Endure humiliations and setbacks. Catch yourself in the little self-justifications we all do when you're accused. See Step 1. **THIS IS THE VIRTUE OF THE SAINTS AND IS THE GREAT ANTIDOTE TO PRIDE.**
- **Chastity**: Disposes us to be pure in soul and body. Even for those without hooks of impurity or for even those in the married state, development of this virtue is fundamental to holiness. You cannot continue to grow in holiness until you've mastered the baser passions of Brother Ass. Just as I mentioned in mortification, abstinence within your duty of state, whether permanent or for a certain period.
- **Religion**: Disposes us to give to God the honor due Him. Add new prayers to your daily routine, especially the Rosary. See Step 11A & B.

Virtues and the Five Senses

- **Taste**: Temperance, prudence, patience, charity.
- **Touch**: Chastity, temperance, prudence, charity, humility.
- **Smell**: Temperance, prudence, patience, humility.
- **Hearing**: Temperance, prudence, patience, charity, humility.
- **Sight**: Temperance, prudence, patience, chastity, humility, charity.

That completes Step 9 and the second combat step, dear friend. We'll meet again at Step 10, where we'll complete our discussion on strengthening the soul by improving our intellects. God bless!

THE COUNTERATTACK



God and I are greatly edified by your progress, my dear friend. We've seen you progressing from a lowly slave lying prostrate at the feet of Satan with his foot on your neck to now starting to pick yourself up. You've been saying the Nothingness Itself prayer, going to Confession, frequently receiving Holy Communion, and you could swear you "feel" God's grace in your life. I don't

want to burst your bubble but be careful! "Wherefore he that thinketh himself to stand, let him take heed lest he fall," (1 Cor x. 12).

I need to warn you! My experience with La Misma Nada showed something interesting that I am compelled to warn you about. After having run the support group for about ten weeks with good consistent success, all the men in the group reported that they had fallen to their hooks in the same week. They had been showing such good progress refraining from their hooks to this point. It looked like they were going to waltz right through to the point where the lines to their hooks were completely severed. What happened? I curiously listened to their stories. They were doing everything right; they were making decent progress in their spiritual lives and seemed well on their way to mastering their hooks in short order. All of a sudden, BANG! A tempest rose up and swamped them. Their circumstances were different but the timing was just too eerie to be coincidental. You, too, will face a similar tidal wave. I want to warn you about The Counterattack.

THREE SOURCES OF TEMPTATION:

I hope you were paying attention when you were reading the Step 8 chapter where I mentioned three sources of temptation. Well, just to refresh your memory, these sources are Satan, the world, and our own bodies. Jesus Himself was tempted in these three ways by the devil, *"And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterwards he was hungry. And the tempter coming said to him: If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread. Who answered and said: It is written, Not in bread alone doth man live, but in every word that proceedeth from the mouth of God. Then the devil took him up into the holy city, and set him upon the pinnacle of the temple, And said to him: If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down, for it is written: That he hath given his angels charge over thee, and in their hands shall they bear thee up, lest perhaps thou dash thy foot against a stone. Jesus said to him: It is written again: Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God. Again the devil took him up into a very high mountain, and shewed him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them, And said to him: All these will I give thee, if falling down thou wilt adore me.*

Then Jesus saith to him: Begone, Satan: for it is written, The Lord thy God shalt thou adore, and him only shalt thou serve.” (Mt iv, 2-10)

Our Lord is tempted by all three sources; He is offered food for His body, the kingdoms of the world, and He is obviously tempted by Satan himself since he is the one addressing Jesus. Why should we be any different, especially once we make a serious effort at sanctity? *“Son, when thou comest to the service of God, stand in justice and in fear, and prepare thy soul for temptation.” (Ecclus. II. 1)* If Christ suffered Himself to be tempted then we who follow the Master can expect nothing less.

Now, to be sure, when we are fighting our own hooks, we are principally fighting against our own bodies. We are fighting ourselves, the spiritual man against the carnal man – man-to-man, if you will. Both within the same physical body you have two different “men” fighting it out, and since you are struggling against your hook, it is only logical that it is the carnal man who is the dominant one. I’m sure you can vouch for this yourself, friend, as I know the intensity of the war within you since I’ve experienced it myself.

In those rare moments when the carnal man needs any assistance to maintain his dominance over you in this spiritual wrestling match, he has the aid of the world with the many NOS that we have to face. From Step 8 you saw how vast an array of NOS you are confronting; probably in almost any direction you turn you see at least one of them. It really is an unfair fight from a purely natural perspective – the odds are probably 100:1 or worse when you consider all the factors that there are trying to pull you out of the waters of grace by your hook. This is why we are waging it on the supernatural perspective instead, so that we can even the odds out more in our favor.

OK, we have our bodies and the world, that’s two of our three antagonists. So, where’s Satan? How does he fit into this war? Well, simply put, he doesn’t need to be. We are so weak that the simple tag-team of the first two sources of temptations is enough to keep most of us permanently hooked. He just laughs at us; we are no sport for him. He has much more important fish to fry, so to speak, in the form of souls that provide a greater return on the time he invests. These would be souls that bring others along with them to Hell when they fall, such as priests and bishops. This is where he’d rather put his labors, as his return on investment is so much higher. Therefore, as long as we are fully occupied by facing our own natures and our NOS, he won’t get involved, since that’s not very efficient on his part. Why spend more resources than necessary on a battle whose outcome is pretty much certain of being successful? Satan won’t be interested in getting into the fray until he sees that he’s losing the war and it takes time for him to notice. Since he, too, is a finite creature, he doesn’t know everything that’s going on with the 6 billion or so souls there are on the earth so it takes a big change in the situation for him to realize that he’s losing one of those souls. This means that there’s a time delay between when you started the

Catholic 12-Steps and when he gets involved. Only then does he show up. This permits us to make a good initial beginning at defeating the hook. This is fortunate because we desperately need the consolation of some sweet victories to build up our confidence so that we do more than just think about overcoming ourselves. Without the sweet candy of success, no one would dare venture into the struggle; as soon as we did so, Satan would just slam us back to the deck and we'd be eternally intimidated against ever making the attempt again.

Why is this? In short, because God wants you to succeed and He knows exactly what we need when we need it. He's lavished you with many graces: the grace to run aground, the grace to make an Act of the Will to Succeed, the grace to say the Nothingness Itself prayer and the Rosary daily, the grace to go to Confession and to Mass frequently, the grace to frequent the sacraments, and countless more. He knows that we, as spiritual babies, need sweet treats for us to do any serious labor. Therefore, He provides the sweet consolation of a good beginning just to get us going. But He also knows that "...Not in candy alone doth man live..." to paraphrase the Gospel passage. Just as a child needs treats in his early training in order to get him to exert himself, so does God give us the same type of spiritual treat. It might be OK to give treats for training but no good parent gives his child nothing but treats at mealtime. A child needs a well-balanced diet to include foods that may not suit his pallet but are necessary to grow strong bodies. You are no different. No doubt you've made good progress while God has sent you these graces of consolation and you're feeling pretty confident in your ability to defeat your hook.

And that's the problem. It is very difficult for the spiritual child to not take the graces of this good beginning for granted. It is almost automatic. We are still worldings at heart so we still have a tremendous amount of self-love within us. Remember how we described our running aground episode as only distracting our pride and not really destroying it? Since "God resisteth the proud..." (Jas iv.6), we are, to a greater or lesser degree, still distasteful in God's eyes because of our large reservoir of self-love. Therefore, He will permit The Counterattack from Satan to humiliate us to begin to eliminate that self-love as well as to teach us that God is the source of our success and not ourselves. This is to instill confidence in Him and not pride in ourselves.

The Counterattack will also be the first real test of our will to overcome the hook. It is a desolation from the Good God that is the beginning of His lovingly sharing His cross with us. It's an act of His love for us. As painful as The Counterattack can be, it is a sign that not only are we making progress against our hook, but that we are making progress in becoming better friends of Our Lord. And that alone, my good friend, is something to be greatly edified about.

I certainly don't want you to fall to your hook when The Counterattack come but I absolutely want you to be ready for it when it comes.

How can you tell when The Counterattack is occurring? It will be different for everyone but if the experiences from La Misma Nada are any indication, you can expect it to be severe, even to the point of being life-changing. You could see it as a “knock-out blow”. Some of Satan’s tricks are to intimidate you to never again try to cut the line to your hook or he could get you to convince yourself that the hook isn’t really sinful after all, or he could get you to commit greater sins in trying to defeat your hook. He gets great satisfaction in doing this. For example, falling into adultery while trying to defeat the hook of pornography.

What to do? First of all, humbly accept the defeat; admit that it was your own personal weakness in your will, your being the limiting factor in the flow of barnacles of grace (such as lack of devotion on your part), and your limited hull to properly accept the graces that God has sent you. Return to the state of grace as soon as you possibly can. Renew your Act of the Will to Succeed – “As God is my witness...”, renew and increase your efforts – especially your mortification, avoid the NOS that caused the defeat, and lastly, NEVER GIVE UP! PERSEVERE, PERSEVERE, PERSEVERE!!!!



In case you didn’t get all those points, here they are again in outline form:

ACTIONS UPON DEFEAT

Humbly accept the defeat

Admit personal weakness in:

- Our Will.
- Our limiting flow of “barnacles” of grace: (e.g. lack of devotion)
- Our limited “hull” to accept grace: (e.g. attachment to hook)

Return to State of Grace quickly by going to Confession.

Renew resolution to succeed: **“As God is my witness...”**

Renew/increase efforts: (especially mortification)

Avoid NOS that caused the defeat.

Persevere, persevere, persevere: NEVER GIVE UP!

STEP 10: STRENGTHENING THE INTELLECT

Congratulations once again, my good friend, you've made it this far. Your perseverance is commendable and I'm sure that you are anxious to begin this last of the three steps that are designed to strengthen your soul. Of course you remember that Step 8 was designed to address the weaknesses of your memory. Step 9 worked on the highest of the faculties of your soul, the will. Now Step 10 will complete this integrated rebuilding of your soul by working on your intellect. We have two goals to accomplish here; one's short term that you can begin to work on right away but the other will require a much longer time frame to achieve. So without any further ado, let's restate Step 10:

9. I will strengthen my intellect by educating myself on the truths of the Faith. I will regularly read the Bible, the works of the Saints, Encyclicals of the Popes, and good Catholic reading so that my intellect and my conscience will become properly formed.

Now before we actually begin, I want to tell you that this step as undergone considerable change since my first rendering of the Catholic 12-Steps. It was originally just about strengthening your faith through doing spiritual reading with the goal of improving your conscience and making you a better Catholic. However, as I pondered this more, especially during my experience with La Misma Nada, it became clear that what was needed was not a step to improve one's faith – we already have steps that do that through the Mass and the Sacraments; what was needed was something to complete the work on the soul with its three faculties of memory, will, and intellect. I already had steps for the memory (8) and the will (9) so we needed a step for the intellect to complete this soul-strengthening process. As highly important as it is, the problem with just doing Catholic readings is that it improves the intellect in only one area. Our intellects require strengthening all-way round. How to do that could be a book all by itself but suffice it to say, our efforts need to be comprehensive, that is, integral in this area if our work is going to really do us much good against our hooks. Hence, we're going to use Step 10 as a springboard to achieving the complete integration of your intellect with things that are Catholic. This is akin to our analogy of our soul being a ship's hull.

Since the water surrounds the hull completely, it does us no good to strengthen it just at the keel or in the bow because the water will just find another spot to leak through; we have to strengthen it everywhere because the water always finds the weakest point. That would indicate that we have to eliminate or reduce all of our intellectual weak points. I'm not talking about becoming geniuses or experts about Catholic dogma or culture or anything like that. I'm simply saying that you need to know what it means to be a Catholic as well as know what it takes to lead a Catholic life and then to go live that Catholic



life. This means beginning a regular process of exposure to things that are Catholic and a process of “un-exposure” to the things that aren’t. This cannot be done instantly; Rome wasn’t built in a day, either. Instead we will undertake this in two stages. The first is to begin to do daily spiritual readings. This you will begin to implement immediately. The second will be done gradually over a long period, maybe even taking the rest of your life, where you will begin a process of making your life integrally Catholic by creating a Catholic environment for you and your family wherever possible. The more important of these two goals, of course, is to learn the truths of the Faith first; branch out from there once you have a firm grasp of the basics.

SIDEBAR (PART I): WHAT “READING” MEANS

In order to fulfill the last part of Step 10, “...so that my intellect and my conscience will become properly formed,” I’m going to stretch the definition of “reading.” You remember that nothing gets into your intellect except through the senses, right? Well, since your intellect is constantly receiving messages from your environment, it is in effect, “reading” your environment at all times and what it is reading can either be a help or a hindrance to your salvation. Now, since you obviously don’t want your intellect hindered, it is important for you to expose yourself to as much Catholic “reading” material as possible if you are going to do a complete job of retooling your intellect. That means that the other senses need to do their part in this process as well. Oh, we’ll certainly want to increase our spiritual reading but for our purposes, “reading” includes all things that you see, such as looking at art and architecture, and in addition, it includes the other senses such as hearing too, so we’ll also talk about music. Therefore, this all boils Step 10 down to being about you establishing your own Catholic Culture and the necessity of you engaging with all things that are “Catholic” as much as possible and disengaging yourself from all things that are not realizably Catholic, that is, that you can’t “pull” some Catholic truth out of it without being tricked by the anti-Catholic parts of it.

SIDEBAR (PART II): WHAT IS CATHOLIC CULTURE?

You may have heard of this term elsewhere; it seems a pretty popular phrase these days. I see the term as being redundant since all things that are “Catholic” are culture and all things that are true “Culture” are Catholic. However, since the term is so widely used, I will use it here but I want you to understand in what sense I use it. So, what do I mean by the term “Catholic Culture”? To answer that question, I’m going to break it up into the two terms “Catholic” and “Culture” and then I am going to tie it all together using a quote from Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ that sums it all up, “I am the way, the truth, and the life.” (Jn xiv. 14)

Well, friend, you already know that “catholic” means “universal”. We’re talking here about things and ideas that are universally true in both time and space. An obvious example would be the truths of our holy Faith. They were true in the 1st

Century AD in Judea and they are equally true in our own present day and country. But can't we also talk about other things that are universally true, or what I collectively term "Truth", as well? We know that God is the Creator and that He created the birds, the flowers, and the bugs; but didn't He also create the very laws by which His creation operates? Of course, He did. He made the laws of physics, mathematics, music and art, even the rules of beauty such as what makes an arrangement of flowers "beautiful". Since He made all of these and all of these are universally true, all Truth must be Catholic, even if it isn't directly about religion.

By contrast, this concept excludes anything that is false, or what I will term, "Error." Besides those things that are just flat-out wrong, we also include in the category of Error things that are peculiar to just one time and place so that they are not universal. Examples of this are fads or anything short-lived in nature, which, unfortunately, is pretty much a description of our own pop culture since it is based on the 10-second sound bite and what is "new" and not what is universal. Here, anything that has lost its "newness" is thrown out so the pop culture is constantly in motion, forever creating and de-creating itself. Even whatever part might objectively be considered Catholic becomes obscured on the conveyor belt of the constant parade of "new" (as an aside, this culture exists primarily to keep us spending money since the money-makers can only stay in business by appealing to our greed to have the "new"). This ceaseless parade of "new" is everywhere, even in obscure ways, whether we're talking about collectibles like Top-40 hits, magazines, ceramics, or Christmas ornaments, or about disposable things with built-in obsolescence, or about remodeling of your home, vacation trips, or youth sports. Not convinced? Try this. Listen to discussions at work or wherever you meet people you know – even at church. First, listen to how many of the topics are about something new, "How was your weekend", "How was vacation", "How's that bedroom project", or "How'd you do in the tournament"? See how the face of the owner of the "new" lights up? Now, what's your reaction when you are the owner of the "new" and are asked about it? Be honest. Feels good to talk about it, right?

Anyway, in summing up, you can interpret the "Catholic" part of the term "Catholic Culture" to be any and all things that are explicitly "Catholic" as in the things of our Holy Religion but also other things that are implicitly "Catholic" because they have a universal appeal that speaks the Truth in some way. Truth means Catholic and Catholic means Truth.

OK, so what's "culture"? Culture comes from the Latin, "cultura" which means, "to cultivate" as in to grow or to nurture. In English we have horticulture and agriculture as examples of sciences on how to grow things. A culture, then, is something that fosters life and here we mean both the physical and spiritual life with an emphasis primarily on the spiritual life. We mean both because the spiritual life is our ultimate end and the physical life because that is our means of

acquiring the spiritual life. Therefore, culture is any part of our physical life that fosters our growth in the spiritual life.

Some examples of culture might be helpful but I'm sure you can come up with some yourself as well. Of course, we all have to have protection from the elements so we wear clothes, so clothing is the first one. We have to live somewhere, so architecture is another. We use devices to sleep, sit upon, and eat so we have furniture. Speaking of eating, how about cooking and cooking utensils? We want to be entertained so we have music, theater, and literature. We want to express our emotions so we have poetry and art. All of these are examples of culture so, you see, the list is almost endless but I think you get the idea of what I'm talking about.

Every society has its own means of solving the very practical problems of everyday life and as I've said before, these solutions are either an aid to or an impediment to our getting to heaven. In our society you deal with an unwanted pregnancy by having an abortion. In a Catholic society, you deal with the problem of unwanted pregnancies by not fornicating to begin with. Since God created societies to assist us in our earthly voyage back to our heavenly home, a culture is only a true culture if it helps us to grow towards heaven. Whenever I use the term "culture" it should be understood that I mean a true culture. Anything else is actually "anti-culture" because it fosters death instead of life. Clues to identify whether a society is an anti-culture or not are whether or not laws parallel Catholic Truth, protect its most helpless members, and, a more obscure one that I'd like to point out, is the balance between natural and man-made materials used. The more emphasis that is placed on using artificial or man-made materials indicates a movement away from God's creation and a greater reliance upon man's own creation. Natural materials tend towards culture while man-made ones tend towards anti-culture. For an example, look at the construction of the great cathedrals of Europe. They are made with stone, wood, marble, etc. - all natural materials. The modern skyscraper has a preponderance of steel, concrete, and plastic - none of which is naturally found.

The epitome of Catholic Culture is Western Europe in the 13th Century because both Church and State were united together to make all phases of society act as helps to men to save their souls. The laws, music, architecture, literature, religion, etc. were to a superior degree in harmony and witnessed in their own way the truths of the Catholic Faith. There were exceptions, of course, because the effects of Original Sin prevent man from doing anything perfectly but a man living in that time was not hindered and impeded from saving his soul because of "separation of church and state", contraception and abortion, the heresies of Protestantism and Islam, rampant materialism, pornography, the liberal democratic state, etc. etc. etc. I don't suppose you can see what I'd consider an example of anti-culture now do you?

Therefore, let me pose a definition. **Catholic Culture is any part of our human existence that speaks the truth in some manner that moves us further along the way to eternal life.** I don't think you can find that exact definition anywhere but I think it fits for our purposes here in Step 10.

Now before we close this sidebar let's think about Our Lord's words and how they apply here to our definition of Catholic Culture, "I am the way, the truth, and the life." (Jn xiv. 6) How is He all three: way, truth, and life? Well by "way" we can mean the manner that something is done, like the way to make a cake or we can also speak of "way" as in a path or highway. Christ is both the manner we should live because we should imitate His sinless life and He also is the path or highway by virtue of the Church He founded, which guides us by her sacred doctrines along with the Mass and the Sacraments to the path we need to follow in this world. He is the "Truth" because He is pure Truth – no Error whatsoever, which correctly describes what our holy religion has always and everywhere taught. And lastly, He is the "Life", both temporal and spiritual. By virtue of His two natures we know that both were sublime. The evidence of His earthly life we have from the Gospels themselves; the heavenly life because we know that He has ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of the Father. Let's go back to our definition now. Catholic Culture reflects these words of Our Lord by mirroring these very same thoughts. It gives us a way for us to live here on earth by speaking truth to us in our everyday life that show us the way to our own heavenly life.

CATHOLIC CULTURE PHASE I, GOOD CATHOLIC READING:

With that behind us, let's take a look at the first phase of Catholic Culture, which is to do daily reading from good Catholic sources. You should consider choosing something from an area in which you know you are weak but make sure it's a topic and reading level that you are comfortable with. Aim for 15 minutes as a minimum. Do more if you can but strive in a mighty way to make this a daily habit. If all you can handle is 5 minutes, fine. Do that. You need to do well what you do so don't overdo it. Increase the time as you can and when you can. Do you find a certain book or author boring or over your head? Get a different one. Pick something at your level, even if it's a so-called children's book. So what! No one else is watching. As I'm sure you remember the definition of a virtue being a good action done habitually, do the same here to make daily reading a habit, a virtuous habit; one that you will keep with you until the day you die. The key is to begin simply...and simply begin. Regardless of what you choose to read, you should begin this phase right away.

As I said earlier, the purpose of Step 10 is to strengthen the intellect in all areas. To begin, however, I seriously suggest that you focus on the most important area and that is Catholic doctrine because chances are pretty good that, regardless of your Catholic background, you have gaps or holes in your understanding of what it really means to be Catholic. It makes perfect sense that you can't will to do the

Divine Will if you don't know what that Divine Will is. The following reading list is made up of what I personally have found to be very effective. I'm sure that others will have recommendations that I will want to include in later editions of "The Hook and I" or you will have your own personal favorites that have given you much fruit. As the Holy Ghost "*breatheth where he will,*" (*Jn iii. 8*) so that we each learn in different ways, I suggest my list as a starting point but add your favorites or what others suggest as well.

If you have made it to this point in your struggle against your hook, you have already discovered the depth of the level of combat necessary to break the attachment. It is your reason that has made this discovery and this step serves to strengthen your faith by educating your reason, which is another term for your intellect. Now, I know that many people will say differently, but Faith and Reason are not in conflict with each other. There is NOTHING in the Catholic Faith in which there is a conflict between the two. Any "contradictions" are only apparent, not real. In this time of Crisis in the Church, however, there is an incredible amount of misinformation, disinformation, and just a lack of information being disseminated amongst the faithful. There have been cases in which we have been lied to. Therefore, it's critical that we all educate ourselves so that we know what the Church, "*semper et ubique*" (always and everywhere) really teaches. Remember: it cannot change! In this way, our intellects will be properly formed which will greatly aid our wills. "*And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.*" (*John viii: 31-32*) In this case, St. Paul is speaking of freedom as being free from attachment to sin - which is exactly what we are trying to accomplish with our struggle against our hook. Therefore without an further ado, here is a bibliography of recommended readings:

BIBLE

Douay-Rheims version, especially the Haydock Bible. It's expensive and in two volumes but the text is a faithful rendering into English of the Vulgate and has extensive commentaries. Modern translations have distortions in them so I don't recommend them.

Missal of the 1962 or earlier Mass. Used ones can be obtained at yard sales, used bookstores, or antique stores for 5 or 10 dollars. The epistle and gospel readings can go a long way to fill in your understanding of scripture if the cost of a Haydock Bible is out of your price range.

The Church Year by Fr. Leonard Goffine. Covers the readings of the year as well as providing an excellent introduction to the lives of the saints.

CATHOLIC DOGMA

- Catechism of the Council of Trent
- Dogmatic Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent

- Baltimore Catechism (A, B, C, & D)
- My Catholic Faith - this can be also be obtained used. It currently runs in the \$35 range but I bought a used one for five bucks.

SPIRITUALITY

- Preparation for Death by St. Alphonsus - anything written by him.
- Dark Night of the Soul by St. John of the Cross – anything by him as well.
- True Devotion to Mary by St. Louis-Marie de Montfort - anything by him.
- The Interior Castle or The Mansions by St. Teresa of Avila.
- Dialogues by St. Catherine of Siena
- The Story of a Soul by St. Therese of the Child Jesus.
- The Three Ways of the Spiritual Life by Garrigou-Lagrance - anything by him.
- The Imitation of Christ - attributed to Thomas a Kempis.
- The Soul of the Apostolate by Dom Chautard - do NO Works of Mercy without reading this.
- Legion of Mary Handbook by Frank Duff (editions up the late 1950's)
- Humility of Heart by Fr. Cajetan Mary da Bergamo

CATHOLIC SOCIAL DOCTRINE

The encyclicals of the popes up through Pius XII. The following list is by far from exhaustive, Leo XIII wrote enough encyclicals on his own to fill a thick book. A single example from several popes are given below

- Bl. Pius IX: Syllabus of Errors
- Leo XIII: Mirari Vos
- St. Pius X: Pascendi
- Pius XII: Casti Conubii

Now please don't think that this is an exhaustive list, but it is a good beginning. I have found that once you are past the touch-and-go combat against your hook, you will become thirsty for solid Catholic reading. As I have been advised, so I will advise you. You should do a minimum of 15 minutes a day reading of a good religious book. Never let a day pass that you haven't read something spiritual to feed your soul. You don't let a day pass without feeding your body, do you? Of course not. Neither should you neglect to feed your soul. By the way, in the future you will use at least part of this daily reading for your daily meditation as well. That's just a warning of things to come.

CC PHASE II, OTHER GOOD CATHOLIC THINGS:

Now let's move on to the other things that are part of Catholic Culture. For the most part, you probably wouldn't see these as being "Catholic" on first blush but

remember our definition above on what Catholic Culture is. I am going to present some examples of sources of literature/history, music, art/architecture, and philosophy that you can use to help you to educate your intellect to strengthen it in other areas besides religion. Education comes from two Latin words, “ex, eo” which means out of and “docere” which means to lead. In other words, education is “to lead out of”, and in our case, ignorance – the ignorance caused by Original Sin, poor schools, a society immersed in relativism and sex, and finally our own sins.

What I’m proposing here for you is to make learning your Faith your first priority in Step 10. Gradually sprinkle in over time some of the ideas that I present here. Add more of them, as you are able to over the rest of your life; that means that this step is never really completely finished. You should always strive to make your life more integrally Catholic and that means that you shouldn’t be surprised that as you progress you find more and more areas of your life that you will want to “tinker with” or re-arrange, if you will. Your own interests and abilities will guide much of the direction of this second part of Step 10. If you have an interest in music I would expect that you would spend more time with that than you will with architecture. You should, however, expose yourself to some of each of these areas as well as ones that appeal to you, such as cooking or handicrafts. I can’t put every possible area of Catholic Culture in a book of this type but once you get past the idea that there has to be a crucifix on top of something in order for it to be “Catholic” I think you’ll be well on your way to “Restoring all things in Christ – at least in your own family”.

Speaking of “Restoring all things in Christ” brings up another topic that needs to be mentioned. Once you have seriously begun to explore Catholic Culture, in many ways you and your home will begin to resemble the early monks of Europe during the Dark Ages who went out into the wilderness and were surrounded by pagan barbarians that had flowed in a tidal wave over the remnants of the dead Roman Empire. Putting their trust in God, they drained the swamps, cleared the land, worked the fields, and were living examples of Christian charity to all they met. They were islands of the Catholic Faith – of Catholic Culture amidst a tempestuous sea of barbarism. Initially isolated by the waves of paganism, they sought only to preserve what they could of civilization while doing their religious duties.

“How could this have happened?” you might ask. The answer is simply because the Truth draws souls to itself – even without their knowing it. These islands of monks, these islands of culture, converted souls to the True Religion in the same way that the mangrove tree in a tidal basin along the seacoast works. The mangrove lives in the brackish water found there, half fresh



and half salt. It sends its roots into the silt at the bottom of the water and shoots forth its trunk into the sky. As the tide rises and falls it carries debris with it, what we might call flotsom and jetsom (old spelling). Their branches and roots snag this debris so that when the tide falls it settles to the bottom. Day in, day out,

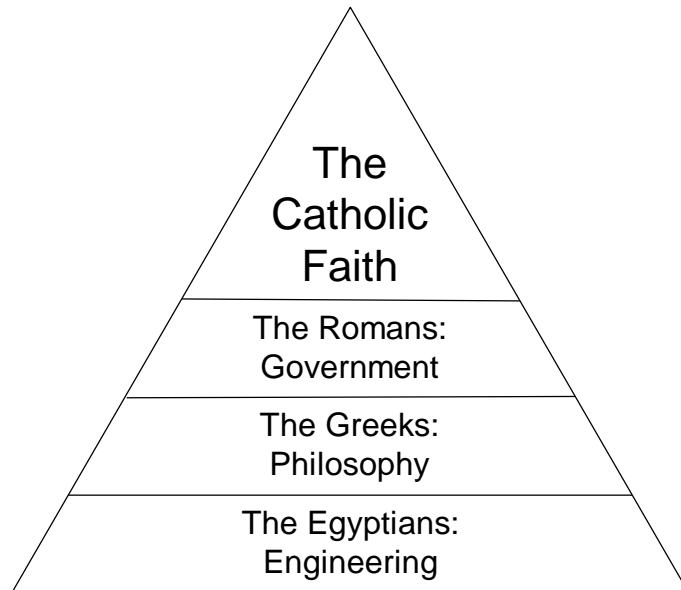


more and more silt is deposited around the roots, slowly building up a landmass where before there was nothing but a single mangrove tree surrounded entirely by water! This island of fertility provides soil for plants, food for aquatic animals and nesting for the birds. As time goes by, this single tree will create an island, complete with its own ecosystem. My friend, we

too are called today to be just like the mangrove tree and to create similar fertile islands of culture within an increasingly pagan sea. This is why it is so important that you begin to seek out the pieces of Catholic Truth that you can find, wherever you can find them. First, cut the line to your own hook to be sure; save yourself first. After you begin “to see light at the end of the tunnel” in that war, work on your own household. After that, spread out to your extended family, neighbors, and colleagues. Don’t think that someone else will do it. If you don’t do it, it won’t get done! You must do your part to help in the wider struggle to sever the lines of the barbarian hooks that have enslaved our modern world. Look at the picture of what a single mangrove tree did! Even if you are not called to be a monk and to go out and drain the swamp, you are at least called to build an “island” within that swamp!

All right, I have one last point to cover before I deluge you with suggestion lists. Much of what I recommend comes from ancient Greek and Roman sources. Why? Well, if you look at the sketch I’ve drawn of a pyramid, you’ll notice that the Catholic Faith sits on top of three ancient civilizations that preceded Our

Lord: Egyptian, Greek, and Roman. This is an oversimplification but each of them was famous for some field of expertise that was required to already be in place when Christ arrived in order to facilitate the rapid growth of His new religion as well as for man to know that the best he could do still wasn't good enough; he still needed something more than what he could reason out on his own. Man had to already know that he had reached the pinnacle



of philosophy, which he did through the Greeks, in order to realize the sublime nature of Christ's teaching. "Why didn't we think of that? Because we couldn't!" The transportation network and unity of the central government of the Romans was necessary to provide for the rapid distribution of the Good News and the Romans needed the engineering skill of the Egyptians before that in order to build the transportation network. How could St. Paul perform his travels and spread his epistles around the Mediterranean rapidly if there weren't the Roman roads and control of the seas? In other words, the whole thing was a setup by God! He knew what He needed to grow His religion and He knew that man had to be frustrated over his inability to provide answers to his own questions. "This is as good as I can do and it's not good enough. Something's still missing and I can't get there from here." The upshot of all this is that the ancients got close to the answers so we can learn much from them. We have to avoid making the same mistakes that they did – remember that they aren't Catholic, but regardless, there is much fruit for us to harvest in understanding how they saw the world so don't be surprised at the amount of ancient sources.

I was fortunate in being able to teach in a small Catholic Academy for four years. I was ruined financially from the experience but because it was a classical curriculum I was exposed to a tremendous amount of classical literature and history over that period. I taught Grades 4 through 12 at various times and I had to keep up with my students so I read everything that they did. That sure made for lots of reading! We covered everything from the Ancient Egyptians, Greeks, and Romans all the way through to the modern era in both literature and history so I was able to fill in the holes in my own intellect at the same time I was trying to instill Catholic Culture into my students. I didn't teach the Egyptians because they were covered in the 3rd grade but just about everything else on the list I've had the pleasure to read at least once.

Enough background already! Let's get to the details:

GOOD LITERATURE:

For good reading I always recommend the classics. Now, the goal is to look for the Catholic meaning in any non-Catholic literature; the classics are your best, but not your only source. There are many children's versions of much of this literature so if the full-blown adult edition is beyond your skill or desire, feel free to substitute the children's one with the understanding that modern authors have frequently taken liberties to suppress portions that are "too" Catholic so you may have to "read between the lines" in order to get the full Catholic effect. Also, be cautious about both the ancients and the moderns; there is frequently nudity and sensuality that you'll want to avoid. I guess things have really come full circle. Just be careful; older used books are typically a safe bet. In any case and without further ado, here is a partial list of good reading:

Good Literature

Classics:

- The Ancient Period:
 - The Histories by Herodotus.
 - The Anabasis by Xenophon.
 - Plutarch's Lives is a collection of biographies of famous Greeks and Romans written in the late 1st century. Plutarch wrote a "life" about anyone who was anybody before 75AD.
 - Homer' Iliad and Odyssey.
 - Virgil's Aeneid.
 - Avoid Ovid's Metamorphoses. It is entirely too sensual.
 - Children's Versions:
 - The Children's Homer by Padraic Colum is a very readable version that includes both the Odyssey and the Iliad. I suggest an older edition as the illustrations avoid much of the nudity characteristic of the Greeks. If you only read three ancients books, this is the first one you should get.
 - Mythology by Edith Hamilton is very well done and will give you an understanding of how the Greeks and Romans approached the supernatural.
 - Famous Men of Egypt, Famous Men of Greece, & Famous Men of Rome by John Haaren and AB Poland are fantastic retellings from history and mythology. "...Greece" and "...Rome" are the other two "must reads".
- Apostolic:
 - The Didache.
 - The Meditations of Marcus Aurelius. For a pagan stoic he has some interesting things to say. Compare his philosophy to George Washington's.
 - Two Lives of Charlemagne
 - Song of Roland

- Poem of the Cid
- Medieval:
 - Dante's Divine Comedy. Read all three parts, not just Purgatorio. This is Catholic thought mixed in with Renaissance Italian politics. The Cliff's Notes wouldn't be a bad thing to read alongside it to help explain some of the characters and symbolism, though.
 - Marco Polo's Travels.
 - I don't suggest Canterbury Tales by Chaucer unless you are very careful. Although set up as a series of tales told during a religious pilgrimage there are a number of tales that are too sensual. It is a good introduction to Olde Englishe, however. Again, get the Cliff's Notes and skim each one for whether or not it passes muster before you choose to read that it.
- Reformation:
 - Shakespeare. I really enjoy The Old Bard. Controversies aside over whether he actually wrote his works or not, there is a great number of Catholic references in many of his works. Good stuff.
 - MacBeth
 - Julius Caesar
 - Hamlet
 - King Lear
 - Coriolanus
 - Henry V
 -
- Modern
 - Short Stories by Tolstoy. You can read War and Peace if you want to but his short stories are more easily digested, for my tastes.
 - The Brothers Karamazov and Crime and Punishment by Dostoyevsky
 - TS Eliot
 - Orthodoxy by GK Chesterton. Anything by GK is good. I particularly like his very subtle and effective reasoning in this work.
 - The Hobbit and The Lord of the Rings Trilogy by J.R.R. Tolkien. The widely popular movies skim or skip over much of the Catholic symbolism that Tolkien injected into this series. I'm amazed at how popular Catholic Truth is to the general public as long as they don't know that it's Catholic.
 - The Screwtape Letters and Chronicles of Narnia Series by C.S. Lewis.
 - Anything by Hillaire Belloc.

Before I move along, I want to encourage you to write your own poetry, keep a journal, or try your own hand at writing a book. It'll keep your creative juices flowing and will keep the rules of grammar fresh in your mind, which is not a bad thing, especially if you are home-schooling your children or have to write on occasion for work.

MUSIC:

One of the things about our anti-culture society is that it has made us a nation of spectators, not doers. We tend to sit (like around the TV) as so many voyeurs or lumps waiting passively to be entertained. Break that mold! This is especially true of music. Most recordings that you can buy are basically "virtual music". It's not at all what the musicians were really playing – in fact, many times they weren't even playing together! Each track is recorded and rearranged until it has the "sound" that the recording engineer wants. After each track is edited, or more precisely, scrubbed to perfection, then all of the tracks are mixed together. This is what you buy – virtual music. It's not real. It's not even a recording of what the band or artist ever played on any given day and at any given moment! Listen. It's too perfect. No excess pauses, flat notes, or singers off key. My solution is to make your own music. There's nothing more Catholic than a home in which music and singing are part of everyday family life. Don't play an instrument or can't carry a tune in a bushel basket? Not to worry. Any fool with ten thumbs can play the mountain dulcimer (I do) and it can be learned very easily. Hum. Sing. Learn harmony. Play rhythm on the tabletop or even on your stomach. Take lessons or teach yourself. The instrument doesn't matter just so long as it's within your budget, you like the sound of it, and have the aptitude to play it. You're never too old!

What style of music do I suggest? Pick one you like with the understanding that no matter how far back you go, there's likely to be some aspect of it that will be anti-Catholic. For example, let's pick Early American Folk Music from the 18th Century. You'd think that would be pretty safe, right? It's over 200 year old! What could be wrong with it? Well, some of the lyrics are rather risqué, especially in some of the sailor tunes, or they may be heretical or border on the blasphemous like The Cherry Tree Carol. With the exception of Catholic liturgical music, regardless of what era or style you pick you will have to pick the grains of sand out of the salt, so to speak. You will encounter parts that will, or at least should, rub against your Catholic senses. The farther back in time that you go or to countries that have Catholic roots, the safer you will be but please take my advice and always keep your eyes open. This goes doubly so if you are sharing this with your children. They will not be able to discern the anti-Catholic parts until it's too late. They will have already incorporated it into their subconscious memory. Just be careful and alert.

Of course, sometimes you have to have recorded music; try playing the piano in your car during rush hour! In these cases I recommend the following genres of music:

Good Music

- Gregorian Chant: The rich collection of liturgical chant that is the Church's treasure still provides peacefulness to the spirits of even anti-Catholics. Listen to any classical radio station and you'll be amazed at the amount of chant selections played.
- Classical: Beethoven and Dvorak are my favorites. I'm not familiar with modern "orchestral" music so I can't pass judgment on it. I leave it to others to judge its value.
- Folk: Since I started playing the mountain dulcimer I have learned to appreciate the simple lifestyle of the mountain folk. I'm also learning the fiddle nowadays and that fits right in to this style of music.
- Ethnic: Having Irish, German, and French ancestry in my family, I find these types natural for me to enjoy. Don't be afraid to explore your own ethnicity's music. Let me also mention folk dance here.

I haven't found much of modern music that doesn't emphasize sensuality, immorality, or rebelliousness but judge for yourself, only be honest. If you must listen to it, seek whatever fruit you can. You'll probably find yourself skipping tracks here and there on your CD's to avoid certain songs but there are some decent singers, guitarists, and pianists that do have talent so you can at least appreciate them from a technical standpoint. Just be very leery about deciding that the music you are already listening to is really "Catholic" enough.

GOOD THINKING/PHILOSOPHY

Since this step really is about the intellect, I can't pass by philosophy without at least mentioning it. Most people are "turned off" by the word "philosophy" so I put "good thinking" in to soften it up a bit. Philosophy is simply the study of "being" or "existence". How to live, what is truth, etc. If you have made it this far in the Catholic 12-Steps, I know that you have been doing a lot of soul searching about your own existence. Therefore, you are a philosopher. In fact, everyone is a philosopher. A priest friend of mine once said that, "Every man is a philosopher." This makes perfect sense. Our actions follow our ideas. You don't simply bounce from one action to the next as if you were some pinball randomly hit by some type of metaphysical flipper! You behave more or less within some principles that you have, even if you can't express them in words, about how you want to live. Even if you violate those principles from time to time, you know the type of person you want to be. As a Catholic, my friend, I would certainly hope that those personal principles correspond exactly with the Church's principles but even if they don't, you still have ideas on how you should "exist". You are a philosopher – whether you know it or not and whether you like it or not.

What this all means is that you need to expose yourself to what the philosophers who actually thought of themselves as philosophers had to say about “existence”. Therefore, I want to leave you with a list of philosophers whose writings have fruit that you can use. Some of them are good Catholic philosophers and some of them are pretty far removed from Catholic thought. I think it’s obvious why you should read the likes of Augustine and Aquinas. Why are the non-Catholics on the list? Simply because once your intellect has been educated and begun to solidify in conformance to Catholic thought, it is worth your while to understand a bit of what the enemies of Holy Mother Church have said to attack her. Sun Tzu, the great Chinese military philosopher summed it up well, *“Hence the saying: If you know the enemy and know yourself, you need not fear the result of a hundred battles. If you know yourself but not the enemy, for every victory gained you will also suffer a defeat. If you know neither the enemy nor yourself, you will succumb in every battle.”* (*The Art of War, Chapter III, 18*) That’s why you need to know a little bit of what Kant and Rousseau had to say. You need this for yourself and your family but also so that you can answer the questions of the ignorant and the inquisitive as you move farther away from your hook and closer to sanctity.

Because we are all so different in the intellectual arena I’m not going to recommend any specific works. I will, however, suggest starting with condensed or simplified versions borrowed from a friend or library to get a feel for each philosopher’s thoughts. Also, don’t be too embarrassed to borrow from the children’s section of the library either! After that, if you want to go farther you can always buy the original. This way, you won’t be wasting money on books that don’t hold your interest or are too intellectually deep for you.

Good Thinking

Suggested Philosophers:

- Aristotle.
- Plato.
- Socrates.
- St. Augustine.
- St. Thomas Aquinas.

Enemies:

- Rousseau (Enlightenment)
- Kant (Relativism)
- Marx (Communism)

I would like to close Step 10 with an exhortation for you to join the fight “To Restore All Things in Christ” by taking your work with Step 10 far beyond just strengthening your intellect but to seriously immerse yourself and your family with Catholic Culture in as widespread and as deep a manner as you can. It is only by us Catholics becoming “mangroves” in the “tidal basin” of the world around us will we be the “salt of the earth” and the “light on the candlestick” for a world that has long since lost its savor in the darkness of its own sinfulness.

STEP 11: INCREASE MY SANCTITY THROUGH PRAYER.

Welcome once again, my dear friend. If you have just come from Step 7 I want you to just continue reading just like you normally would. On the other hand, if you just turned the page from Step 10, after you read the rest of this introduction, I want you to skip over to the *STEP 11B: MEDITATION:* section. I know this is a rather unusual way to read a book with this flipping back and forth but in keeping with the usual “12-Steps” structure I’ve had to introduce certain parts of the prayer life at different times because, quite frankly, you weren’t ready for them. Introducing everything all at once would very likely have been too much. The end result would have done more harm than good and you would have most likely failed eventually because I was trying to get you to do too much all at once. By way of analogy, you feed toddlers milk and soft foods to begin with; you don’t feed them steak and potatoes - that comes later. Certainly not trying to be insulting, but you can think of Step 11A as the baby food in your prayer “diet” and Step 11B as the adult food. I’m sure you would agree with me that we need to eat the proper foods at the proper ages and that’s why I’ve split Step 11 into two parts. You’ll find each part easily “digestible” if you do take growing your prayer life in these two stages.

Moving right along, here is a restating of the complete Step 11:

- 11. I will increase my sanctity by regular and fervent prayer.** I will especially develop a great love for the Rosary and the Blessed Virgin. I will develop my own list of personal patron saints and I will pray to them regularly. I will start to meditate on the truths that I am reading about so that my interior life will be sufficiently strong for the combat that I am in. in.G:\dcannane\My Documents\Blessed Margaret Articles\The Hook and I articles\COMPLETED SECTIONS\Consolidated Book\Documents and Settings\dcannane\My Documents\Blessed Margaret\steps_11_n_12.htm

Now here is where the branch occurs. If you came from Step 7, **CONTINUE READING WITH STEP 11A: PRAYER.** Otherwise, **SKIP TO STEP 11B: MEDITATION:**

STEP 11A: PRAYER

Welcome, comrade-in-arms, to the step on growing your prayer life. Now, just like we typically do before starting most of our discussions, we want to make sure that everyone understands the terms used and I want to clarify some points before we get started.

SOME IMPORTANT CONSIDERATIONS:

First, let's make clear an important point to avoid any misunderstanding. In all of Step 11, both parts A and B, when we talk about "prayer" we're talking about personal prayer, whether you're praying by yourself or with others like with your family. We are not speaking about public prayer as in the Holy Mass. True, the Mass is the most perfect prayer but for all of us except for any priests who are reading this, we can't "pray" the Mass in the sense that we can't "offer" the Mass – only the priest can do this. We "assist" at Mass by our prayers (even if we're saying the prayers of the Mass from our missal) but we're not the ones consecrating the bread and the wine. So, in this step when I speak about "best" or "most important" prayers, I am NOT speaking about the Mass but ONLY about personal prayers said by Joe Layman – you and me. Besides, the Mass already has its own step!

The second point I want to make sure is understood is that I've moved this portion of developing your prayer life to just after Step 7 because you will soon be starting the most difficult part of the entire Catholic 12-Steps and that is Steps 8, 9, and 10: the Combat Steps. I want you to maximize the graces you are receiving from those steps but I also want to maximize the graces you receive from your repeated good actions in accomplishing the other steps as well. More so than that, however, is that since your sanctity is the real objective and not just severing the line to your hook, having a solid foundation on which to build your prayer life is crucial to developing your sanctity. Without it, you will stay a spiritual infant, which unfortunately, includes the vast, vast majority of Catholics. Not to disparage them, no, far from it, but the truth is that most Catholics hug the minimal effort line, the "I-won't-do-any-more-than-I-need-to" line and still be able to get into heaven. Actually they deceive themselves. Instead of hugging the line, they tend to have a hard time just staying at the line so their salvation is jeopardized. This is the case since most of us tend to lose ground on anything we don't put much effort into and that even applies to the spiritual life. You, on the other hand, have been given a great grace to use your hook to become a saint and give the Good God great glory by overcoming your hook. Don't disappoint Him! We're not looking for the minimum; we're looking for the maximum effort!

The last consideration also has to do with our starting the Combat Steps after this chapter. That consideration is adding regularity and order to your life. It could have been placed in Step 8 where we will be working on strengthening the

will by exercises of mortification. That would have been a logical place to put it since being regular and forcing yourself to keep a schedule is another way for the will to practice control over the appetites. The problem is that it comes too late in the program. As you begin to form habits of prayer now before you start the Combat Steps, you need to get your will used to being in charge. If you cannot drive yourself to say the three simple prayers daily that I task you with in the First Tier, you're going to have an extremely difficult time getting the body to submit to the will in things that are downright contrary to what the body wants. You need to start now to develop the habit of forming regular patterns for your prayer life. Anything less will be haphazard at best and will be discontinued at worst at the first sign of desolation.

Think of the world around you. Everything is regulated in different ways but always in cycles. The sun rises in the East every single day. It follows a trajectory, or path, through the sky reaching its peak at noon and then continues this trajectory until it sets in the West. It never rises in the South or North but always in the East. The time it rises and set as well as the points that it clears the horizon change by virtue of the seasons and your latitude but even these are regulated so there is regularity even within the variations of God's creation. Other areas that show this regularity are the phases of the moon, the tides of the oceans, and the growing season are just some quick examples. You, too, must mimic this regularity and I want you to start developing these habits with your prayer life. By the time you reach Step 8 you will be glad for the head start.

PRAYER:

With those three points behind us, let's ask the question, "What is prayer?" The standard catechism answer is "The lifting up of our minds and hearts to God." Maybe this is simple enough, but what does this "lifting up" really mean? This "lifting up" on the basic level is just communication between two parties but it is really an act of love. It is a heart-to-heart conversation between two persons (in this case, one of the persons is a Divine Person). It should ultimately be an intimate spiritual union between two lovers and the lovers are your soul and God. That's where we want to take our prayer life – raising it to the point of spiritual union between your soul and God.

Please don't be frightened about this talk about "spiritual union", "intimate", and "lovers". Just remember that charity is the greatest virtue and the fact that God is Charity Itself. When we get to heaven (let's be positive now, shall we?) there will be only one virtue and that is Charity. What our prayers should eventually grow to be is a prelude or foretaste here on earth of that blissful charity we will experience when we behold the Beatific Vision in heaven. The only way for this to occur is for us to take our prayer life from nothing or doing mechanical prayers with no thought up to a level of being a supernatural version of the "pillow talk" and beyond between two deeply in-love lovers. Please note that I am not speaking of anything "sexual" here at all. Also, please don't be afraid that this is

beyond you or that it is such a long or difficult journey. *“A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step,”* said the ancient Chinese philosopher Lao-tzu. This is what we are going to cover here in the first part of Step 11, taking those first steps. On this long difficult journey in this valley-of-tears you certainly have Christ alongside you every step of the way. All you have to do is “talk” to Him while you are making your journey!

Now that we know what prayer is, what are our reasons for praying? There are four reasons for us to pray: 1) **Adoration**, which expresses our love and loyalty to God; 2) **Thanksgiving**, thanking God for what He has given and/or done for us (which is a lot); 3) **Expiation**, to beg pardon for our sins and to obtain remission of the punishment for those sins; and 4) **Petition**, to ask for graces and blessings for ourselves and for others. Those are the reasons why we pray with a brief thumbnail description of each. I’m not going to go into a long discourse on these reasons since this discussion is more on the prayers themselves than on the theory of prayer. Just understand that when you are praying that it is for one or more of these reasons and that each is a grand reason to pray to the Almighty.

Now, I unfortunately hear a lot of people complain that their prayers are unanswered but the truth of the matter is that God always hears our prayers IF we pray properly and that’s the key. We will not obtain what we pray for if we have not properly prayed or if what we pray for is not good for our souls: *“You ask, and receive not; because you ask amiss: that you may consume it on your concupiscences.”* (James iv. 3) In other words, God does not grant prayers that are not good for our souls. The best guarantee for getting your prayers answered is to humbly pray with an attitude of submission to God’s will for you; that if it is bad for your soul or against His will, you don’t want it. Rather, you willingly accept whatever it is that would please God – regardless of what it is. This takes some humility to pray this way and really mean it but it works: *“And this is the confidence which we have towards him: That whatsoever we shall ask according to his will, he heareth us.”* (1 John v. 14)

Praying with that attitude of resignation to the Divine Will is a very good start; please keep that in the back of your mind as the ultimate goal for how you want to pray. Now, here are some other points necessary in order for you to pray “properly”. The first point is to **pray with attention**. *“Age quod agis!”* or “do what you are doing.” I know that just about everyone reading this is extremely busy, still, you need to set time aside in which to pray. Trying to do your morning prayers while you’re trying to eat your breakfast while you’re trying to drive in rush hour to work while you’re trying to listen to the morning news just isn’t giving the attention to your prayers that they need. It’s understood that you will pray while you are doing other things at times but don’t do other things when it’s time to pray. Set aside times, places, and circumstances to minimize the distractions while you are praying. You will find distractions enough despite your best efforts so there’s no point in stacking the deck against you praying with attention.

Speaking of distractions, you will find that they are going to crop up in the middle of your prayers. Your mind will wander away with things like your knees hurt, what's for dinner, problems in the workplace, situations with your spouse or children, or simply just having your mind wander to who-knows-what. This doesn't mean you should give up your prayers. Oh, no, far from it! Fighting off these distractions is just one more cross that Our Beloved will use to gauge just what is the extent of your love for Him. Know that they are going to happen. In fact, from now on, expect that the Lord is going to be constantly testing you with trials and tribulations. Oh, to be sure, there will be great consolations but don't get into the mindset that only good things will come to you from now on. Just adjust your thinking that every time He sends you a consolation, along with it will come a desolation so treat everything that happens in your life from now on as just a test. Don't get all riled up about this or that desolation; just humbly and patiently deal with them as they come. It'll make things that much easier if you do this. As far as distractions occurring during prayers goes, struggle manfully against them as best you can. Refocus your efforts, pick up the thread where you left off, and continue on when this happens. This is one of the reasons why I don't want you to take on too many all at once. Doing a few prayers well is vastly better than doing lots of prayers poorly. This is Satan's trap again! He will try to convince you through apparent zeal or enthusiasm – it is pride really, that you can do so much more so you try to do everything all at once. Of course, without having the habit of prayer well developed you quickly fail and give everything up as being impossible. The end result, as I'm sure you well know, is you stay hooked. As I've stated before, getting the guidance of a good spiritual director is quite valuable in making sure that your growth in, not only your prayer life, but in all areas of your spiritual growth, is appropriate to the state of your soul so that you go neither too fast nor too slow in expanding.

The second point on how to pray is to **do so with conviction**, the conviction that we are completely helpless and totally dependent on God to do anything good, especially to obtain the graces to overcome the temptations of our hook. Pray with humility. Remember the slugs and leeches from earlier in the book and how we compare to them in God's eyes? Think of them as infinitely better than we are. Also, remember that the more humble we are, the more we realize our total unworthiness before the Divine Majesty but also the more irresistible we will become to that Divine Majesty: *“He hath had regard to the prayer of the humble: and he hath not despised their petition.” (Ps ci. 18)*

This brings us to the third point and that is **to pray with great desire**. Really and truly want what you are praying for. Half-hearted prayers are met with half-hearted responses. God isn't going to respond with miracles on the superficial: *“From the beginning of thy prayers the word came forth: and I am come to show it to thee, because thou art a man of desires: therefore do thou mark the word, and understand the vision.” (Dan. ix. 23)*

The fourth point is that **we need to pray with loving trust in the goodness of God.** He knows what His children need and greatly desires to give us what we correctly ask for: *“If you being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children: how much more will your Father who is in heaven, give good things to them that ask him?”* (Matt vii. 11)

The fifth and last point on how we should pray is to **do so with perseverance.** Don't be surprised when your prayers are not answered immediately. Again, this is frequently a test to see just how badly we want something and to test our faith. To sum this point up as well as all the others, we have the story about the Chanaanite woman who sought to have her daughter cured of a devil:

“And behold a woman of Chanaan, who came out of those coasts, crying out, said to him: Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou son of David: my daughter is grievously troubled by a devil. Who answered her not a word. And his disciples came and besought him, saying: Send her away, for she crieth after us: And he answering, said: I was not sent but to the sheep that are lost of the house of Israel. But she came and adored him, saying: Lord, help me. Who answering, said: It is not good to take the bread of the children, and to cast it to the dogs. But she said: Yea, Lord; for the whelps also eat of the crumbs that fall from the table of their masters. Then Jesus answering, said to her: O woman, great is thy faith: be it done to thee as thou wilt: and her daughter was cured from that hour.” (Matt xv. 22-28)

Let me close this section before I proceed with the recommended prayers that in praying for special favors, you should unite your prayers with the mortifications that you will begin to perform in Step 9 as an effective (and frequently necessary) “one-two punch” in order to get your prayers answered. Sometimes it takes the “violence” of mortification against one's own concupiscence in order to get certain favors from God: *“Amen I say to you, there hath not risen among them that are born of women a greater than John the Baptist: yet he that is the lesser in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. And from the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent bear it away.”* (Matt xi. 11-12) Please don't take that to mean doing things like whipping yourself, etc. because that type of mortification is only for the perfect, which no one reading “The Hook and I” to overcome his hook is at that spiritual level. Our Lord here is speaking of the “violence” of self-denial like the austere life that St. John the Baptist lived and not the violence of physical abuse. Be prepared to do “violence” to yourself in order to get those special graces.

RECOMMENDED PRAYERS:

Now that we have all the background stuff attended to, friend, I want to finally wade into the prayers themselves. Since Holy Writ tells us to “pray constantly” there has to be some practical way for us to progress from doing few or no prayers, to the point of making each breath a prayer. Trying to do this all-at-once

is impossible and will only lead to frustration and failure. Again, just like starting the baby out with baby food, we're going to do this in increments or stages, so that you get used to each one before you move on to the next one. Therefore, I am going to recommend prayers in three tiers for you to do. I want you to adopt the first tier immediately and with no exceptions. These are the mandatory prayers because you NEED each of them for reasons that I will explain. Like a tripod, they stand on three legs that provide balance to the structure. Take one away and the whole thing falls over. The second tier is for you to adopt as you can over time. These are the standard prayers of Holy Mother Church and are prayers that you ought to be familiar with and, in all honesty, to know by heart. Any time you get together with other Catholics in prayer you will find opportunities for saying them. Knowing these common prayers is not only a good intellectual exercise, but more importantly, is part of the thread that binds Catholics together as part of the Mystical Body of Christ. It's part of what makes being Catholic, well, Universal, because they are universally known. The third tier is for you to begin to take up after the first tier is a well-established habit and sometime during the period when you are making the second tier habit. These prayers are entirely left to your own discretion and the influence of the Holy Ghost. They might be called, "pious practices" because they are worthy in their own right but you will say them because they appeal to your soul whereas other good Catholics may choose not to say them. Don't be insulted or surprised when others do or don't also do them. They are prayers and practices that you personally find speak to your own heart. Don't consider the Third Tier as optional, just what prayers you put into your Third Tier.

I have included all of the prayers in the First and Second Tiers in the Appendix for easy reference later on. From the Third Tier I've only included the Legion of Mary Tesserat prayers and the Blessed Margaret of Castello Novena. I had to include the prayers of my favorite patronesses, of course. The other Third Tier prayers I leave entirely up to you to seek and find since it would be impossible to include every possible "pious practice" in a book of this size.

Now, let's get to the prayers themselves. Since I find tables and lists so helpful to keep me organized, and without any further ado, here is the outline of the Recommended Prayers:

Recommended Prayers

First Tier prayers:

- The Nothingness Itself Prayer
- The Morning Offering
- The Rosary

Second Tier Prayers:

- Evening Prayers/Examination of Conscience
- Act of Contrition

- Spiritual Communion
- Grace Before/After Meals
- Acts of Faith, Hope, and Charity

Third Tier Prayers:

- The Family Rosary
- The Way of the Cross
- The Angelus
- Portions of The Divine Office
- Prayers to favorite or patron saints
- Legion of Mary Tesserat prayers
- Ejaculations
- Wearing of the scapular
- 9-day novenas such as the Bl. Margaret of Castello Novena
- Signing yourself when passing a church / Praying for the dead when passing a cemetery
- Other “pious practices”

FIRST TIER PRAYERS:

The first tier prayers are the critical ones in the war against your hook. I don't say this lightly either because they each contribute something critical. They are: 1) The Nothingness Itself Prayer, 2) the daily Morning Offering, and 3) the Rosary. I've listed them in this order because I think you will find them easiest to incorporate into your daily routine in this order.

The Nothingness Itself Prayer is Steps 1 and 2, as I'm sure you'll recall, and you should already have the habit of saying it daily, and preferably in the morning when you first arise. I've repeated frequently in this book, “*God resisteth the proud but giveth grace to the humble.*” (Jas iv, 6) I'm sure you'll also recall my words that it is ONLY when our humility exceeds our pride, even for a moment that our “hulls” are suitable “targets” and “recipients” of the “barnacles” that God would send us. We have to maintain that level of humility versus our pride in order to maintain that increased flow of barnacles and that enlarged hull area for the combat. I seriously suggest saying this on your knees with your hands folded to adopt a body posture of humility to help focus your mind towards being humble. You should also try to say it with heartfelt meaning. Prayers said from the heart, even if memorized, are a whole lot more efficacious than ones said mechanically or half-heartedly. Also, if you are in a dry period where God seems to be as far away from you as He's ever been so you're wondering if there's any use in saying the prayer at all, persevere in saying the Nothingness Itself Prayer EVEN IF YOU DO SO MECHANICALLY! Just stick to your resolution and God will grant you the consolation of His presence in His own good time. Your job in these moments is to prove your steadfastness to your Beloved by being faithful to doing what you know He wants you to do. In fact, this advice applies to every prayer here – except for the Third Tier prayers. Those are optional and any one

of which you find to be a burden, feel free to discontinue, but this applies only to the Third Tier Prayers. Getting back to periods of dryness, God will use those periods to test you and Satan will use them as a temptation to get you to give up your desire to defeat your hook. Just accept them as part of The Counterattack and remain steadfast in praying.

The next First Tier prayer is the Morning Offering. The one given in the Appendix isn't the only form but it does have the important ingredients, if you will, of what is mandatory in a morning offering. What you are doing when you say the morning offering is to follow St. Paul's advice: *"Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatsoever else you do, do all to the glory of God."* (1 Cor x. 31) This offers all of your least little good actions for the glory of God. Consequently, all of those good actions now have a supernatural end since they are being done for God's glory. This means that they are all meritorious means for you to obtain grace virtually continuously all day long. I'm sure I don't need to remind you that obtaining grace, and copious amounts of it, is the key to the struggle against the hook! That is why the Morning Offering is included in the First Tier. It isn't sufficient simply to go to Mass and receive the Sacraments when we struggle against our hook. We NEED to do everything possible to obtain the absolute maximum amount of grace each and every day. Anything less puts a cap or a lid on the graces we seek to obtain, which would, in effect, be telling God that we aren't completely relying upon Him since we really don't need EVERYTHING that we can get from Him. Need I remind you that this would be an expression of pride on our parts? In any case, the Morning Offering is mandatory because we do have to rely on Him for the grace and we don't want to place any limits whatsoever on the amount we desire of those graces. Makes sense? Good. Now, I just want to point out one last thing about the Morning Offering that I've given in the Appendix. If you already have one that you are currently doing that expresses the same idea of offering everything in your day up to God, feel free to keep it. You don't need to scrap it; continue to use it just so long as the sentiments are the same.

Before I get to the third prayer of this tier, once more, I want to put in a mention about regularity. These first two prayers are a natural to be said together since they are both very short. So, with that in mind, I want you to 1) Say them upon rising, 2) Cross yourself before and after saying them (this should be intuitively obvious to most Catholics but I'm saying it just to be complete), 3) Always in the same place and in the same body posture (e.g. on your knees on the left side of the bed facing the crucifix above the bed). This technique can be followed regardless of whether you get up on workdays at a different time than on Sundays or even if you are traveling. This sense of order and regularity will hold you in good stead in the times of dryness and desolation that Our Lord is going to send you from time to time in addition to the practical benefit of forcing the body to conform to the desires of the will.

WHY WE NEED THE ROSARY:

Let's move on to the last leg of the tripod of prayers in the First Tier, the Rosary. This is the most important and powerful of the prayers that you need to say. It is so important that I've given it its own section and I make bold to say that this is the one prayer that if you do not say (and say daily) you will fail in your quest to achieve sanctity by overcoming your hook. I don't say this based upon some infallible statement pulled out of the Extraordinary Magisterium but simply from the historical evidence that those who pray the Rosary obtain signal graces and miracles and those who don't (or worse, refuse to) pray the Rosary don't evidently receive those same graces and miracles. Worse, they tend to lose the Faith all together and that's exactly what neither you nor I want to have happen.

You see, my dear friend and colleague, that the Rosary is Mary's prayer and one cannot have one without the other. Without having a devotion to the Rosary, one cannot have a devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary and vice versa. It's as plain and simple as that. Check the writings of all the saints after St. Dominic's time if you doubt what I'm saying. This unity between Mary and Rosary is in the same manner that the Mother of Christ is so inextricably united to her Son by their mutual love that you cannot have devotion to the one without devotion to the other. Anyone trying to separate the Son from the Mother ends up with a gross distortion of the true natures of both since it is their superabundant love that defines them. As proof I offer you the image of the football players on the sideline when they are being videotaped. They always say, "Hi, Mom!" Even the hardest of criminals loves his mother. How much more so must the Greatest of all Sons love His Mother and in a similar vein how much more so must the greatest of all Mothers love her Son?

Now, let me tie all this together into my basic premise: In order to defeat your hook you **MUST** pray the Rosary. There is no compromise here. This is not an option. Take this as a direct command; humbly submit to it even if you don't understand or agree with it. Just take it on face value that you are going to have to pray the Rosary daily if you want a chance at defeating your hook and growing in holiness. "Why is this?" you might ask. This is so because of a simple three-part line of reasoning. First, in order to obtain the necessary graces to defeat your hook, you need to get them from the source of all graces, which is Jesus Christ. This part I offer without proof, as I'm assuming that all readers, even non-Catholics, will accept this at face value. Second, in order to obtain them from Jesus you need to obtain them through the channel of all graces, and that is Mary. We'll talk about this shortly. The last part in my line of reasoning is that in order to obtain them from Mary you need to resort to her favorite prayer, the Rosary. Part A follows part B follows part C, a simple progression that leads up to the logical conclusion that in order to defeat your hook you **MUST** pray the Rosary. That's what I'm going to endeavor to show in this section. To many Catholics this is all completely obvious and I ask them to bear with me but I think I need to offer the proof of this because I do know a number of Catholics of

goodwill who don't pray the Rosary and see no value in it. This is beyond my little mind to comprehend but I've met them so I know they are out there. I'm going to use a mixture of scripture and encyclicals to prove this point. Following this, I am going to describe some of the qualities, or facets as I will call them, of Mary that we as addicts will want to take advantage of in our war against our hooks. Having said all that, let's get on to proving that it is through Mary that we will obtain the graces we need.

We've already taken as a given that Jesus is the source of all graces but what does the Bible have to say about Mary? The Old Testament foretells of her power against sin even in the book of Genesis, *"I will put enmities between thee (God speaking to Satan) and the woman, and thy seed and her seed (which is Christ): she shall crush thy head, and thou shalt lie in wait for her heel."* (Gen iii. 15) The "she" is Mary because she is the mother of the "Seed", which is Christ, the promised Redeemer. There are those who use "he" in this passage but that is both inconsistent with the construction of the sentence and with the other Old Testament references to women who deal fatal head blows to evil men. Remember that the Old Testament is a foreshadowing of the New Testament so there are consistent threads throughout the Old Testament that will be fulfilled or perfected in the New Testament. One example of this idea of a woman overcoming evil as a foreshadowing of the Blessed Virgin's crushing Satan's head would be Judith cutting off the head of Holofernes to save her people from destruction. *"Thou art the glory of Jerusalem, thou art the joy of Israel, thou art the honor of our people. For thou hast done manfully, and thy heart has been strengthened, because thou hast loved chastity, and after thy husband hast not known any other: therefore also the hand of the Lord hath strengthened thee, and therefore thou shalt be blessed for ever."* (Judith xv. 10-11) Hmm...if this is said about a woman who "manfully" cuts off Holofernes head one time and she is "blessed for ever", how much more so must it be Mary who acts "manfully" in continually crushing Satan's head and be even more "blessed for ever"? I think it's clear that the Church's interpretation that it is "she" is the correct one.

Moving along to the New Testament, we have evidence that she has extremely powerful intercessory influence with her Son. We see this in the wedding feast at Cana where Our Lord performs His first public miracle of turning water into wine. Incidentally, this passage also shows Our Lord's filial obedience to His Blessed Mother as well as a foreshadowing of the Holy Eucharist (good stuff to meditate on). I want to point out that she doesn't tell Him what to do, she simply tells Him of the problem and He provides the solution even though His response would indicate that He had other plans, *"And the wine failing, the mother of Jesus saith to him: They have no wine. And Jesus saith to her: Woman, what is that to me and to thee? My hour is not yet come. His mother saith to the waiters: Whatsoever he shall say to you, do ye."* (John ii. 2-5) This shows that Jesus was obedient to the desires of His Holy Mother, even changing His plans to please her.

OK, He is willing to listen to her, but I think it's also necessary to show that she listens to our petitions as well. There's no evidence that the waiters came up to her and complained about the wine, only that Mary saw the problem and acted to solve it. Instead, let us turn elsewhere to show that if she is our Mother then she has a maternal obligation to care for us, too, and therefore, attentively listens to our prayers. This is typically shown by taking the episode of Our Lord's crucifixion on Calvary, but I want to reinforce it to drive the point home, "*When Jesus therefore had seen his mother and the disciple standing whom he loved, he saith to his mother: Woman, behold thy son. After that, he saith to the disciple: Behold thy Mother. And from that hour, the disciple took her to his own.*" (John xix. 26-27) For the "eyes of faith", that's enough to say that she who becomes John's mother becomes my mother also but I know that there are skeptics who would deny this, saying that this applied only to John and does not extend to us. For them, I offer these words of St. Paul speaking to the Romans, "*For whosoever are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. For you have not received the spirit of bondage again in fear; but you have received the spirit of adoption of sons, whereby we cry: Abba (Father). For the Spirit himself giveth testimony to our spirit, that we are the sons of God. And if sons, heirs also; heirs indeed of God, and joint heirs with Christ...*" (Romans xiii. 14-17) Now, if the Father has adopted us, we have most certainly been adopted by the Mother as well. This means that all the maternal love and care that Mother Mary rendered to her Son must be rendered to us as well by the obligation that all mothers have toward their children. Just as she interceded on behalf of the bridegroom at Cana and Jesus responded, so too, does this mean that she will intercede on our behalf and Jesus will respond – not just because of His love for us, for He certainly loved the bridegroom as one of His creatures, but because of His superabundant love for His Beloved Mother.

I trust by this point that I have shown that Jesus listens to Mary and Mary listens to us. However, I haven't yet shown that this is the only path of grace for us. It may be a great path but not necessarily the ONLY path. To resolve that issue, I want to draw your attention to one last piece of scripture that will segue very nicely into the evidence that it has always been the mind of the Church and the consistent belief of all Catholics that Mary is, indeed, the Mediatrix of All Graces, and therefore, the ONLY path by which we receive grace. For those who don't understand the term, "Mediatrix", it is the feminine form of "mediator", which is based upon the Latin term for "middle", or as we would now mean, the one in the middle between two parties – a go-between. So, let us look in at that humble home to the time of the Annunciation where the Angel Gabriel has appeared to the Virgin Immaculate to announce that it is God's desire that she become the Mother of God. St. Luke records her exact words of complete and docile assent to the will of God, "*And Mary said: behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it done to me according to thy word.*" (Luke i. 28) Do not forget, dear reader, that she had free will and could have refused the request so thank God for her "fiat".

Pope Leo XIII, as quoted from Denzinger's "The sources of Catholic Dogma", refers to this same passage in his encyclical, "Octobri mense", on the Rosary, released on September 23, 1891:

"The eternal Son of God, when He wished to assume the nature of man for the redemption and glory of man...did not do this before He received the wholly free consent of His designated mother, who, in a way, played the part of the human race itself, according to that famous and truthful opinion of Aquinas: "Through the Annunciation the Virgin's consent was looked for in place of all human nature." **Therefore, no less truly and properly may it be affirmed that nothing at all of the very great treasure of every grace, which the Lord confers, since "grace and truth came by Jesus Christ" [John 1:17], nothing is imparted to us except through Mary, God so willing; so, just as no one can approach the highest Father except through the Son, so no one can approach Christ except His Mother.**" (Emphasis added)

So, my dear friend, from this evidence of Scripture, St. Thomas Aquinas, and Pope Leo XIII, I trust that it is clear that Mary is the only channel by which we can obtain the necessary graces for our task of defeating the hook and gaining sanctity. That means that two out of the three parts of my premise have been taken care of. Now let's move on to the last part, that the Rosary is the necessary tool with which to pray to Mary. Here, I certainly can't pull out some Bible quote since the Rosary wasn't given to us until St. Dominic's time. Nor can I pull out another Denzinger Brothers' reference to an ecumenical council that dogmatically declares the Rosary as infallibly the only way to obtain the intercession of the Blessed Virgin. Nope. Can't do that. But what I can prove to you is that it has been entirely the mind of the Church and also by giving you just a few pieces empirical of evidence to show you that it is through the Rosary by which Mary provides the greatest graces to her children.

In fact, so important is the Rosary in the mind of the Church that every pope since Leo XIII up through Paul VI wrote one or more encyclicals recommending the faithful to pray the Rosary as well as to extol its great effectiveness. An Internet search of "papal encyclicals" will give you the text for any one of them. Instead of quoting from one of these latter-day "venerable brethren", I'm going to quote from a much earlier pope, Pope St. Pius V, in his encyclical, Consueverunt Romani from 17 September 1569. The text I am quoting is taken from <http://www.papalencyclicals.net/Pius05/p5consue.htm>. It has some useful historical background that will help you to see the mind of Church and the high place she has held the Rosary for better than 500 years. I've emphasized the portions that apply directly to the point at hand:

"1. Prompted by their example, and, as is piously believed, by the Holy Ghost, the inspired Blessed founder of the Order of Friars Preachers (he's speaking of St. Dominic here)...when parts of France and of Italy were unhappily troubled by the heresy of the Albigenses...that they were raging most savagely against the

priests of the Lord and the clergy, raised his eyes up unto heaven, unto that mountain of the Glorious Virgin Mary, loving Mother of God. **For she by her seed has crushed the head of the twisted serpent, and has alone destroyed all heresies, and by the blessed fruit of her womb has saved a world condemned by the fall of our first parent. From her, without human hand, was that stone cut, which, struck by wood, poured forth the abundantly flowing waters of graces. And so Dominic looked to that simple way of praying and beseeching God, accessible to all and wholly pious, which is called the Rosary, or Psalter of the Blessed Virgin Mary,** in which the same most Blessed Virgin is venerated by the angelic greeting repeated one hundred and fifty times, that is, according to the number of the Davidic Psalter, and by the Lord's Prayer with each decade. Interposed with these prayers are certain meditations showing forth the entire life of Our Lord Jesus Christ, **thus completing the method of prayer devised by the Fathers of the Holy Roman Church...Christ's faithful, inflamed by these prayers, began immediately to be changed into new men. The darkness of heresy began to be dispelled, and the light of the Catholic Faith to be revealed...**

'2. Following the example of our predecessors, seeing that the Church militant, which God has placed in our hands, in these our times is tossed this way and that by so many heresies, and is grievously troubled...and afflicted by so many wars, and by the deprave morals of men, **we also raise our eyes, weeping but full of hope, unto that same mountain, whence every aid comes forth, and we encourage and admonish each member of Christ's faithful to do likewise in the Lord.**"

This very same pope requested all of Christianity pray the Rosary to secure the defeat of the Muslim navy at the battle of Lepanto in 1570. Closer to our own day, large public gatherings praying the Rosary were responsible for getting the Soviet army to leave Austria in 1945. A less militant but still effective miracle was the Our Lady's "Miracle of the Sun" in 1917 at Fatima, Portugal, which was witnessed by tens of thousands of souls, many of them enemies of the Church. Even a modern-day saint such as Padre Pio even called it, "THE weapon", as if to say it was the most crucial spiritual weapon that Catholics possessed and with that I will stop. I could go on and on with other examples and quotations from highly respected saints and others but I believe the point's been made. Suffice it to say, if you want your prayers to get through to Our Lady, you have to pray her Rosary. Period.

THE MANY FACETS OF MARY:

Since we've been talking about Mary and her Rosary, let's continue this discussion and lead it to some practical considerations for those of us who struggle against a hook. Now, one can almost never say enough about the potency and value of praying to the Queen of Heaven. Whole volumes have been written about Our Lady, and many by some of the greatest saints. Even they don't fully gauge the depth of her mysteries. This depth eludes mortal man for no one has ever been able to completely and fully comprehend the Blessed Virgin; we are just too limited in our abilities. I think part of the problem is that we tend to see



things in two-dimensions, or flat, whereas she is truly multi-dimensional. In this respect, she is more like a diamond, which, when properly cut has a large number of angled sides, or facets, each beautiful to behold. In fact, the crystalline structure of the diamond gives it facets within facets. What do I mean by that? If you'll look at the picture I have of a rather large diamond sparkling against a backdrop, I want you to observe that the bottom is a bit longer than the top and it comes to a point at a rather sharp angle. A bit above halfway up there appears a circular part where the angle changes abruptly and towards the very top there is another change in the angle of the outline to form the top. Each of these large divisions form the major facets that describe the diamond overall. Now, you will observe that these major facets are further subdivided into smaller angles that show up as changes in the shades of light and dark in the picture. These are the smaller facets of the diamond that have been cut along the lines of the crystalline structure of the diamond that fit into the major facets. They further divide or refine these major facets. Therefore, I hope you can see that this most precious and hardest of natural minerals is composed of facets within facets; it is a multidimensional structure.

Now let's take this short explanation of a diamond (I hope the gemologists out there aren't cringing too badly with my oversimplification of diamond structure) and compare it to the Blessed Virgin Mary since we are going to make use of her own facets within facets in our struggle against the hook. First of all, she mirrors this same facets within facets nature of her Son, Jesus Christ, so we will need to examine Him for a moment first, simply because it is important to see that, like the diamond, she is a reflection of the Light that shines upon her.

Now, we all know that Christ is God, Who is not a single Person in one God but three Persons in one God; Jesus being one of them. He is not the Father and He is not the Holy Ghost but He is God so He is one of three Facets, if you will, in God. Next, He is also Prophet, Priest, and King so He has three other facets within His own nature, or facet, within the Blessed Trinity. You can think of these three as the major angular changes of the diamond that I described above. Each of these facets of Our Lord provides spiritual fruit for our souls because they say something new and unique about Him when we regard any one particular facet. Meditating upon Christ the King, you can examine this facet as Christ the King of my own heart or Christ the King of the World or Christ the King as Head of the Mystical Body. See? None of these facets of Our Lord explain Him in total detail but each provides a luster or brilliance, if you will, that reflects meaningful light into our souls.

Let's now turn to Mary and explore a bit of her own facets within facets nature. She is not God, of course, but she does have a relationship to each member of that same Blessed Trinity. To the Father, she is a Daughter. To the Son, she is a Mother and to the Holy Ghost, she is a Spouse. But she is more so than that. To each of them she is a Virgin. So she is the Virgin Daughter to the Father. She is the Virgin Mother to the Son. Likewise, she is the Virgin Spouse of the Holy Ghost. In addition, she is also the Queen of Heaven and Earth. I hope you're beginning to see just how complex Mary actually is. But we're not done. Within each of these titles, Mary has additional facets that emphasize various qualities of hers or needs of ours. Although I don't remember seeing it in the literature, I hope you will agree with me that in this regard, Our Lady is indeed a diamond, a most beautiful sparkling diamond cut to absolute perfection. She, too, is an excellent reflector of the Light and her love is hard enough to cut through the glass of the hardest heart. She also has great durability because she never tires of praying for each of her children all the way to "the hour of our death." The most important part of our metaphor, however, carries us back to the facets within facets of the diamond. When you turn a diamond in your hand and you will see all light brilliantly reflected. Doing so, however, means that you catch only one facet of the diamond head-on with the light at any given moment. Turn it again and you can focus on a different one. You can almost continually turn it to focus on one facet and never get back to the first one; there are that many different facets to it. The same goes with Mary.

I want to call your attention to the Litany of the Blessed Virgin Mary; you can easily find a copy in your missal. I've listed the 49 different titles that she's referred to in the Litany.

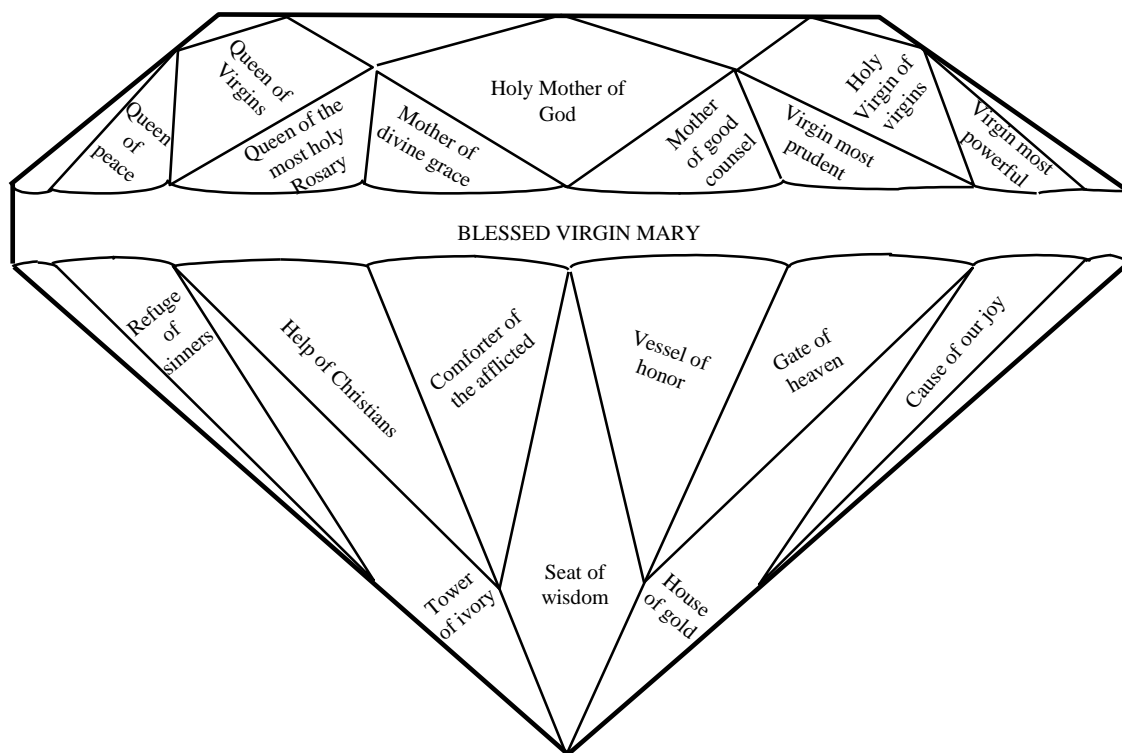
Titles of the Blessed Virgin Mary as Found in Her Litany

Quite a few different names, huh? Now, I've taken each of the main titles,

Holy Mary	Queen of angels	Holy Mother of God	Holy Virgin of virgins
Mirror of justice	Queen of patriarchs	Mother of Christ	Virgin most prudent
Seat of wisdom	Queen of prophets	Mother of divine grace	Virgin most venerable
Cause of our joy	Queen of Apostles	Mother most pure	Virgin most renowned
Spiritual vessel	Queen of martyrs	Mother most chaste	Virgin most powerful
Vessel of honor	Queen of confessors	Mother inviolate	Virgin most merciful
Singular vessel of devotion	Queen of virgins	Mother undefiled	Virgin most faithful
Mystical rose	Queen of all saints	Mother most amiable	
Tower of David	Queen conceived without original sin	Mother most admirable	
Tower of ivory	Queen assumed into heaven	Mother of good counsel	
House of gold	Queen of the most holy Rosary	Mother of our Creator	
Ark of the covenant	Queen of peace	Mother of our Savior	
Gate of heaven			
Morning Star			
Health of the sick			
Refuge of sinners			
Comforter of the afflicted			
Help of Christians			

Queen, Mother, and Virgin and applied it to the left, middle, or right of the top main angle of the diamond, so the "Queen" facets are to the left, the "Mother"

facets are in the center, and the “Virgin” facets are to the right. I’ve filled the bottom cone-shaped facets with one of her other titles. You can see that in each of the smaller facets within the major title section is one of her sub-titles from the litany using the major title as the beginning word in that section so that in the “Mother” section we have a “Mother of God”, “Mother of divine grace”, “Mother most pure”, etc. The same goes in the “Virgin” and “Queen” sections as well. I’ve repeated doing this in the sketch until I ran out of sides that I could fit text into but I think you get the point. We could continue assigning a different title of Mary’s into each of the facets of her diamond but I know that since there are titles we can only guess at, we’d run out of diamond facets before we ran out of Marian titles. Now, I want you to just imagine a diamond that’s not constrained by the laws of physics. This shouldn’t be hard to do since she’s a “spiritual diamond” so we can always add sides to match whatever new titles come to mind. There are no limits to the facets we can add, only limits to our understanding of her and that is the point of this entire exercise.



Now, in our fight against the hook, we are going to mimic the Litany of the BVM. We are going to emphasize the three main ones: Queen, Mother, and Virgin. In our warfare against our hook we are going to relate to her with respect to these three titles at various times and depending upon our needs of the moment. No one of them is sufficient for our purposes since our needs are so great; it will require us to see her in each of her major roles at different times in the struggle against our hook and in our spiritual journey back to Our Beloved.

First, let's consider Mary as Virgin. Classically, Church writings on Mary always emphasized this facet of her but in the modern age, virginity has gotten a bad rap so that many Catholics now a days tend to downplay Mary's virginity. In this oversexed society, anything that speaks of saving oneself, of being pure, or of being chaste is derisively laughed to scorn as being more than just not-with-it, but of actually being unhealthy and unnatural. It is seen as not something to be jealously guarded to the death but something to be dispensed with as soon as humanly possible. To make matters worse, there are those Catholics who can't get past the literal definition of virginity and not see it as something that is unstained by the world, preserved from the pleasures of the flesh, or clean and innocent to the point that they NEVER refer to Mary as Virgin – especially around their children. "I might have to explain what a virgin is", forgetting that virginity can easily be explained to little ones by describing its attributes in the manner that I just described. To me this is a great disservice to our children but it also distorts how we ourselves view Mary to our detriment. For those of us in the great struggle we need a role model who perfectly understands that struggle – even if that struggle has NOTHING to do with impurity. She is our perfect role model, not as one who suffers from our hooks but as one who perfectly resisted all temptations and one who understands our plight. Don't think for a minute that just because she was perfect means that she was never tempted. If Christ Himself was tempted after His forty day fast and ALL other rational creatures (like angels and men) have been tempted to test their free will and love for God, it is not reasonable to assume that the Blessed Virgin Mary did not also suffer temptations. Therefore, she is the perfect role model for us because she resisted ALL temptations so she is the perfect patroness for whatever your hook might happen to be.

Second, let's consider Mary as Queen. This facet of Mary is a little easier insofar as there isn't any queasiness about explaining what a queen is. The problem is that monarchy and queenship in general has gotten a bad rap in our democratic society. The concept of service owed to the Lady of the Manor by virtue of her sovereignty and dignity is foreign to us. This fealty thing just doesn't make sense to us because we really don't have a frame of reference for the concept. I suppose the closest thing we have is the First Lady, the President's wife, but she has no inherent power or dignity except by virtue of to whom she is married and then it lasts for no more than eight years. It just isn't the same thing. The queen was queen for life once she was crowned. If you've read King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table or other books about knights and chivalry you might be able to imagine a knight in service to a queen or a lady from the time of the Middle Ages. He has declared his fealty to her and willingly fights for her due to his love for his sovereign. Just being in her presence is enough for him. She has a regal bearing and manner that spurs him to great feats of arms simply for the pleasure of performing them for her. In the war we are in, having the privilege to serve so august a queen should similarly inspire us "to great feats of arms" knowing that SHE is the one who provides us access to the treasures of the "realm". This sentiment of a knight's service to his queen inspired by her

dignity and nobility is what we want to capture when we consider Mary as Queen of heaven and earth. Offer your sword to her in the upcoming battles and she will tie her colors to your lance as you ride off, confident that you have her patronage come-what-may. This idea of fealty or service to the Queen Mother will, no doubt, grow as we move further along in sanctity because then we will begin to not only grow more closely to her by virtue of our moving closer to her Son but also because we will begin to appreciate in greater degree the beauty of her dignity and nobility. Who would not willingly serve such a Queen?

Third, let's consider Mary as Mother. I believe that most of us will find this facet of Mary the easiest to latch on to but still it has its pitfalls. The innate maternal instinct that God gave to mothers – even bad mothers, means that they freely love and care for their children. They give of themselves, regardless of the cost, until it hurts, and then they give some more. This isn't the problem. The problem is with the children. In our society of super-overabundance and feminization, we never get tired of receiving so we constantly demand more – and the mothers respond by giving more. With fathers relegated to second-class status, men frequently do not perform the family role of disciplinarian any more so the mother's generosity is not balanced by the father's regulation with the end result that many of us never really grow up but always have our hand out asking for more, and it's usually for things like toys and candy. We carry this attitude over to our relationship with Mary. Forgetting that crosses and desolations are also graces from God, we expect only the grace of consolation and become upset when our prayers for more "goodies" go unanswered or take "too long". God expects us to pray for our spiritual and temporal needs and He wants us to pray for them through Mary. All the things that we NEED will be provided but in proper proportion and in God's good time. Therefore, expect that you will have to be patient and persevering in your prayers, especially for those of us who have grown up in the "instant gratification" mentality of the western world. Even more importantly, Mary will send us the graces that our souls need so expect that she will bless us with the bitterness of periodic desolations along with the sweet-tasting consolations. With this in mind, I'd like to stress the need for going beyond the "toys and candy" in our prayers. As we progress along the path of sanctity from slaves to our hooks to something considerably beyond this, don't forget that as the Queen Mother, she has access to gifts of considerably more value than the toys and candy that we tend to ask for. Don't be bashful about asking for the gifts to do "great things for God and the salvation of souls", to borrow a line from the Closing Prayer of the Legion of Mary Tesseria because as you mature spiritually, your soul will require more substantial nourishment. Let me tie the two ideas of being "blessed" with desolations and our souls needing more substantial nourishment. At some point, I pray that you'll begin to see the Mother of Jesus as the waiters at Cana saw her. Not by presenting the solution to her, but only by presenting the problem and relying on her to work out the details, even if those details are painful desolations or not what we would have her do for us. Instead, we should rely solely on her maternal instinct to provide whatever "wine" we need.

Let us wrap up our discussion of the Blessed Virgin before we close out our commentary on the First Tier Prayers. If you come away from Step 11A with only one point ingrained in your mind, I hope that it is that you, too, are convinced that your success or failure against your hook lies in your daily success or failure at praying to Mary: Queen, Mother, and Virgin, through her favorite prayer, her Most Holy Rosary.

SECOND TIER PRAYERS:

Having completed the First Tier Prayers with the Nothingness Itself Prayer, Morning Offering, and Rosary let's move on to the Second Tier Prayers. I would expect that most practicing Catholics would already be familiar with most, or all, of these prayers – but you never know, especially in this day and age. To those knowledgeable folks, you have my apology for “wasting” so many pages on what might appear to be second nature to you. On the other hand, I'm sure that there are other readers to whom these prayers will be a spiritual “breath of fresh air” by seeing them listed in print, possibly for the first time in their lives. It is to these souls that this section is aimed. To avoid forcing them to go digging about through the literature of sometimes-questionable pedigree, I have also placed these prayers in the Appendix for easy reference down the road.

I would anticipate that you might have the question, “When do I move on to the Second Tier?” This really depends on how you are progressing, friend. These prayers are not meant to replace the First Tier ones, but are meant to be added to your daily routine so the answer pretty much depends on your state of soul and your readiness to take on additional spiritual work. They will, however, better round out your prayer life so you should tackle them as soon as you feel capable of undertaking them. Certainly if you already know them you should already be doing them daily. If you are not, you should begin to do so quickly. Also, you should be saying them with the same reverence and regularity that you've been saying the First Tier ones.

Since the sections on the First Tier were rather lengthy, I've restated the Second Tier Prayers below to refresh your memory:

Second Tier Prayers:

- Evening Prayers/Examination of Conscience
- Act of Contrition
- Spiritual Communion
- Grace Before/After Meals
- Acts of Faith, Hope, and Charity
- Wear the Brown Scapular

The prayers on the first two lines are to be done together in the evening right before you go to bed. They serve to complement the Morning Offering by closing the day with prayer, just as we opened the day with our Morning Offering. Here,

the emphasis is on what sins have we committed during this day's journey. I list the Examination of Conscience but I really don't expect you to go through the complete page-after-page examination. What is meant here is to pause briefly to identify your dominant fault of the day. This will help you to prepare for your next confession by keeping a mental running tally. As I anticipate that at least in the early going, this dominant fault will probably be your hook, this will help you to keep track of your victorious days and your "inglorious" days, so to speak. Keeping your state of soul frequently in mind is a good way of staying focused on the task of defeating the hook. You will also find that as you become more successful with "glorious" days that the dominant fault will shift to some new sin. Note what that sin is and take steps to root it out as well. If you remember our discussion earlier in the book on the levels of humility, this is where you'll be able to gain some measure of how you're doing. Give great thanks to God when the daily dominant fault is now a venial sin instead of a mortal sin.

The Act of Contrition is strategically placed on the second line. You've been doing it every time you've gone into the confessional so you might already have it memorized. I want you to end your examination of conscience with the Act of Contrition. There won't be a day goes by that you don't commit at least some sin, "*For a just man shall fall seven times...*" (*Prov xxiv. 16*) and expressing your grief and sorrow for even the least of our sins is an excellent habit.

I've placed the Spiritual Communion on the third line. This prayer is to be added to both your Morning Offering and your Evening Prayer. You want to "book end" the day with spiritually receiving Our Lord – especially on the days when you can't get to Mass and Communion.

The next prayers are saying Grace Before and After Meals. Many people still say Grace, or the blessing, before they eat but the Grace After Meals has fallen out of favor in many circles. This is too bad because this is essentially the same as not saying "Thank you", when you receive a gift. It's really quite rude when you think about it and to Whom are we being ungrateful? Besides, it permits us to pray for the souls of the faithful departed three times a day (they won't forget whomever prayed for them so it's an investment in securing their assistance when it's our turn in Purgatory). Another point to consider is that this prayer is normally said in public at Catholic gatherings and what Catholic gathering was there that didn't include a meal? Having memorized at least the Grace Before Prayer will save you much embarrassment when you attend those Catholic gatherings and you'll want to attend them because, as you'll learn in Step 10, those gatherings are one way in which we spread and share Catholic Culture with one another. The last point is that crossing yourself and saying Grace in public restaurants is a good public witness for the Faith. Even if by yourself and saying the prayer silently, you should still cross yourself – that is the common way Catholics pray, you know! Too chicken to cross yourself in public? Remember that it is a good mortification for you to have to overcome human respect so it's good for your humility. More importantly, please don't forget Our

Lord's admonition to those who would deny Him, *"But he that shall deny me before men, I will also deny him before my Father who is in heave."* (Matt x. 33)

This brings us to the Acts of Faith, Hope, and Charity. These are an excellent profession of our faith. What's more, knowing these three acts will help you to keep the Catholic definitions of these terms straight in your mind. Other sects have "borrowed" these terms, but have changed their meanings so that when they use them they mean something different than you or I. This can be crucial down the road. I recommend that you add these three prayers to your morning prayers each day and also as part of your preparation for receiving Holy Communion at Mass.

The last part of the Second Tier Prayers is not really a prayer, per se, although there are prayers associated with it, but the wearing of a sacramental. That sacramental is the wearing of the Brown Scapular.

This completes the prayers of the Second Tier. Once again, to recap, these are prayers that all good Catholics should know by heart and since your goal is to also be a "good Catholic", you want to add them in to your daily routine once the First Tier Prayers are a daily habit.

THIRD TIER PRAYERS:

This brings up to the last set of prayers that I recommend as part of Step 11A, the Third Tier. Here is where you get to use your own judgment, which is not normally something that I recommend too often. Usually, it is also better to submit your ideas to the approval of someone else, a disinterested superior, preferably. This keeps us humble and from letting Satan push us off course by doing something disguised as holy but is in reality harmful to us. My only admonition is three-fold. First, wait until you've mastered the First and Second Tiers before starting any new practice. Second, add only one thing at a time and wait until the previous thing is habit for starting another. Even submitting any of these ideas to the approval of a superior or a confidant is a good idea but when you suggest to your priest that you're going to start wearing the brown scapular he's probably going to look at you funny and ask you why aren't you already wearing it? The third part of my advice is to drop anything that becomes burdensome and I mean that if the practice itself becomes a burden or if it makes one of the First and/or Second Tier Prayers become a burden. Satan would like nothing better than for you to start doing the Divine Office instead of the Rosary. Sounds like a fair trade, right? Divine Office is part of the official prayers of the Church. You're part of the Church. You'd rather be a monk than married with six children, a mortgage, and a dog so doing the Divine Office like a monk will make you more holy than doing the Rosary, right? Wrong! Stick to your Rosary. Add a family Rosary before you start doing the Office.

Having mentioned the Family Rosary, which is also the first item listed, I want to make it clear that there isn't really a hierarchy or priority with the exception of that Family Rosary. Everything else is up for grabs. Doing a daily Rosary with the entire family, or as much of the family as you can pull together for 20 minutes, is the best family prayer you can say. Not everyone has a family living at home nor can every family pull everyone together at one time to do the Rosary together. This is a most edifying and fruitful practice but it is not an individual's prayer but a collective private prayer whose incorporation in the family routine depends frequently on politics that may or may not be easily solved. Incorporate it when you can; your efforts will be generously rewarded.

I'm not going to go over the rest of the list except to attempt to favorably prejudice you towards doing the Legion of Mary Tesserat prayers and to do the Blessed Margaret Novena.

I've been an active member of the Legion of Mary for better than ten years as of this writing. I personally can vouch for it being a most effective way for the layman to live the True Devotion to Mary that St. Louis Marie de Montfort wrote about. As your fight for sanctity changes from a combat against the hook to being a war to root out all traces of self-love out of your soul, I highly recommend that if you feel any pull at all towards doing work with souls that you give serious consideration to finding a Legion of Mary group, called a praesidium, and attending one of their meetings. It does require a commitment of attending the weekly meeting and to do an active apostolate such as praying the Rosary at a nursing home once a week and making sure that elderly Catholics receive the sacraments, but I haven't found anything more worthwhile in my life than to do everything with Mary, in Mary, through Mary, and for Mary. On the other hand, if dealing with people directly one-on-one just terrifies you or your duties of state just won't permit the time, or you just aren't called to this type of work I would suggest instead that you become an auxiliary member of the Legion. These folk say the prayers in the Tesserat, or pamphlet, each day along with their daily Rosary with the intention of gaining graces for the actives' apostolates or wherever Mary sees fit to apply those graces. Their commitment is just a daily Rosary and three additional minutes of prayer each day and that's it. Most people should be capable of this level of effort and I would hope that anyone who has received the graces to defeat his hook would desire to do this work if only out of gratitude to Our Lady for favors received. Feel free to give it a try. Nothing ventured, nothing gained.

The other prayer I want to "plug" is a novena prayer written to Blessed Margaret of Castello to secure blessings for the Blessed Margaret Family Help Center, Inc., a non-profit corporation that I started in 2002 to lay the proper legal groundwork for my own apostolic efforts. This book is a part of that apostolate and all royalties from the sale of this book go directly to the Blessed Margaret Center, or BMFHC, as we abbreviate the title. Just as one should be grateful to the Blessed Virgin Mary for her favors, I also pray that for those who have

benefited from “The Hook and I”, they would likewise want to return grace-for-grace to those who have been their benefactors.

That’s all the guidance I want to offer on the Third Tier Prayers. Just go slowly and let the Holy Ghost lead you. Make a habit of what you undertake. Keep your perspective so that the 1st and 2nd Tiers are not superseded by the 3rd Tier prayers. Discontinue anything that becomes a burden, and don’t adopt a “dogmatic” attitude that just because something works for you that others must adopt it also.

God bless you in your prayer life; just don’t forget to go to *STEP 8: NEAR OCCASIONS OF SIN* instead of going on to Step 11B. God bless!

STEP 11B: MEDITATION:

Welcome, dear reader, to Step 11B: Meditation. If you've just turned the page from Step 11A, you should really head back to *STEP 8: NEAR OCCASIONS OF SIN* because you should now be ready to actually enter into the fight to strengthen your soul and gain mastery over your body. On the other hand, if you've just completed Steps 8 – 10, this is exactly where you belong. Congratulations on successfully maneuvering through my unusual way of organizing this book. Let's take a step back for a moment, and take a look about what our strategy has been. If you've been faithful at applying the Catholic 12-Steps as I've laid them out, you've been working on a structured plan that has really focused on your spiritual side. You've been praying more, attending the Mass and the sacraments more, and you've just begun the Combat Steps of 8, 9, and 10. The purpose of all of these steps has been to accomplish one thing –



bring your soul into line with what the Divine Will is. Think if you will, of a mother duck with all her little ducklings scattered about the lawn near the edge of a pond. It's time for everyone to go out for a swim so what does she do? She quacks a couple of times and all the little

ducklings scurry to form a line, one-by-one, in their proper order behind her as she starts to waddle towards the water. At first this is just a gaggle or cluster as they start to move out but as she gets closer and closer to the water the line is more perfectly formed so that what we humans see is this well-ordered array of Mother Duck followed by the baby ducks traveling to and entering the water in a

neat and well-ordered arrangement. It follows this pattern most all of the time. It doesn't matter what type of ducks or the season or even the country, this is the way a Mother Duck gets her brood



into the water. Think of the Divine Will as the pond of water. The Mother Duck is your soul and the ducklings are the faculties of your soul as well as your body. The Mother Duck doesn't get in the water, or stated in a more "theological" way, doesn't arrive at complete union with the water, until all the faculties of the brood are mostly in order. It isn't until the Duck family is actually IN the water that the perfect single-file ordering of all the "faculties" behind Mother Duck is actually achieved but the order must be fairly well complete before anybody gets wet.

Our journey back to God follows a similar pattern. When you originally ran aground by virtue of the actions of the Merciful God, your "Mother Duck" of a soul began to feel that it was time to return to the "water", that is, to turn your life back to God. I assume that you have just begun the three combat steps in the

Catholic 12-Steps so you are still getting your “ducklings” in order but, trust me, as long as you maintain the strength of your Act of the Will to Succeed, you will get these ducklings in fairly good shape. In the process you will be working yourself closer to the pond. What I am going to discuss here in Step 11B is the necessary ingredient for you to move your Duck family to and into the pond. That ingredient is the Interior Life and that is grown through meditation. Yes, you need to start daily meditation, not in the yoga sense or method but in classical Catholic style. You might also see the term “Spiritual Life” used in place of “Interior Life”. Whichever term is used, it is the strength of the presence of Jesus Christ within our souls. The stronger this presence is in us, the stronger is our interior life. Think of it as how intense and intimate is our relationship with Him. Are we acquaintances, friends, or lovers? When we fall in love with that special someone here in the natural world, we marry that person. In the spiritual world, this is called “Spiritual Marriage” or “Betrothal” and it also implies that complete union between two lovers – in this case between our soul and Christ’s. What we are seeking for our ultimate objective is complete union with Christ to the point where it is Christ directing our actions and not ourselves. In St. Paul’s words, *“And I live, not I; but Christ liveth in me. And that I live now in the flesh: I live in the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and delivered himself up for me.”* (Gal ii. 20) For St. Paul, his soul had achieved perfect union with Christ because of the intense mutual love between their souls. He was utterly fearless in the face of dangers or sufferings. The Holy Ghost directed all of his actions and words so that even his least little actions were moments of grace for everyone around him. It should be no wonder that the Church sprang up so quickly everywhere that he went! There might be those who think that Paul’s words are just metaphor or pure symbolism. To the contrary, he says precisely what occurred in his soul. Take his words literally and that is the ultimate objective for us, for you, my dear friend, in Step 11B. If you read the writings of the saints, regardless of whether it be from an apostle, father, doctor, mystic, or whatever, you will hear St. Paul’s “not I, but Christ” echoed in their words. Each and every one of them had achieved this level of spiritual union with Our Lord and **IT IS NOT IMPOSSIBLE FOR US TO ACHIEVE THE SAME LEVEL OF UNITY WITH CHRIST HERE IN THIS WORLD.**

Now, please don’t get the idea that what I’m going to say here is the final word on the subject, Oh, far from it. This is the last chapter that I wrote to complete “The Hook and I” and I’ve had a mighty struggle getting it into a shape that is both understandable and yet accurate to the teachings of the Church. Just when I thought things were proceeding fairly well, I discussed the difficulty I was having with a dear friend of mine who was proofreading the text but had not seen this chapter yet. She asked me who I was using as resources and her response when I told her St. John of the Cross and St. Catherine of Siena, she responded that they were too difficult to understand. I haven’t read St. Catherine’s “Dialogues” but I’ve found St. John’s writings to be absolutely sublime. Hmmm, now here’s a serious quandary. How do you write about a subject that a) you’re not an expert in, b) your sources are described as “too deep” for people to

understand, and c) you need to make it interesting for the reader, hopefully to the point of wanting to pursue perfection himself. I'm certainly not going to pass myself off as any type of expert or even very knowledgeable on the subject, for that matter. I'm going to rely on the works and opinions of others; I'm still working my own way to the pond myself! For this chapter I am primarily using the works of Fr. Garrigou-Lagrange, in his two-volume work, THE THREE AGES OF THE INTERIOR LIFE, Dom Chautard's, THE SOUL OF THE APOSTOLATE, and Fr. Helmut Libietis' St. Louis de Montfort's True Devotion Consecration to Mary. Instead of providing a whole bunch of footnotes that are quotes of quotes so that everything began to look like some technical thesis that would very quickly leave you, my dear friend, with glassy eyes and no clue what my point was. Instead, I've gone directly to the sources that these venerable priests recommended where I could and quoted directly from them myself. So, what this means is that I'm gonna be very brief on the theory and boil their beautiful ideas expressed so sublimely into something that will be just enough to explain things with the sincere prayer that you will want to explore these works yourself. In the meantime, if what you read here is still difficult to "stomach", you can blame me for your "indigestion".

Having completed that explanation (or maybe excuse), let me explain the strategy for this chapter, which is about convincing you of the need to begin doing daily meditation. To do that, I have to provide some background information on the spiritual life and the different stages that a soul has to pass through in order to "return to the pond". That's been the tough part to explain, by the way. This is necessary so that you will understand the task before you and so that you will recognize the signs of the transformation in your soul as they occur so that you can take maximum fruit from them. This will prepare you for what lies ahead of you as you continue your journey beyond your hook.

Once I've completed explaining the three spiritual ages, the real discussion on meditation will begin with the focus moving to a more practical level by talking about your interior life and why a strong interior life is crucial for souls seeking perfection. This is especially true for those souls who are called to work with others. I will tie-in how meditation is the cornerstone to that strong interior life. In the last section I will provide you with the "nuts and bolts" details about doing your own meditations. I will present two ways of doing it. One is based upon the techniques practiced by the early monks and the second is recommended by Dom Chautard. I have my own preferred way of meditating but I leave it to you, with the guidance of your spiritual director, to determine which one is best for you. Take your pick. Just practice it daily and make it a mandatory part of your daily routine. In any case, by the end of Step 11B, I hope to leave you with a strong desire to strengthen your interior life and to want to begin doing your own meditations. You don't need to start out big. Just do like I always advise: Begin simply and simply begin! Good! With our strategy laid out before us, let's move into the first part with an explanation of the Three Spiritual Ages.

THE THREE SPIRITUAL AGES:

I find it interesting that so many aspects of our Holy Faith come in threes. We have the Blessed Trinity, the Three Theological Virtues, three days in the tomb, three denials of Peter (remember this one – we'll be coming back to it), etc. The ages, or the divisions, of the spiritual life are no exception. Our threesome in this case is divided into the Purgative, Illuminative, and Unitive ages. These fancy terms describe what is occurring to the soul in these stages as God prepares it for further movement towards Him. Since these terms are hardly the stuff of everyday language, let's think of them as they correspond with the three ages of man: Infancy, Adolescence, and Adulthood. Please note, once again, the parallel that exists between the natural and supernatural – something in the one world is reflected by something similar to it in the other world. This parallel carries through with some interesting points that I think will help your understanding so I want to call your attention to them.

The first point is that we begin life as an infant and progress through adolescence to adulthood in a logical sequence without skipping a step. No one emerges from the womb as a full-grown adult! We all start out as babies. In the same way, souls normally begin as spiritual infants and grow through adolescence to adulthood. The fact that there have been exceptions to this shows the superiority of the spiritual realm since God can bless souls with the grace of union with Him immediately at conception or before birth. The Blessed Virgin and St. John the Baptist are two examples that I can think of. Both were sanctified in the womb so both began their post-partum life already at the Unitive Age spiritually, although both had to grow to adulthood by being infants first. Remember that I said "parallel" so there will be exceptions and you will find that the supernatural world will always be superior to the natural world since the greater of the two worlds is obviously the supernatural. The second parallel between the two is that each age is a period of growth with the transition from one age to the next always accompanied by a certain amount of pain. We use the term "growing pains" to indicate pain like a child's teething and I'm sure you remember the emotional and physical awkwardness you felt in the teenage years with the onset of the physical changes that brought physical maturity. In the spiritual life, we will call these transitions, "conversions", and they, too, are accompanied by a certain amount of pain. The last parallel that I want to call your attention to is a bit on the sad side and that is that not everyone reaches adulthood, in either the physical or spiritual life. Some children die in infancy and some of them have developmental problems that prevent them from becoming full-fledged adults. We speak of them as being "retarded", held back for whatever reason from fulfilling their expected level of development. This is also true in the spiritual life since not all souls will reach this spiritual adulthood. In fact, very few do, at least this side of the grave. Most of us will not reach the age of perfection and enter into Spiritual Marriage until we receive the Beatific Vision when we emerge from Purgatory. Here we have opposites. In the natural world most people will indeed reach adulthood but in the spiritual world very few will do so. Most of us will stop short

at a lower level. In this sense, our souls become “retarded”, stopping short of their expected (that is, expected by God) level of development. But be warned: If this does indeed happen, it’s due to a lack of generosity on our part as to why we don’t reach the perfection of spiritual adulthood.

That’s enough by way of comparisons between the physical and spiritual lives. Let’s turn our attention to some of the characteristics of the spiritual life. As I mentioned before, these three spiritual ages are each begun by a conversion process. The first conversion takes place some time after our baptism when we feel a call by God to enter into service to Him. In other words, our “Mother Duck” feels a yearning to return closer to God and this stirs her to get all of her ducklings moving towards the Divine “pond” as I explained earlier. For myself, and I assume for most people reading this, that first conversion occurred about the time of the combat against my hook. This “call” doesn’t occur in a day or a single event but over a stretch of time. This is the beginning of a journey that will, no doubt, take years to complete. Of course, dear friend, you will remember that when we were baptized we all had the three theological virtues of Faith, Hope, and Charity infused into our souls and in the combat against our hooks we have, or will have, experienced considerable growth in those virtues but what really characterizes us in this stage is, not these virtues, but our own self-love, which we possess in copious quantities. Don’t believe me? Here’s a test. Pass by a mirror or other reflective surface and catch yourself looking at your own image. How long do you look at “El Supremo”? You gaze at what you love. Even though our humility will have grown considerably, our pride will still not be conquered. Making the matter worse, we are blind to this self-love and are incapable of rooting it out since we cannot even recognize that it’s there. Since we cannot eliminate it by ourselves, God helps us here by, well, basically burning it out of us through other conversion processes. Each of these conversion processes is designed to eliminate this self-love but, fortunately, He does this in steps instead of all at once. He does this so that He can infuse more desirable graces in us and we have a chance to adjust to our new state. If He did all of this at once, we’d probably die from the shock! Unfortunately for us, it’s the only way it can be done. In addition, besides removing our self-love, these conversions also act to eliminate our dependence on our senses in the pursuit of Our Beloved. Since our souls are becoming more spiritual, it stands to reason that we need to begin understanding in a more spiritual way, and for that, our senses are worthless.

I hope you’ll recall that it is only through our senses that our intellects perceive things. You understand what you’re reading because you can see my words through your sense of sight and your brain processes the information and therefore you understand me. The problem is that our desired union with God is a spiritual, as opposed to physical, union so that our senses are incapable of detecting this communication. Think of the radio in your car or in your stereo at home. Each radio is designed to pick up radio signals only of a certain frequency and with only a specific type of signal format or modulation. Tune your car radio

to AM, which stands for Amplitude Modulation, and you don't pick up FM, or Frequency Modulation, stations. In fact, you won't pick up amateur radio stations either that also happen to be sending out AM signals but are transmitted on a different frequency than what your radio is tuned to. As far as your intellect is concerned, the FM stations don't even exist since you are ignorant of anything transmitted by them. They make no impression upon your intellect; you don't hear any background noise from them, you don't hear what song's being played, and you don't know the weather forecast. That is, unless you change the setting to FM. Our souls are the same way. We are born with an AM-only radio, if you will. It is only by God changing the setting on your soul to FM that you are capable of receiving His spiritual signals. That's what these conversion processes do. They convert you from being capable only of receiving sensible, or through the senses, signals from God to being able to receive spiritual signals as well. This is done by bitter experiences that eliminate the soul's self-love. In fact, St. John of the Cross calls them "Dark Nights" because the soul feels abandoned by God and left alone in the dark, so to speak.

Now I don't want to scare you off but in the chapter on the Soul earlier in the book, I talked about the need for us to "run aground" in order for our pride to be diminished enough that God can give us the graces we need at the beginning of our warfare against our hook. "*God resisteth the proud*". This was a necessary step in order to "convert" us from our sinfulness. This same point will still apply to us even when we are not habitually in mortal sin. **Remember this! WE ARE BLIND TO OUR OWN SELF-LOVE AND IT IS ONLY BY RUNNING AGROUND THAT WE ARE ABLE TO MOVE TO THE NEXT AGE.** That's a paraphrase of my earlier words but the same principle still applies. In order to move up spiritually past a certain point, we must have the aid of the Good God and He does this by additional crosses, or as I've put it, "running aground". It doesn't matter if that conversion is from sin to grace, infancy to adolescence, or adolescence to adulthood. As we strive to grow in the spiritual life, you must expect and accept that God will give you crosses to burn away the elements of your self-love that are spiritual impediments to your moving closer to Him. If you remember our "White Rabbits" or attachments to things of earth, these will be slowly taken away from you, or at least have the attachments to them broken. At each level, God will echo His words to St. Peter, "*Lovest thou me?*" (*John xxi. 16*) In fact, here's another threesome; God will ask this same, "Lovest thou me?" question to us at each of our conversions. He does this to test the ardor of our love for Him. Unfortunately, this is why so few Catholics ever make it to spiritual adulthood. They won't give up one or more of their white rabbits because, in their heart of hearts, they secretly love their attachments more than they love God. So when He asks, "Lovest thou me?" We say, "Uh, well, uh, no. Not that much." This is what stifles our reach for perfection. Of course, my friend, this is exactly what I DON'T want for you. It is my fervent prayer that you will become one of the great saints of our day – or at least to become as holy as God desires you to be.

THE AGE OF INFANCY: (THE BEGINNERS)

With that introduction behind us, let's begin. The very first age is the age of beginners. Here, the primary occupation of the soul is the struggle against one's own sinfulness and staying in the state of grace. This age is commonly called the "Purgative Age" because, just as the name suggests, this age requires purgation, or purifying, of everything that is displeasing to God. I don't need to tell you how much effort it takes to "purge" yourself of your hook and all your other sinful habits. You're fully aware of the difficulty of that task. I'm "preaching to the choir" here! Besides these sinful habits of ours, we also have to purify our senses, intellects, memories, and wills. We've been doing this in the Catholic 12-Steps through our efforts at mortification and prayer but if we are generous and have begun to want to serve God more perfectly, we need to add two more elements, only one of which we can do for ourselves.

The voluntary one is meditation, which is what all of Step 11B is about. Through this and continuing our other efforts we will grow in greater intimacy with Our Lord. You will stay in this stage of spiritual infancy certainly until you have attained mastery over your hook and the line has been so shortened that you don't fall prey to it. Obviously this will not be done overnight but will take some variable length of time. No problem, persevere and apply yourself diligently to eliminating your faults and growing in sanctity. At this stage, think of yourself just like a little child who responds to his father primarily through "goodies" or being enticed with little rewards in order to do what his father wants. His level of love is still very much of an "I love you because of what you do for me". "I love you because you feed me and give me hugs and kisses and candy." The child's love is still centered on the "what's in it for me" mode and seriously limited by his lack of physical and emotional maturity.

Now, as the child begins to approach adolescence, he acquires new capabilities like reaching the age of reason and his love starts to move more towards an appreciation of how the beloved feels and to behave more in ways that please his beloved. For us, in order to move up to the next spiritual age and to closer union with God, it requires His help in order to root out elements of our self-love that we cannot see in ourselves, but more so, it also eliminates our dependence on sensible consolations. These sensible consolations are the "...hugs and kisses and candy" of easy successes against our hook and the like that stir our emotions. The problem with these consolations is that we develop a love for them instead of the God Who provides those consolations. As others have said, we really love the Consolations of God instead of the God of Consolations.

Going back to our duck analogy, every duck has its own ceiling, or altitude, that it cannot fly above. Try as it might, it just can't lift itself any higher into the air. We are no different so it takes help from Something outside of ourselves to transform us into another "bird" with greater abilities to soar to higher altitudes. For those generous souls that have begun to desire to love God more perfectly, and I pray

that you will be one of them; God will bless them with a purification of the senses that will serve as their second conversion. What is this “second conversion” and how do you recognize it? The saints have typically used St. Peter’s denial of Our Lord on Holy Thursday as his second conversion denial to describe it. See Chapter 60 of St. Catherine of Siena’s “Dialogues” if you’d like to read this in greater detail for yourself. Up to Holy Thursday, St. Peter’s love was “imperfect” and relied too much on himself and his own perceived strength. Therefore, Jesus foretells, and even permits, - yes, permits, Peter to deny Him. Grievously humiliated by his sin, Peter “*wept bitterly.*” (*Luke xxii. 62*) In Peter’s case, the second conversion” came about through Peter being allowed to fall into mortal sin. In others, it might be any of the means of “running aground” that I described earlier in the Chapter on the Soul: sickness, calumnies, or great humiliations, for example. For those souls who humble themselves during this conversion, God raises them up to the spiritual age of the proficient. For those who turn back, refusing to release their death grip on their pride or whatever God wishes to take away, they fall back as retarded souls who will rise no further in sanctity and even run the risk of “*The dog is returned to his own vomit, and the sow that was washed, to her wallowing in the mire.*” (*2 Peter II. 22*) At that point, God accepts our self-imposed limitations on our love for Him and He no longer provides us those extraordinary graces to reach perfection; once again, He’s the perfect Economizer and He doesn’t waste His graces. Being told, “No!” at this point provides proof to Him (and to us if we are honest with ourselves) that we’ve reached our “ceiling” and no longer want to expend the energy to fly higher. Let us pray that this fate does not befall us, my friend!

THE AGE OF ADOLESCENCE: (THE PROFICIENT)

Assuming that the soul presses forward in its journey through the second conversion, it will emerge from this conversion as a spiritual adolescent. The Mystics have called it the Proficient or Illuminative age, so-called because now God illuminates the soul with greater spiritual gifts. These are the Gifts of the Holy Ghost but given in greater measure than what we received at our Confirmation. The proficient has been given great self-knowledge, and consequently, a greater knowledge of God by way of contrast. If you remember the part in Step 1 when we talked about how we see ourselves and compare that to how God sees us? We saw ourselves as those men of “distinction and greatness” and God saw us as “slugs and leeches”? Depending on our level of generosity and docility, the Holy Ghost infuses greater understanding into the mysteries of God and of our Holy Faith. In addition, our intellect is also enlightened. Now we will see ourselves as the “slugs and leeches” and God as having “distinction and greatness”. We begin to understand things, not because we’ve read or studied them, but because God infuses, or simply stated, He puts in, knowledge and understanding that we have no real way of explaining how it got into our heads to begin with!

As we become spiritual adolescents in this stage, let me draw from our own experiences when we were at that physical age in our lives. This is the age of a growing awareness of our maturing bodies and emotions. Our muscles grew and our bodies blossomed indicating the arrival of greater capacities than what we had as children. But we also developed an understanding of adult things that, as children, we were completely ignorant of. Some call this “a loss of innocence” and, depending how and from whom we learned these things it might well have been a regrettable loss of innocence. From the standpoint of maturing to adulthood, however, this increased knowledge and understanding were necessary for us to properly discern our vocations, to take our places in adult society, and to form families. This time is also when we probably first fell in love. Not some crush or “puppy love” but seriously falling in love with someone of the opposite sex. We might have even contemplated marrying this person (some of us actually did marry our high school sweethearts!) unless someone with greater sense informed us of the serious obstacles present to making that first love a permanent love. Now, dear reader, I know it can be easy to take all this with a focus on the baser and impure side but I want you to elevate your focus on the more sublime aspect of those years and that is that during these years, we learned how to love someone else, someone outside of ourselves, someone who we desired to please – not for how we would feel but how this would please our beloved. Oh sure, we enjoyed the teenage equivalent of “...hugs and kisses and candy” but we began to see through all that and our love began to take on the true definition of love, “to seek the good for the beloved”. It also was a time when we learned who we were (are). What characteristics did I have that pleased her? What about those that didn’t? I’m sure that there’s been more than one boy who finally learned the value of personal hygiene after having been emotionally crushed by having his ladylove reject him with the words, “Go away. You stink!”

Taking this teenage experience of learning how to love back to the spiritual, this second age is where a greater love for God begins to grow based on a deep desire to imitate Our Lord’s life and His virtues and to please Him by our actions. This charity for God will lead the soul to want “*To do great things for God and the salvation of souls.*” (The Legion of Mary closing prayer) In fact, all of the virtues will grow in greater abundance in the soul. We’ve already discussed the virtues previously so I won’t go into them here. I do, however, want to include a sketch taken from Fr. G-L’s book. This is a sketch of the Rock of Christ, that is, our soul’s being Temples of the Holy Ghost. The foundation is Humility with the twin pillars of Faith and Hope resting upon it. These two pillars of virtue support the arch of the virtue of Charity, which covers the entire temple of all other virtues and the Gifts of the Holy Ghost. Sitting atop the arch, and never let us forget this, my dear friend, is the Cross of Christ, which we must needs share in and to bear our own portion of its weight if we are to intimately share in His love.

Two last points I want to make about proficient is their great Devotion to Our Blessed Lady and that their prayers change to contemplation. We’ve discussed Our Lady in Step 11A so I don’t think I need to “replow that furrow”, just know

that as one gets closer to the Son, so too, will one get closer to the Mother. On contemplation, we're going to leave the definitions aside for the time being but understand that meditation is a labor because it requires the use of our wills to accomplish. Contemplation, on the other hand, is an act of love or affection. St. Francis de Sales, in Book VI, Chapter III of "Treatise on the Love of God" compares the two with bees: *"Little bees are called nymphs...until they make honey, and then they are called bees: so prayer is named Meditation until it has produced the honey of devotion and then it is converted into Contemplation...so we meditate to gather the love of God, but having gathered it we contemplate God, and are attentive to his goodness, by reason of the sweetness which love makes us find in it. The desire we have to obtain divine love makes us meditate, but love obtained makes us contemplate; for by love we find so agreeable a sweetness in the thing beloved that we can never satiate our spirits in seeing and considering it."*

Still, despite this growing understanding, knowledge, and love of God, the proficient soul is still not quite ready for complete union, or spiritual marriage, with God. Oh, no. There are still remnants of dross, or foreign material, to be burned away from the gold of our souls; vestiges of the "old man" in the soul that prevent that complete union. It is these imperfections that need to be removed and that is the objective of the third conversion. To help our understanding, let's recall dear St. Peter again. The price of becoming the first pope was that billions of Catholics until the end of time would see his imperfections highlighted as if under a microscope for all to see! St. Catherine called his second conversion the time following Peter's denial of Christ until the Ascension so this wasn't an "event"; it was a "process". We can expect the same in our own lives. Peter loved Our Lord intensely during this time yet he still had imperfections. For one, he didn't have fortitude, *"...and the doors were shut, where the disciples were gathered together for fear of the Jews."* (John xx. 19) It is not until Pentecost and the descent of the Holy Ghost that Peter becomes utterly fearless in the face of the Jews. It is the timeframe from Jesus' ascent into heaven until the Holy Ghost descends at Pentecost that is Peter's third conversion. The same applies to all proficient, as well.

Let me draw a parallel from my own life that probably echoes the experience of many of you, dear readers. I fell in love with a girl who I would one day marry. It's been over thirty years to this point that we've been together and, with the grace of God, we'll make another thirty before it's all said and done. When I was a young man, much of my being "in love" was also being "in lust". It was difficult to separate the "how you make me feel" from "how I make you feel" emotions. Therefore, my love was imperfect because it still contained "grains of sand" mixed in with the "grains of salt". I would venture to say that all teenage love has a good element of this in it. Newfound urges and emotions are difficult to understand, let alone control. It takes a good amount of the school-of-hard-knocks, as they say, to overcome this. Things such as military service, college, layoffs, broken hearts, babies, overdue bills, mean bosses, and all the other life

experiences that finally convert a young man's love for a woman into that mature love that focuses solely on the beloved instead of himself. Until his love does rise to that level, he's a poor candidate for marriage, even if he's financially and career-wise marriageable. It is the same with the spiritual teenager, too. Unfortunately in this life, we tend to jump into marriage much sooner than when we are really capable of handling it. The divorce rate of 50% proves that. Love is blind, so they say, but God isn't. He knows that it is useless to proceed to the next spiritual age until He knows that we are ready for it. That is why there has to be a third conversion.

THE AGE OF ADULTHOOD: (THE PERFECT)

Souls that have reached the Age of Adolescence and that God deems ready for being united with Him more completely are, once again, subjected to a conversion process to strip the soul of the last remaining imperfections. Really generous souls move through this last conversion and join the ranks of the "perfect" as the mystics call them. Here, their love for God is as complete and as united to Our Lord as is possible this side of heaven. These are the "ducks" in the "pond". Another term they have used for this stage is Spiritual Marriage since that is the normal earthly equivalent for the man and woman in love, *"Wherefore a man shall leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they shall be two in one flesh."* (Gen ii. 24)

Here, the soul loves God completely and continuously with no other thought than to serve and to be with the Beloved. Souls in this state frequently write of longing to leave this earthly life and to be joined permanently to God in heaven only awaiting the good pleasure of the Object of their love. St. Paul speaks of this while he was imprisoned in Rome, *"According to my expectation and hope; that in nothing I shall be confounded, but with all confidence, as always so now also shall Christ be magnified in my body, whether it be by life, or by death. For to me, to live is Christ: and to die is gain. And if to live in the flesh, this is to me the fruit of labour, and what I shall choose I know not. But I am straitened between two; having a desire to be dissolved and to be with Christ, a thing by far the better. But to abide still in the flesh, is needful for you."* (Phil i. 20-24) Again, we need to take Paul literally. He is clearly saying that he'd rather die so he can go to heaven to be with the Christ but, on the other hand, he is so united with Christ by love that, even in the present life, "to live is Christ". Certainly this passage shows that the Apostle to the Gentiles was among the perfect when he wrote this. His very thoughts are sublime. He greatly desires to be permanently united in heaven yet he is already united, at least in some form, to Christ. He is totally resigned to doing strictly the will of God, whether it is to die, stay in prison, or to continue his labor for the sake of his flock. He is absolutely fearless, completely resigned, and totally in love.

One other aspect about the perfect that I want to mention and that is a contrast with the prayers of the beginner and the proficient. The beginner's meditations

are laborious because they are pushed along by the strength of the intellect. The proficient's prayers have ascended to contemplation where his prayers are now pulled along by his greater love for God, but this contemplation is not continuous. We can think of it as being pulled along in a line and just in the same way that you can pull a pencil along a ruler to mark a straight line on a piece of paper, you eventually have to stop pulling it in that one direction by virtue of the limit of the paper, the ruler, or the length of your arm. The perfect's prayers are continuous and have been described as "circular" so that there is no limit as to how many times you can draw a circle or an ellipse on a piece of paper, that is, until your strength runs out or your pencil loses its point. That "point" would correspond to the Bridegroom "dissolving" you in this life to be united again in the next.

Let's return to our young man in love again. He's fallen in love and gotten married. He's an old man now and is celebrating his Golden Wedding anniversary. His beloved of fifty years is no longer beautiful in appearance, at least to the world. In his eyes, however, she's as radiant as on her wedding night. His love for her no longer depends on what you might call the "earthly pleasures" of their honeymoon. Instead, it is based upon a more sublime love that seeks the happiness of the beloved simply for the sake of the beloved. It is intensely tender and tremendously patient.

These two have grown closer: they can read each other's minds. Having been married for the greater majority of their lives, most of their memories are of the same things: vacations, babies, struggles, and joys. They may even have a physical resemblance to one another – with the exception that he



should be wearing pants and she should be wearing a dress! These couples are a joy to behold and, unfortunately, not common. I've included a picture of my wife to help illustrate this; we've not reached our Golden Anniversary yet but we are closer to that milestone than to our Wedding Day. Not all couples reach this stage. I've already mentioned that half of our marriages end in divorce and, of the rest, many of them are not happy because of the self-love of one or both of them. Just like spiritual perfection, earthly adult love is rare enough. Dear reader, I know you can picture in your own mind's eye one or more of these senior couples. By the grace of God, hopefully you are one of them or at least

related to one of them. Learn from them. Then supernaturalize that love in your own life.

The Three Spiritual Ages of our spiritual life correspond very closely to the earthly ages of our physical life. Both lives are tales of love and whom you love. Both begin with a total love of self and are supposed to end with a migration of that love to Another. How each tale ends is a question of how generously you are willing to put Someone else's desires before your own so that coming into this world you want everything, and going out of it you want nothing.

THE INTERIOR LIFE (PREREQUISITE FOR SANCTITY):

In the last section I used the example of a young man falling in love with a woman, eventually marrying her, and then growing old with her as his love for her deepens. Continuing this line of thought, let's turn to the means by which he won her heart. He talked to her. He communicated his thoughts to her, listened to hers, and they spent time together. He learned what her likes and dislikes were; what was her favorite food, what were her hobbies, what music did she like, and so on. He asked her out. She told him, "Yes". He called her on the phone. He wrote her notes and letters. In this day and age, he'd be sending her Instant Messages and emails. Regardless of the form of his communication with her, that's what he did. He communicated with her. That, my dear friend, is what meditation is. Quoting from the Glossary of Terms in The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross translated by Kavanaugh and Rodriguez, meditation is, "*A discursive activity proper to beginners and built on images formed in the imagination and phantasy (sic). Serving as a remote means to union by habituating the spirit to spiritual things through the use of the senses, it empties the imagination of profane images. Its purpose is to acquire some knowledge and love of God.*" The definition goes on to talk about its transition to contemplation but for our purposes we've covered enough. I've underlined the last sentence about its purpose because isn't this just exactly what our young man was doing in talking, writing, phoning, emailing, listening, etc. to the young woman? Yes, of course it is. He was getting to know her in a way that was greater than just superficial so that, through his knowledge of her, he learned to love her. And from that tender shoot of love would emerge his life-long commitment to her. Could he have fallen in love with her without all this talk? Only a fool would say, "Yes!" I think that it is readily apparent that you cannot love what you do not know. Without this high degree of knowledge of his beloved, any "love" would have just been a fantasy on his part and not based on reality. Certainly such an illusion can't last over time.

Meditation is that same form of communication but on a spiritual plane whereby the soul gains greater knowledge and love of God. A soul that doesn't meditate is akin to our young man never engaging his ladylove in conversation and still "loving" her, expecting to marry her. In his case, we can only lament his

foolishness. We can also only lament the soul foolish enough to neglect meditation and that still expects to grow in holiness. Same parallel; same results.

We have another reason for meditating and this applies to anyone who is working on the Catholic 12-Steps. The 12th Step is To Perform the Works of Mercy. In other words, to work with our neighbors as a means of “giving back” in gratitude for the graces that the Good God has bestowed upon us so that we could overcome our hooks. This is because all Catholics, but we especially, are called upon to do active work with the souls we do see to serve the God we cannot see, *“If any man say, I love God, and hateth his brother; he is a liar. For that loveth not his brother, whom he seeth, how can he love God, whom he seeth not?”* (1 John iv. 20) We will call that type of active work with others the “Active Life”. It is the opposite of our prayer life, which we will call the “Interior Life”. This is time spent with God and is the cornerstone is meditation. Notice I said, “cornerstone” and not that it was just meditation. There are other aspects to the interior life and we have already mentioned some of them at various places in the book but I didn’t call your attention to them as part of the interior life. Here we will pull all of these things together, at least in passing, but, by and large, the interior life used here means meditation.

Now, I know that I can’t do two things at once, so I assume that you can’t either. That means that when I’m involved in the active life I can’t be involved in my spiritual life so in any 24-hour day, what time I spend actively is time that I can’t spend interiorly so that there has to be a trade-off between the two. There are many unhappy souls that mistakenly believe that the active life is the superior of the two because the interior life “isn’t doing anything”. Nothing could be further from the truth. Recalling our nautical analogy and our soul being a ship, it should be easily seen that a ship that spends little or no time in port is going to be ravaged by the buffeting of the wind and the waves not to mention the shot and shell from the enemy! A ship or fleet that doesn’t return to port will never have its damage repaired, its sailors healed, its supplies restocked, or even receive new orders from the Admiralty. The soul is the same way. Without fresh doses of grace applied at the time and place where needed will soon mean that we will be relying on our own natural lights to deal with situations as they arise. By this point, I bet I don’t need to warn you about any time we talk about “our own” as being an opening for “our own” pride to take over. And that’s usually what happens. What begins as a good action done for the greater glory of God and the salvation of souls soon withers under the wind and waves of difficulties so that we soon succumb to the shot and shell of the enemy and either give up our good works or we subconsciously place ourselves as the real objective of those good works instead of keeping God as the proper end. Please don’t pooh-pooh this, my dear friend. It is all too frequent that this occurs, but it especially occurs in souls that believe, “That won’t happen to me!” Be very careful on this point!

Performing the active life at the expense of the interior life is to place the pyramid upside down. Consider Our Lord’s life. He lived for a total of 33 years. The first

30 of which, were lived privately without so much as a single public miracle! It was only after Christ had prepared Himself by living the interior life within the Holy Family did He venture forth into His active life. That's better than 90% of His life spent "not doing anything". We also have Jesus' testimony comparing the two lives. Mary and Martha are in the house that Our Savior is visiting. Martha busies herself in the kitchen preparing, cooking, and in a word – DOING. Mary, on the other hand, sits at His feet, absorbing His every word, action, and just being in His presence. Martha tells Jesus to rebuke Mary and send her into the kitchen to help out. What does Jesus say? *"And the Lord answering, said to her: Martha, Martha, thou art careful, and art troubled about many things: But one thing is necessary. Mary hath chosen the best part, which shall not be taken away from her."* (Luke x. 41-42) Mary represents the interior life and Christ not only doesn't back Martha up, he rebukes her for wanting Mary to give up the "best part". Our Lord Himself is giving us His judgment on which of the two is more important. The interior life is, indeed, the "best part".

I pray that that's enough convincing for you; I could go into whole chapters on the Interior Life but that's not really the point of the book, is it? Instead, please let me take the easy route by giving you just enough of the benefits of the Interior Life in outline form so that everyone will catch the high points and for those whose curiosity is piqued, they will do more reading on the subject on their own at a later time. So, taking the Table of Contents from The Soul of the Apostolate by Dom Chautard are the benefits of the Interior Life:

Benefits of the Interior Life:

- Interior life the foundation of sanctity in the active worker
 - It protects the soul against the dangers of the exterior ministry
 - It renews his strength
 - It multiplies his energies and merits
 - It gives him joy and consolation
 - It refines his purity of intention
 - It is a firm defense against discouragement
- The Interior life is the condition of all fruitfulness in active works
 - The interior life draws down God's blessing
 - It makes the apostle capable of sanctifying others by example
 - Supernatural radiation made possible by the interior life
 - It makes the Gospel-worker truly eloquent
 - Results of the interior life are deep and lasting
 - The formation of shock troops, Spiritual direction...

That should be enough preliminaries on the Interior Life. Let's get down to the meat of the subject. "Finally!!" you might be yelling, but I wanted to make sure that the groundwork was laid out properly first. Again, taken from Dom Chautard's work are the elements of the Interior Life (pages 195 and 196). Here, then, are the elements of the Interior Life: 1) **a daily schedule**, 2) **morning mental prayer**, 3) **Mass, Holy Communion, and the Breviary** (for priests), 4) **Daily examination of conscience**, 5) **Frequent spiritual communions and ejaculatory prayers**, 6) **Study of Sacred Scripture**, 7) **Frequent confession**, and 8) **Spiritual retreats**.

The first point is on keeping a regular schedule. Remember that a Catholic Life is a regulated and ordered life. This is why I've instructed you to say the Nothingness Itself Prayer with your Morning Offering upon rising; this is so important that I made them Tier 1 Prayers in Step 11A as well as an important exercise of your will over your body. You need to do violence to yourself to keep this schedule, it's that important! I'm going to skip Point 2 for the time being. On Point 3, much of Chautard's work is geared toward the priest and religious doing active work so several elements are not really suited for those of us in the world. I've taken the liberty to modify them to suit the average layman. For example, point 3 is geared to the priest's saying Mass, receiving Holy Communion, and saying his Divine Office each and every day. I would hazard to say that that's not really available to many laymen. Certainly, if it's available you should go daily to Mass and receive Holy Communion. More practically, I think that attending Mass and receiving Communion as frequently as possible should be our guide and I've stated this in Steps 5 and 6. As far as the Divine Office is concerned, I like to say Compline whenever I get the chance but I've placed it in the Third Tier Prayers in Step 11A because I think that the Holy Ghost may or may not inspire you to want to say it. The thing to remember here is to develop a great love for the Liturgical life of the Church as a part of your prayer life. The Daily Examination of Conscience of Point 4 was introduced as a 2nd Tier Prayer of Step 11A. If you expect to grow in holiness, it is mandatory that you work to eliminate your sins and imperfections. Keeping a daily running total will keep your dominant fault ever in your mind so that it should be easier for you to identify your NOS that cause you to fall into it and it will help you to stay focused or recollected and on guard against it. It also eases the way for you to go to Confession frequently. We discussed this in Steps 4 and 7.

Twice daily Spiritual Communions are a Second Tier prayer. I've not pressed the issue of ejaculations to this point. I figured you had enough "stuff" on your plate already. They are part of the Third Tier Prayers. I leave the specific ejaculations to you and the inspirations of the Holy Ghost. Personally, I like, "Come Holy Ghost" and "Blessed Virgin, help!" but choose whatever works for you. Studying Scripture from Point 6 was discussed in Step 10. Expand this to include spiritual reading in general. Point 7 was discussed as part of Point 4. Last but not least, is Point 8 with spiritual retreats. I've heard of retreats being described as "A double shot of whiskey for the soul!" and it's been my experience that that has

been true for me; I'm confident that you will also find this so once you have gone. I don't know of a better way to learn God's will for me than when I can withdraw from the static and the noise of everyday life by being on a five-day Ignatian Retreat. It's a compressed version of the 30-day retreats that St. Ignatius of Loyola required for his Jesuits. If nothing else, you will come home from one of these knowing how to meditate, which brings us back around to Point 2, the daily meditation. I'm going to cover that in the next section but let me close this one with a recap of the elements of the Interior Life in outline form:

Elements of the Interior Life:

1. Daily schedule
2. Daily meditation
3. The Liturgical Life of the Church: Mass, Holy Communion, and the Breviary
4. Daily examination of conscience
5. Frequent spiritual communions and ejaculatory prayers
6. Study of Sacred Scripture
7. Frequent confession
8. Spiritual retreats.

METHODS OF MEDITATION:

Now it's time to get into the heart of Step 11B, the act of meditating. Hopefully, you are fully convinced with the necessity of daily meditations as it is a prerequisite for growing in holiness and that is what you ardently desire as your ultimate goal in this life. If that's the case, you have entered fully into the spirit that I have tried to have flowing throughout the Catholic 12-Steps. I have already given you a formal definition for meditation, but, truth be told, I don't think it really explains it to the average Catholic. So, with the grace of God, I'm going to give you a less technical, but hopefully, more understandable definition of meditation. Meditation is to think about some aspect of Our Holy Faith for some length of time using all our powers of imagination, will, and reason to learn more about God and to grow closer to Him in the process. Pretty simple, I think. Remember our young man who wanted to get to know a certain young woman? We already said that he communicated with her to get to know her but in doing that, didn't he also spend a good amount of time with her as well?

That's what your meditations are going to be. You are going to spend time, quiet time, getting to know God. You can think of this as a sort of spiritual courting or dating with Christ.

In any case, here's the game plan. You are going to find a time and place where you will have quiet and solitude for a span of fifteen minutes or more. **NOTE: NO MUSIC!** There are some who will say that the music will inspire them but God speaks to us in silence and background music will only distract and "deafen" you to His voice. Also, in our spirit of having a schedule, you will always do your

meditation at the same time every day. For example, you could do it immediately upon rising in the morning or a half hour before retiring to bed each night. You will use as your source some good Catholic book. Your spiritual director can certainly guide you here but I am going to recommend that your first meditations be from the Passion accounts in the four Gospels. After that, barring direction from your director, I suggest either continuing the Gospel accounts of Christ, the Ignatian Retreat meditation subjects, a chapter from The Imitation of Christ, or Preparation for Death by St. Alphonsus Liguori. After that, you should be well versed at meditating and can choose appropriate materials on your own.

You have a decision to make at this point because there are two schools of thought. The first school is to do your meditation while you are doing your reading. This is the one, according to Fr Libietis' book, St. Louis de Montfort's Consecration to Mary, page 15, this is the method used in early times, *"In early times, learning meditation meant, primarily, acquiring the habit of pausing in the course of one's reading of Holy Scripture or of a pious work. During these pauses, the soul thought, reflected and convinced itself of the truths proposed, realized its duties, made acts of conformity to the divine will, and gave expression to its hopes and its petitions. When these sentiments of faith, confidence and love were exhausted, one resumed quite simply the reading of the sacred text."*

The other school of thought follows that given in Soul of the Apostolate, page 202, where the spiritual reading is done the previous evening before bed and the meditation is done upon rising. *"My spiritual reading, in the evening – so precious an element in the spiritual life – rekindles my desire for mental prayer the following morning. Before going to bed I foresee briefly, but in a clear and forceful manner, the subject of my meditation, as well as the special fruit I want to draw from it, and in the presence of God I stir up my desire to profit by it."*

Take your pick. Meditate while you're reading or meditate after reading. Try one method and if it doesn't work for you, try the other. Your temperament and state of soul may make one easier than the other. Eventually, I'm sure you will find one of the two to be your preferred method and you'll stick with that one.

Now, here is how you actually perform or conduct your meditation. It is done in three parts, 1) Preparation, 2) Reflections, and 3) Affections and Resolutions. The Preparation is normally just a few minutes. The greatest amount of time should be spent in doing the Reflections part. At the Retreat Houses, they give you five minutes out of a 45-minute meditation for the third part so let's stick with that, too. So, with a fifteen-minute meditation, five minutes should be taken up with parts 1 and 3, say two minutes for the Preparation and three minutes for the Affections and Resolutions. This leaves ten-minutes for the Reflections. This is actually a pretty short meditation but, as I always say, "Begin simply and simply begin." Start with 15 minutes and increase it when and if you can. You will find even this short amount of time to be a labor for a while because you won't be

used to the exercise, you'll get distracted, and you'll lose focus periodically but just persevere through it. Don't forget that Satan knows what you're up to so you should certainly expect him to try to disrupt your plans, of course. As long as you persevere, though, you'll get your "sea legs" soon enough as long as you work at it and you'll be an "old salt" before you know it.

I'm sure there are souls out there who have enough details to go ahead and get started. I was always one of the slow ones who needed to "have his hand held" the first time I did anything so, for those like-minded souls, I'm going to go into another layer of detail on each of the three phases. As different saints had different nuances in their methods, I'm going to refer to what St. Francis de Sales had to say in his work, Philothea, or an Introduction to the Devout Life, Part Second, Chapters II thru VIII.

First, the Preparation Phase! As the name implies, this phase is designed to prepare you to actually do the meditation. It gets you into the right frame of mind and is broken down into three exercises. They are: 1) to put yourself in the presence of God, 2) invoking God's help, and 3) setting forth the mystery of the mediation.

It might not be clear what "putting yourself in the presence of God" means. After all, isn't He already everywhere? Well, yes, of course He's everywhere but that's not the sense that we mean here. The idea here is that you have to make yourself aware of that presence. You don't think about breathing but you do it all the time, don't you? You have to make an effort to actually think about breathing before the action of taking and exhaling air rises to the conscious level of your mind. It's the same here. Our Holy Author here lists four ways of stirring up this presence. You can reflect on His presence everywhere, within yourself as a Temple of the Holy Ghost, His presence in heaven while He gazes upon you, or in His Humanity and being beside you. I personally like the forth option; for me, I like to imagine Christ as a close intimate Friend in close conversation with me. Once again, take your pick. Use your imagination to make this presence as real as you can.

The Invocation Phase might need a little explanation, if only to clarify what "invoking" is. To invoke is "to call upon someone", as in our case, to call upon God for His assistance in making the meditation. This needs to be done with humility and a sense of unworthiness but compelled to approach Our Lord due to His benevolence. A simple ejaculation taken from Scripture, such as, "I am Thy servant, O give me understanding. (Psalm cxviii. 125) or one of your own making, "Come, Lord Jesus, Come" will suffice. You should also invoke the saints like the Blessed Virgin, your Guardian Angel, or other saints that are related in some way to the meditation.

The "Setting for the Mystery" Phase is not always used in every meditation but is useful when you are meditating on a scene from Our Lord's life or anything that

you might see as a picture or a movie. Use your imagination to conjure up or stir images of the time and place in which the meditation takes place. This can be particularly useful when meditating on Our Lord's Passion. There are excellent movies that you may have seen that depict these scenes. Don't be afraid to pull these scenes up from your mental "video library". Doing this right can make for some very powerful meditations.

That concludes the Preparatory Phase. As you can see, this shouldn't take but a minute or so. Next, let's get into the second phase or Reflections Phase, which is set up by the last phase of Setting for the Mystery. That act of the memory, enabling your mind's eye to "see" the mystery, opens up to an act of your understanding to "know" the mystery. At this point you reflect on the mystery itself and ponder it, somewhat like taking that diamond image I gave you about the Blessed Virgin Mary. Mentally, you "see" the diamond beforehand. You pick it up and hold it to the light. That's your preparation. Now, turn the diamond, change its position in your hand, move your hand to alter the light, move the diamond, first slowly and then quickly to compare how the reflections differ and change. Soak it all in. Any facet of the diamond that appeals or fascinates you, dwell on it. Absorb its essence. Understand it. Look at it from the "macro" and "micro" points of view. Consider the major angles that are cut. How and why? How do they alter the reflections? Consider the molecular structures. How is it created and how does it also affect the reflections? Other points to ponder: the color reflected, the diamonds hardness – by itself and with respect to other "mysteries"? Use your imagination to assist you to further your understanding.

That, my friend, is the Reflection phase and, for some "facets" of the diamond, you will find easy to dwell on, others you will find a labor to maintain. If you get distracted pull yourself back and re-focus. On the other hand, don't be afraid to let the Holy Ghost pull you along to where He will. Passively follow Him for He leads you to your Beloved. This leading on will spur in you thoughts and emotions, things you want to tell Our Lord, resolutions that you desire to make. This will naturally (or is it supernaturally?) move you to the third phase, "Affections and Resolutions". In this phase, pour out those emotions and thoughts that you are feeling and turn them into concrete resolutions for your own improvement. You will find this a most effective tool to overcoming your hook and growing in sanctity so never leave behind any of the spiritual fruit.

Having completed Affections and Resolutions, wind down your meditation with three simple acts, first, an Act of Thanksgiving, an Act of Oblation, and finally, an Act of Intercession. Meditating is something like going out on a date. So what do you do at the end of a date where you've had a wonderful time? I'm going to address this from the perspective of the woman. Well, the first thing you do is to thank him for the wonderful time, right? OK, thank Our Lord for the graces received and the consolations from it. Next, you would show some sign of affection such as a handshake or maybe even a kiss. An oblation is an offering, so an Act of Oblation is to offer, in this case, yourself along with your affections

and resolutions, to the Father, in union with the sufferings of His Beloved Son. Lastly, you close out a date by asking him when you can go out with him again, so your Act of Intercession is to ask for the graces, blessings, and virtues to fulfill your resolutions. In addition there will be other intentions that are close to your heart that you'll mention. Don't forget the Church, the religious, your family, friends, benefactors, and detractors as well.

Say, "Good night!" by closing with an Our Father and Hail Mary.

That, my dear friend and colleague, is how St. Francis de Sales teaches how to meditate. Use this as a starting point; modify it as directed by your spiritual director and your own circumstances. Just remember, it's all about love and spending time with Your Beloved. See you at Step 12 and God bless!

STEP 12: PERFORM THE WORKS OF MERCY.

Alleluia, my friend, you have reached the home stretch! If you have arrived at the point of putting Step 12 into practice you should consider yourself highly blessed. You have persevered through the war against your hook and God has favored you with the graces to turn your life around: you are no longer a slave to your passions but it is your passions that are a slave to your will. Of course, you can't rest on your laurels and become complacent. To help you to keep everything in perspective and to help you to continuously grow in the sanctity that is required to KEEP the line to your hook severed (and as short as possible), we have Step 12, stated below:

12. I will perform the works of mercy. I will especially perform those works that impact souls who suffer with my addiction. I will perform good works to give glory to God, the salvation of my own soul, and for the good of my neighbor.

THE SOWER OF THE SEED

Once you have a semblance of mastery over your hook, it's time to give back. What do I mean by "a semblance"? As a guess at a timeframe, I suppose I would give it a year since the last time you gave in to your hook. As to a level of temptation, what is the seriousness of the temptations that you now experience? Are you really challenged when they occur or are you able to dismiss them more quickly and easily? Only you can answer for sure but if you meet the "semblance" test then the parable of the Sower of the Seed should be a story that applies to you.

I'm sure you know this story, the one where the farmer, or the sower, scatters seed in different types of soil: on rocks, by the wayside, in the weeds, and on fertile soil. This parable is so important that it is repeated in three different gospels. It's in Matthew xiii, Mark iv, and Luke viii. Just so you don't have to go dig out your Bible I've included the relevant passages, using the text from St. Mark's Gospel, chapter 4:

- 3 *Hear ye: Behold a sower went out to sow.*
- 4 *And whilst he is sowing, some fell by the way side: and the birds of the air came, and eat it up.*
- 5 *And other some fell upon stony ground, where it had not much earth: and it shot up immediately, because it had no depth of earth:*
- 6 *And when the sun was risen, it was scorched: and because it had no root, it withered away.*
- 7 *And some fell among thorns: and the thorns grew up, and choked it, and it yielded no fruit.*

8 *And some fell upon good ground: and brought forth fruit that grew up, and increased, and yielded, one thirty, another sixty, and another a hundred.*

Now, what's the explanation of all this? Well, Our Lord loves us so much that He gives us the answer in His own words. Skipping down to verse 14:

14. *He that soweth, soweth the word.*
15. *And these are they by the way side, where the word is sown; and as soon as they have heard, immediately satan cometh and taketh away the word that was sown in their heart.*
16. *And these likewise are they that are sown on the stony ground: who, when they have heard the word, immediately receive it with joy.*
17. *And they have no root in themselves, but are only for a time: and then when tribulation **[their hooks]** and persecution arise on account of the word, they are presently scandalized.*
18. *And others there are that are sown among thorns: these are they that hear the word,*
19. *And the cares of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts after other things **[there's that hook, again]** entering in, choke the word, and it is made fruitless.*
20. *And these are they who are sown upon the good ground, who hear the word, and receive it, and yield fruit, the one thirty, another sixty, and another a hundred.*

The words in the brackets are mine, of course. Our Lord's words would seem to indicate permanence as to which category of ground any particular "seed" or soul falls into but this, however, is not the case. Unlike the real-life seed, which cannot move once it's planted, our souls can move and migrate between the different types of soil depending upon our level of sanctity. Our success at defeating our hooks is living proof of that! When we began the Catholic 12-Steps we were seeds on the stony ground or in the weeds. We weren't the seeds on the wayside because that seed is "eaten by the birds" of the world immediately and never even tries to overcome its hook. God's grace has "blown" you from your previous wretched state to the fertile good ground through your beginning and persevering through the Catholic 12-Steps. Once you have achieved a state of soul where you are rarely attached to your hook, you have migrated to the fertile soil where the seed, "...increased, and yielded, one thirty, another sixty, and another a hundred." (Mk iv: 8) You have reached that time, my fellow seed. You have been "planted" in the good, fertile ground and it is now time for you to bear fruit.

BEARING FRUIT

You might be asking yourself what "fruit" means in this case? It doesn't mean apples, peaches, and the like. Instead we are talking of performing good works: the practicing of virtue, especially charity, as well as the works of mercy. In Step

11 we talked about how our relationship with God was meant to change from being just “adopted sons” to becoming lovers of God so Step 11 is really about the “fruit” given back to God. In Step 12 we are going to talk about performing the works of mercy: of performing acts that are “fruitful” for souls – both our neighbor’s and our own.

Moving along with our discussion, it would be convenient for us if, once we’ve beaten our hook, we could just kick back and cruise into Heaven but this isn’t the case. Why? Because God has invested in you and He now expects His payback. Church History tells the story of several unfortunates who lived very holy lives – until the end when they became reprobates and undid much of their good works if not even to lose their souls. King Solomon is an excellent example from the Old Testament to give you one case. He desired only wisdom but was given riches, power, and fame because of the humility that he possessed as a young man. Unfortunately all this went to his head. He began to practice idolatry from trying to please so many wives and concubines (and I have trouble keeping just ONE wife happy!). Origen is a more recent example. He was a learned Churchman who wrote some wonderful things but then fell into error. He’s frequently quoted by the Church Fathers and should have become one himself but he failed to persevere until the end. This must NOT happen to us, fellow pilgrim! What we have begun well, we need to end well. Do not think that God will not or cannot punish us also if we don’t persevere or are ungrateful for the graces we receive. He can very easily withdraw them and we will then easily fall prey to our hooks, *“Like a dog that returns to its vomit.” (Prov xxvi. 11)* Do you remember way back in the beginning of this book that I told you that the purpose of the Catholic 12-Steps was NOT just to beat your hook? I told you that if that’s all you wanted to do you could do that with anybody’s 12-Step program. You could possibly beat your hook but you’d probably lose your soul anyway, right? No, the purpose of the Catholic 12-Steps is to make you a saint. The Good God has invested many graces in you and He expects a healthy Return On Investment (ROI).

ROI:

God being God, He is frugal with the graces that He gives. He doesn’t waste them and puts exactly the right amount and exactly the right kind where they will do the most good. He is the Wise Investor. He knows which “stocks” to invest in so as to maximize His return. He has wisely invested in you, dear friend, as opposed to someone else because He knew that in you He would maximize His ROI. How does He get this return? He gets it in three ways from the victory of our struggle against our hook:

- He receives glory
- We save our souls
- We help our neighbor save his soul

The holiness of our lives and the fact that we are no longer who we were manifests God's grace and mercy for everyone who knew the "old man" and how much the "new man" differs from him. It is clear to all (including ourselves) that this transformation in us bears the mark of the hand of God and nothing less. It is obvious that He is a loving God who has bestowed great graces upon a soul that He cares deeply for. The transformation has been nothing short of miraculous and this miracle can only be attributed to a God of great power and majesty. In addition, who could not be humbled by this gift of His merciful love that He has bestowed upon our unworthy selves (Remember the pictures of leeches, slugs, and worms from Step 1?). There are many souls much more worthy of His efforts but, no, He chose you and me to bestow these great favors upon. Out of the 6 billion souls on this planet, He chose us! We are living trophies of His power! Yes, we are trophies, if you will, of souls "won" in His heavenly "trophy case". And since, "To the victor goes the spoils" as they say, the glory is entirely His by our triumph against our hooks. We may have "played" the game but He was the Head Coach of the team! In fact, the more "hopeless" our circumstances were, the greater is His triumph. This has the effect of "pulling" souls towards Him because it offers those other souls hope that they, too, can rise from their wretchedness – both here and hereafter.



Now, for us personally, that "pulling" began when we made that first Act of the Will in Step 0 to conquer our hooks and has continued up through today so that we should constantly be in the State of Grace. Therefore, if we were to die at this very moment, we should both go to Heaven, maybe after a long stint in Purgatory perhaps, but eventually we would get there. Make no mistake about it. We got to where we are right now because of that war we waged against our hooks! If we hadn't committed everything we had to the contest and gotten back up swinging every time we got knocked down into mortal sin, there would be virtually no hope for us, at least from our own doing. Maybe the Blessed Virgin would intervene on our deathbeds because of Rosaries said by those who love us or perhaps we'd "age" our way out of our hooks so that we become physically incapable of committing the sin of our hook and make a good Confession before we die but, come on, we're talking about our souls! Never, ever count on a "maybe" when the stakes are so high. Besides, the tree falls in the direction that it leans, my friend: *"As you sow, so shall you reap."* (Gal vi. 8) We aren't guaranteed that we'll get to Heaven just because we've mastered our hooks but we are certainly pointed in the right direction. But I'm sure you're already aware

of this, my friend. Let's forget looking at this negatively and instead take the positive approach – the way of love.

That's right; once we've arrived at Step 12 our souls are called to become lovers of the Beloved. I am awestruck at the love Christ has bestowed upon me for everything He's done for me – not only as just another member of the Mystical Body of Christ but even more so, for me personally in giving me the grace to be the victor over my hook. I'm sure you feel the same. This tremendous love towards us demands, compels, yes, "pulls" from us a tremendous response of love in return! Returning love for love, even though the best I can do is a wimpy, puny, miniscule, insignificant reflection of the light of the blazing sunbeam of love He is showering upon me. If we surrender to this "pull", it will guide us ever closer to our Beloved and, hence, we will persevere all the way up to "the hour of our death. Amen."

There's another consideration for us though. Anyone who has been enslaved by a sinful hook has a large ledger, if you will, of mortal sins confessed and forgiven. That means that there's a huge backlog of temporal punishment that needs to be



made up for. We can perform that punishment in Purgatory after we are dead or make up for it here on earth. I, for one, would prefer to skip the purgation thing all together. This transformation has also placed us on a pedestal, so to speak, of being role models to others so that they could see that it was indeed possible to conquer our hooks, and therefore, their own hooks. "If he can do it, so can I" rings in the heads of everyone else who knows or hears about your story.

I wish I could tell you that all we need do now is to strive for perfection and keep on striving for it until He calls us home, but that would be sugarcoating things. We have much labor ahead of us. We have many acts of love to perform. We will also have additional trials and crosses that we will have to bear as God purifies our souls to make us acceptable for our Beloved. The closer our souls get to Our Lord, the more He will test our love for Him through more demanding works and heavier crosses. However, if we persevere we will cross the finish line and "win the prize" just as St. Paul tells us: "*Know you not that they who run in the race, all run indeed, but one receiveth the prize? So run that you may obtain.*" (1 Cor ix. 24)

God will expect us to yield Him fruit by working for His glory and the salvation of our neighbor which means that we, each and every one of us, has a moral obligation to render fruits of good works back to our Heavenly Father. This obligation is well done by performing the Works of Mercy. We talked about these back in Step 5 when we talked about restitution for our sins. There the primary focus was to help ourselves. Now the focus is much different. True, we are still working to help ourselves erase the entries on the ledger since, once again, *“Charity covereth a multitude of sins.” (1 Pet iv. 8)* But now we are going to concentrate on the “charity”, or love, that motivates these acts. I’m going to list them again below. You will not be suited to all of them. So what! There will be one or more of them that you are already doing each and every day; others you probably would like to do given the right set of circumstances and training. By the way, I’m quoting from dog-eared copy of the New Saint Joseph Baltimore Catechism No. 2 again so remember that the examples are aimed at children. You adults will just have to extrapolate examples that apply to you!

Spiritual Works: Acts of love toward our neighbor to help him in the needs of the soul. And since the soul is far more important than the body, the spiritual works of mercy are far more important than the corporal works of mercy.

- **Admonish the sinner:** It is an act of love to try to make another realize how bad sin is. This might be done by trying to keep him out of sin or an occasion of sin, or by trying to get him to confession afterward. In cases where we think it might make him worse, we do not correct him directly. We can let him know indirectly, though, especially by our example that we do not approve of his actions.
- **Instruct the ignorant:** It is an act of love to help others in one way or another to learn the truths they need to know to save their souls.
- **Counsel the doubtful:** It is an act of love to help others to be certain about what they should do to love and serve God. For example, answering questions about eating meat for lunch on Ember days.
- **Comfort the sorrowful:** It is an act of love to help another person in any kind of sorrow, and to refrain from doing anything that would unnecessarily cause another person more sorrow.
- **Bear wrongs patiently** (the Cross again!): It is an act of love to accept the consequences of another’s thoughtlessness or carelessness, and to suffer inconveniences that another should bear.
- **Forgive all injuries** (and again!): It is an act of deep love to forgive all those who have injured us in any way, even deliberately. Christ demands that His followers have great love and forgiveness for one another imitation of His own forgiveness of His enemies as He hung on the Cross.

- **Pray for the living and the dead:** We have already seen how our sharing in the communion of saints demands that we pray for everyone. This is a great means of spreading the fires of love to others, whether in this world or in purgatory.

•**Corporal Works: Acts of love that come from the HEART to help our neighbor in his bodily needs.**

- **Feed the hungry:** Everyone needs bodily food. It is an act of love to help others to obtain their bodily nourishment, especially those in greatest need. Examples - Bringing food to a needy family. Sharing your candy. Going to the grocery store for your mother. Helping with the cooking. Doing the dishes. Waiting on company.
- **Give drink to the thirsty:** What was said of food applies also to the need everyone has for drink. Examples - Giving your friends a drink on a hot day. Giving the baby its bottle. Pouring tea at the table. Lifting up a little boy to get a drink at a fountain.
- **Clothe the naked:** Everyone needs clothing. It is an act of love to help others with clothing, especially those who need help. Examples - Bringing clothes to a needy family, or to a clothing drive for Europe or Asia. Helping your little brother dress himself. Helping your mother with the wash. Shining shoes or ironing clothes.
- **Visit the imprisoned:** Besides those in prison, many others suffer hindrances or dangers to freedom. Helping them or protecting them is an act of love. Examples – Protecting a little boy from a bigger one. Minding the baby. Fighting for one’s country. Doing patrol duty at corners.
- **Shelter the homeless:** Everyone needs shelter. To help others obtain shelter or to preserve it is an act of love. Examples – Bringing others to your home n time of fire, floods, or other disasters. Helping to take care of the furnace. Dusting the furniture. Making the beds. Cleaning the floor.
- **Visit the sick:** Helping sick people in any way is an act of love. Examples – Running an errand for an elderly lady. Reading to a sick person.
- **Bury the dead:** It is an act of love to show respect for the bodies of the dead. Examples – Going to funerals. Treating cemeteries with respect. Cutting the grass on a grave. Putting flowers on it.

There are many worthy Catholic organizations that will give you those circumstances and training we just discussed. Seek them out. They exist. Just make sure they are Catholic in more than just in name. I will repeat my admonition against mixing with non-Catholic organizations to do charity work. You will be converted; not they. Oil and water don’t mix so don’t join what you cannot change. Only pride will convince you that it is possible. In any case, here

are a few organizations that would recommend; I've asterisked those that I've had personal experience with so that I can vouch for their value:

- Blessed Margaret Family Help Center, Inc.*
- Legion of Mary* (Active or auxiliary)
- St. Vincent de Paul Society*
- St. Raphael League
- Guilds (Medical & Teaching)
- Holy Name Society
- Archconfraternity of St. Stephen
- Eucharistic Crusade

Aren't a joiner and you feel called to do something "outside" the list of the Works of Mercy or need some nuts-and-bolts examples? The key is to use your own talents in your own "inimitable" style, as they say. Give money if that's all you have. Teach, work with youth, help the Right-to-Life movement, perform Catholic Action in the political sense, join a religious order, or become a Third Order.

Can't find an existing organization that does what you are called to do? Start your own, but do so only if you see a real need and are called to do it. Get confirmation that this is God's will by consulting with your spiritual director. Read Matthew 25. Read [The Soul of the Apostolate](#). Whatever or wherever you work, remember that it is for the glory of God - not ourselves. Remember also that the hook stays in your soul forever and that, as always, *"Charity covereth a multitude of sins"*.

Please keep us informed on your progress - your successes and your failures. Know that you are included in the Mass and prayer intentions of the Blessed Margaret Family Help Center. Know that, together, we can indeed "Restore all things in Christ - one family at a time". God bless!

CLOSING REMARKS

That concludes the Catholic 12-Steps as I've been given lights to see it by the Good God. I have attempted to explain a method based squarely upon Catholic principles to overcome sinful hooks, or addictions. It is focused upon strengthening the soul as the means to success so that it emphasizes your spirituality but it doesn't ignore the natural aspect as well. Each of the steps is designed as a building block to build an integral structure in your soul to defeat your hook and to grow in sanctity. Is it successful? The fruits of your labors, my most dear friend, will either prove or disprove my method.

I seriously believe that there really isn't anything new here since the Doctors of the Church have already "mined" the topic. The only nuances here are possibly just putting it all together into one place and the unique way of describing it. The rest of it has already been available for those who looked for it. I'm truly surprised that someone with better understanding and greater holiness hasn't already done this since the need has always been there and all the pieces of the puzzle of been available for centuries.

Regardless, you've read the theoretical stuff now so it's time for you to write your own story about the battle against your hook. I will be praying for you and I hope that you will give me feedback as to what works and what doesn't so that the next edition of "The Hook and I" will benefit from your experiences. Even with all the priestly review I've had for this book I'm convinced there's still too much of me in the pages and not enough of Our Lord. You can help me filter it out by providing me with that feedback.

Another hope of mine is that others will build upon my trial program, La Misma Nada, by starting other Catholic support groups for the different hooks as folks achieve success and want to give back to others in performing their own Step 12 apostolates. In this way, we will make some serious inroads in "Restoring All Things in Christ – One Family at a Time" here and around the world. As Catholics we have the truth and it's high time we took advantage of it for ourselves and for a sick world mired in the depths of sin. If it pleases God, this will be a piece of the triumph of Our Lady's Immaculate Heart. Who knows?

Depending on the demand, my next objective might be to help set up La Misma Nada groups where and when asked. I also plan on putting additional details in a guide for facilitators. Two future goals are to fulfill the need for more information on Catholic Culture as well as a guide to courting and vocations for our young people. Even amongst those who should know better there is widespread ignorance and, dare I say, contempt for the need to disassociate ourselves from society's anti-culture which is typified by how our young people, even our Catholic children, by and large, are impure all the way to the altar and are then surprised at why their marriages are unhappy. Go figure! I'm sure that even if "The Hook and I" doesn't raise a lot of hackles, daring to publish what the Church

has “always and everywhere” taught that strikes at the heart of our modern society will probably raise a lot of eyebrows to say the least. Still, charity demands that someone do it. It has to be said – somehow, someday. We’ve lost too many generations of souls just blindly doing what the mass media tells us to do on our march to The Brave New World and that just has to stop. In any case, I don’t have a timetable for these works yet; Man proposes, God disposes.

As for the Blessed Margaret Center, Our Lord hasn’t revealed what He wants for it. What started as a crisis pregnancy center has certainly transformed itself into an addiction recovery group, that along with education and home schooling resources. Somebody please show me the connection between the two! Still, I think that having an actual building (other than my house) that contained both meeting rooms for La Misma Nada groups of all sorts along with a retail store selling items for home schooling families and just Catholic Culture-type stuff in general would be a worthy undertaking. It could be used for additional activities for the apostolate but we shall see, in the fullness of time, as they say, what other activities come to fruition. Certainly, the Center could use whatever alms and prayers you might care to give and I’d be eternally grateful for both.

One last thought and I’ll leave you in peace, my dearest friend, and I’m not quite sure how to put it. Through these pages, by my writing them and by your reading them, I hope we’ve both grown closer to Our Beloved by virtue of our hooks. By both of us getting closer to the same Object makes us both grow closer to each other so I feel like I’m finishing a letter to a very close friend. Please rest assured of my continued fraternal affection and continuous prayers for you; I look forward to meeting you on the other side. God bless!

APPENDIX

EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE

First Commandment: “I Am The Lord Thy God, Thou Shalt Not Have Strange Gods Before Me”

Have you denied the Catholic Faith, openly rejected or spoken against any doctrine of the Catholic Church?

Have you disbelieved or willfully indulged in doubts against any article of faith, or suggested or encouraged such doubts in others?

Have you betrayed the Catholic faith by saying that all religions are good, that a man maybe saved in one as well as in another?

How many times have you been guilty of these sins?

Have you read the Protestant Bible, heretical tracts or books, or sold, or lent them?

Have you attended, or joined in false worship? Have you played or sung in places of false worship? Have you listened to heretical or infidel preachers or lectures?

How many times?

Have you exposed your faith to danger by evil associations? Have you joined any secret society forbidden by the Church? Do you still belong to it? Have you through your own fault, remained ignorant of the doctrines and duties of your religion?

Have you remained a long time, a whole month, or longer, without reciting any prayer, or performing any act of devotion towards God?

Have you committed a sin in a holy place, the church, the graveyard? Have you been guilty of great irreverence in Church, by immodest conversation, by an unbecoming way of dressing, or by other gross misconduct?

Have you consulted fortune-tellers, or made use of superstitious practices, love-potions, charms, horse-shoes, horoscopes, etc, read, kept, given, lent or sold dream- books, fortune-telling books, and the like?

How many times have you been guilty of these sins?

Have you sinned and remained in sin because God is good?

Have you given way to despair?

Have you given too much importance to sports, or any creature?

Have you been ashamed of your faith, of being a traditional Catholic?

Second Commandment: “Thou Shalt Not Take The Name Of The Lord Thy God In Vain”

Have you been guilty of blasphemy by angry, injurious or insulting words against God or any of His perfections, or against the Catholic Church, the Most Blessed Virgin Mary or any Saints? Did you even hate God?

Have you pronounced in a blasphemous or irreverent manner, or in anger, the Holy Name of God, the Name of Our Lord Jesus Christ, or abused the words of Holy Scripture by any indecent or grossly irreverent application?

How many times?

Have you sworn falsely? Have you done so to the prejudice of your neighbor? Have you joined an oath-bound secret society? How many oaths did you take in the society? Did you take an oath to be revenged or to commit some other crime? Have you induced others to swear falsely or unnecessarily, or to break a lawful oath?

Have you cursed yourself or your neighbor? Did you mean it? Is this sin habitual? How often do you curse in the day?

Have you made any rash vows? Have you broken or neglected a lawful vow, or changed it without permission?

Third Commandment: “Remember Thou Keep Holy The Lord’s Day”

The Precepts Of The Church

1. To assist at Mass on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation.
2. To fast and abstain on the days appointed.
3. To confess your sins at least once a year.
4. To go to Communion during Easter time.
5. To contribute to the support of the Church.
6. To observe the laws of the Church concerning marriage.

Have you on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation willfully missed Mass, or arrived late, or left before Mass was over? Have you talked, laughed and gazed about during Mass? How often?

Have you been habitually absent from the sermons and instructions?

Have you attended and actively participated in the “New Mass”? Have you received Holy Communion in the hand?

Have you performed unnecessary servile work on Sun days and Holy Days of Obligation, or caused others to do so?

Have you desecrated these days by frequenting ungodly company, by sinful amusements, gambling, immodest dancing, or drinking to excess? How often?

Have you without necessity eaten meat or caused others to eat meat on days of abstinence? Have you broken the laws of fasting? (Lent, Vigils, Ember Days, Eucharistic fast . . .) How often?

Have you neglected to contribute, according to your means, to the support of your pastor and church?

Have you been married before a civil magistrate, or even before an heretical preacher?

Have you, without dispensation, married a relative or non Catholic person? Have you contracted marriage in any way forbidden by the Church?

Fourth Commandment: “Honor Thy Father And Thy Mother”

Have you despised or even hated your parents, wished their death, or that some other misfortune should befall them?

Have you insulted, mocked, ridiculed or cursed them? Have you threatened them, or even lifted your hand to strike them?

How often have you been guilty of such sins?

Have you disobeyed them in serious matters; kept bad company, read bad books and papers, and so on? Have you sorely grieved your parents by your ingratitude, or misconduct?

Have you, still a minor, promised or even contracted marriage without their knowledge and consent?

Have you neglected or refused to aid them in their wants? Have you been ashamed of them on account of their poverty?

Have you faithfully accomplished their last will? Have you neglected to pray for them?

Have you been disrespectful and disobedient to your spiritual superiors, the Pope, the bishops and priests of the Church? Have you behaved towards them in a haughty and insulting manner? Did you refuse to pray for them or for their conversion?

Do you pray for your country, for your government? Have you placed your country above God?

Have you taken part with the disaffected and seditious (revolutionary activities)? Have you ever joined a communist or a liberal association?

Have you resisted the lawful authorities of the country, taken part in any mob violence, or disturbed public peace?

Fifth Commandment: “Thou Shalt Not Kill”

Have you by act, participation, instigation, counsel or consent, been guilty of anyone’s death or bodily injury?

Have you intended or attempted to take another’s life? Have you been guilty of the sin of abortion?

How often have you committed these sins?

Have you intended or attempted to take your own life?

Have you injured your health by excess in eating or drinking? Have you been drunk or been the cause of drunkenness in others?

Have you used drugs?

How many times have you been guilty of these sins?

Have you by act, advice or consent done anything to hinder or to destroy life? How often?

Have you wished the death of your neighbor, or that some other misfortune befall him? Have you intended or attempted to injure, or ill-treat others? How often?

Have you been at enmity with your neighbor? Have you refused to speak to him or salute him? How often? Are you now reconciled with him?

Have you excited others to anger or revenge?

Have you through avarice, passion or revenge, engaged in vexatious or unjust lawsuits?

Have you harmed anyone's soul by giving scandal, destroying this soul through bad example? Have you, by wicked words, deeds or bad example, ruined innocent persons, taught them bad habits or things they should not know?

Have you exposed yourself or others to temptation (night clubs, beaches, movies on the television or at the cinema, theaters, etc.?)

Have you kept a television in your home knowing it is an occasion of sin for you and your children? Have you listened to bad music? Have you allowed your children to listen to it?

Have you dressed in an improper or indecent manner (mini skirts, tight pants or slacks for women, plunging necklines, see-through blouses and skirts, flesh colored material, shorts, bikinis, etc...)?

Have you thrown temptation in the way of the weak? Have you tried to dissuade or discourage those who were willing to repent and reform?

Have you dated when you should not have done so, when you were not mature enough to get married? Did you offend God during your courtship?

How often have you been guilty of these sins?

Have you neglected to give alms according to your means, or to relieve those in distress?

Sixth and Ninth Commandments: "Thou Shalt Not Commit Adultery" "Thou Shalt Not Covet Thy Neighbor's Wife"

You must mention those circumstances that change the nature of your sin: the sex, the relationship and the condition, whether married, single or bound by a vow. Were you married or single at that time?

Have you dwelt with willful pleasure on impure thoughts or imaginations, or consented to them in your heart? How often?

Have you willfully desired to see or do anything impure?

Have you made use of impure language, allusions, or words of double meaning? How many were listening to you?

Have you listened with willful pleasure to immodest language? How often have you sung immodest songs or listened to them?

Have you boasted of your sins?

Have you read immoral books or papers, or lent or sold them to others? How often have you written, sent or received improper letters or messages? How often have you gazed with willful pleasure on improper objects, images or cards, or shown them to others?

Have you voluntarily exposed yourself to the occasions of sin by sinful curiosity, by keeping dangerous company, by frequenting dangerous places, dangerous or sinful amusements; by immodest dances and indecent plays; by remaining alone in the company of those of the opposite sex, or by undue familiarities?

Do you keep sinful company now? Have you in the past or do you now live with someone who is not your spouse before God?

Have you ruined an innocent person?

Have you been addicted to secret sins (masturbation)? How often have you committed this sin? Over how long a period of time?

Have you been guilty of improper liberties with others? How far have you carried your sinful conduct?

Have you by your freedom of manners, your immodest dress, and so on, been the cause of temptation to others?

Have you been guilty of seduction or even rape? Did you accomplish your designs by a false promise of marriage? Have you refused to repair the injury done?

Have you committed crimes against nature?

Have you taken part in the sins of others?

Have you been guilty of the sin of fornication, or adultery?

Have you used artificial birth control? Have you used natural birth control without sufficient reason? Have you tried to cheat God and His Law? How many times have you committed these sins?

Seventh and Tenth Commandments: “Thou Shalt Not Steal” “Thou Shalt Not Covet Thy Neighbor’s Goods”

Throughout this whole examination, you must not merely tell the number of sins, you must also tell, as exactly as possible, the value of what you took, or the amount of damage caused by your injustice, that the confessor may know whether your sins are mortal or not, and what restitution you have to make.

Have you stolen money or anything of value? What was its value? Is it still in your possession? How much did you take each time? How often?

Have you stolen anything consecrated to God, or from a holy place? This is a sacrilege, as well as a theft!

Have you charged exorbitant prices, or made out false bills, or falsified the quality of your goods?

Have you cheated in games? Have you been in the habit of gambling, and to what extent?

Have you engaged in deceitful speculations or enterprises to the injury of the simple and unwary?

Have you defrauded your creditors? Have you been guilty of forgery or swindling? Have you charged exorbitant interest?

Have you robbed the poor?

Have you passed counterfeit or mutilated money? Have you been guilty of bribery, or taking bribes?

Have you kept things you found without inquiring for the owner? Have you retained any of the money entrusted to you?

Have you failed to return things borrowed? Have you neglected to pay your debts? Have you contracted debts without any reasonable hope of paying?

Have you bought, received, or concealed things you knew to be stolen?

Have you been the cause of ruin or damage to the property of another? Did you allow your cattle to injure the neighbor's crop, etc?

Have you squandered the money of your husband, wife, parents, etc. in buying costly dresses, jewelry, in drinking, etc...? Have you been careless of goods entrusted to your charge?

Have you received pay for work or service you have never done, or have done so poorly that it had to be done over again?

Have you sought to gain your cause by bribery, threats, or other unjust means?

Have you damaged or destroyed (e.g., by fire) your property and kept the insurance money?

Have you, in your dealings, taken advantage of the simple, the poor, the young and inexperienced? Have you made hard bargains with the poor, or those in distress?

Have you been guilty of fraud or embezzlement in any public office or private trust?

Have you caused any injury or loss by your negligence or culpable ignorance in the discharge of your profession or employment?

Have you, in any way, taken part in another's theft, fraud or injustice? Have you concealed the injustice of others, when it was your duty to report it?

Have you attempted or intended or willfully desired to rob, steal, defraud or commit any kind of injustice?

Have you by calumny or other unjust means, caused anyone to lose his position or reputation?

Have you voted for anyone you knew to be unfit for office?

Examine whether you have repaired all the injustice you have done. Your sins will not be pardoned so long as you refuse or willfully neglect to make restitution. If what you have unjustly acquired is no longer in your possession, return the value of it. If you cannot restore the whole, restore at least a part, and that without delay. If you are unable to restore it at once, you must have the firm and sincere resolution to do so as soon as possible. You must also strive earnestly to acquire the means of doing so. The obligation of restitution is binding until it is fully discharged. Restitution must be made to the

owner. If the owner cannot be found, you must give the money to God, that is, to the poor, the Church, or some charitable purpose.

Eighth Commandment: “Thou Shalt Not Bear False Witness Against Thy Neighbor”

Have you taken a false oath or advised others to do so?

Have you signed false papers or documents or forged any writings? What injury have you done thereby? How often have you committed these sins?

Have you been guilty of malicious lying? Have you put into circulation, or repeated any scandalous report, you knew or believed to be false?

Have you been guilty of detraction in serious matters, by making known your neighbor's secret sins or defects?

Have you done anything to blacken his character or injure his interests?

Have you caused ill-feeling between others by tale-bearing? Have you revealed an important secret?

Have you without authority read another's letters?

How often, and in the presence of how many persons, have you committed these sins?

Have you endeavored to repair the harm you have done, by contradicting your false reports? Have you tried honestly to restore the good name that you have injured?

Have you spoken against a member of the clergy because he is consecrated to God? This is a sacrilege as well!

How often have you been guilty of unjust suspicions and rash judgments?

The Seven Capital Sins

Pride, Avarice, Lust, Envy, Gluttony, Anger, Sloth.

The Six Sins Against The Holy Ghost

To despair of your own salvation, to presume to be saved without merits, to fight the truth knowingly, to be envious of the graces of another, to be obstinate in sin, to die unrepentant.

The Particular Duties Of Your State

Parents

Have you failed to always take proper care of the life and health of your children? Have you exposed them to great danger before their birth? Have you failed to provide for their wants? Have you given them proper food, clothing, etc. . .? Have you ever deserted them?

Have you failed to teach them a trade or profession so that they could gain an honest livelihood?

Have you manifested an unjust preference for one to the prejudice of the others? Have you been neglectful, unkind and even cruel to your children, stepchildren or wards?

Have you forced your children into a state of life for which they had no vocation? Have you hindered them from following their vocation to the religious or ecclesiastical state? Have you, without reasonable cause, opposed their inclination with regard to marriage? Have you failed to procure for them a good and Catholic education according to your means?

Have you neglected to teach them their prayers? Have you neglected to inspire them, in their tender years, with the love of God and a horror of sin?

Have you delayed their baptism too long? Have you neglected to have them prepared and brought at the proper age to Confession, Holy Communion and Confirmation?

Have you neglected their religious instruction, or sent them to heretical or Godless schools? Have you failed to take them to Mass on Sundays and Holy Days?

Have you caused them not to observe abstinence on the days prescribed?

Have you placed them in a situation where they could not practice their religion, or where their faith or their virtue was in danger?

Have you exposed their innocence to danger by letting the different sexes sleep together, or by keeping them at night in your own bedroom?

Have you kept watch on their conduct carefully? Have you seen where they spend their time, with what companions they associate, and if they are addicted to any secret vice? Have you allowed them to wander where they would? Have you entrusted them to the care of servants that were irreligious or of loose morals?

Have you allowed them to read love stories, trashy novels and other dangerous books? Have you allowed them to take part in sinful or dangerous amusements, or to watch bad television?

Have you let them date when they were not mature enough to do so, or when they were not old enough to get married?

Have you allowed them freedom with persons of the other sex; visits alone, or at improper hours, or to stay out late at night? Have you allowed dances in your house? Have you allowed them to dance?

Have you failed to correct and punish them when they deserved it? Have you allowed them to curse or use improper language without chastising them?

Have you, through indifference or misguided affection, left them without restraint? Have you on the contrary, cursed them in anger; treated them brutally, or exasperated or scandalized them by violent language, abusive names, etc.?

Have you scandalized them by bad example, by neglecting your religion?

The Married

Did you enter into the state of matrimony for bad and non-Catholic motives?

Have you, by your conduct, been the cause of jealousy and grief to your spouse?

Have you profaned the sanctity of matrimony by misuse, or by trying to hinder its lawful end?

Have you sinned against each other by angry words, opprobrious names, or even by quarrels and blows?

How often have you been guilty of these sins?

Have you without just cause and lawful permission, abandoned your spouse in life, lived separately or remained long absent?

Husband

Have you been faithless to your marriage vows?

Have you treated your wife in a gross, cruel or tyrannical manner, beaten her, or abused her in your anger? Have you made her unhappy by your coldness, stinginess, neglect and unfeeling conduct, or by spending your leisure time too often away from home? Have you failed to treat her with attention and forbearance, when she was in a delicate condition?

Have you compelled her to act against her conscience, to sin against the laws of nature?

Have you neglected to support your wife and children? Have you squandered your earnings or the property of your wife?

Wife

Have you, unknown to your husband, made useless and extravagant expenses for yourself or relatives? How much?

Have you caused discord by your selfishness and jealousy and by your unfriendly conduct towards his relatives?

Have you broken your marriage vows? Have you given rise to jealousy by your levity; by trying to win the admiration and affection of others?

Have you been respectful and obedient to him in all things reasonable and lawful?

Have you made your home disagreeable by your ill temper, scolding, and fault-finding, or by pretended or imaginary ailments?

Have you without just cause refused him his marriage rights? Have you induced him to offend God and act contrary to the laws of nature?

How often have you been guilty of these sins?

Have you done your part towards the support of the family, or have you, on the contrary, been idle and neglectful of your household duties?

Students

Have you failed to study seriously and with diligence? Have you failed to spend enough time on your studies? Have you missed an exam because of laziness?

Have you abused the liberty you have at college because you are far away from your family?

Have you spent too much money on useless things and entertainment?

Have you spent too much time on your intellectual training, forgetting about your spiritual life?

Have you failed to avoid the evil influences of your teachers, books or companions?
Have you failed to act as a Catholic with your acquaintances? Have you been ashamed of your faith?

Young Ladies, Young Men

Have you been helpful, assisting in your home or, on the contrary, a hindrance?

Have you been too concerned with the way you look, and do you spend too much time with these frivolities?

Have you dressed decently, with dignity, simplicity, and modesty? Are you superficial and worldly?

Have you kept any occasions of sin in your life, or are you an occasion of sin for someone else?

Have you cultivated your intelligence with good reading, or have you wasted your time with novels?

Have you mastered your will with the spirit of sacrifice, self-denial, and charity?

Have you been the master of your heart, your feelings and your thoughts?

Employers

Have you treated your employees and servants in a harsh or tyrannical manner? Have you overburdened them with work, or obliged them to do unnecessary work on Sundays or Holy Days of Obligation? Have you kept them from Mass on those days? How often?

Have you always given them proper and sufficient food and treated them kindly in sickness? Have you dismissed them unjustly before the time agreed on? Have you refused them their just dues, neglected to pay them or taken ad vantage of their poverty or simplicity to engage them on hard or unjust terms?

How much have you wronged them and how often?

Have you failed to encourage and exhort them to keep out of sin and dangerous occasions; to go regularly to Mass, to frequent the Sacraments? Have you been in any way an occasion of sin to them?

Have you failed to watch over their morals? Have you suffered them to keep improper company, late hours?

Employees and Servants

Have you failed to serve your employers diligently and faithfully? Have they suffered any harm or loss through your fault, neglect or wastefulness?

Have you retained part of what they gave you to make purchases, or taken anything under pretense that your wages were too low? How much? How often?

Have you revealed unnecessarily the faults of your employers, sowed discord in their families, or been the cause, by false or malicious complaints, of other employees being discharged?

Are you in a situation where your faith and morals are endangered, or where you have not the opportunity of fulfilling your religious duties?

Have you connived or aided your employers in their crimes? Have you printed, bound, or sold books or papers against faith or morals?

Magistrates and Public Officers

Have you failed to faithfully discharge the duties of your office?

Have you through weakness, human respect, desire of popularity or eagerness for office and emolument betrayed the public interest, or sacrificed the rights of any individual, or suffered crime to go unchecked and unpunished? In what way and how often?

Have you directly or indirectly received bribes, or allowed yourself to be influenced, by promises or presents, in the administration of justice, or in your official conduct?

Have you embezzled public funds, or used them to your own advantage? Have you enriched yourself or your friends at the expense of the public by means of unjust contracts? In what way, and how much?

- Have you abused your official power to gratify revenge, to favor your friends, or to shield or aid the wicked?

Have you neglected the cause of the poor, the innocent, the helpless and the oppressed?

Have you given scandal by open neglect and disregard of your holy religion and your Catholic duties?

Lawyers, Notaries and Clerks of Court

Have you advocated unjust claims or sustained an unjust cause? Did you obtain an unjust decision? Have you knowingly prosecuted an innocent person?

Have you injured the cause of your client by treachery, gross ignorance, or neglect?

Have you given treacherous, doubtful, or dishonest advice? Have you unjustly flattered the hopes of your client, or otherwise encouraged useless litigation?

Have you been guilty of fraud, bribery or other injustices? Have you procured false testimony, or encouraged others to commit perjury?

Have you been guilty of fraud in drawing up legal documents, or made them ambiguous, or contrary to the intentions of the persons concerned?

Have you falsified, destroyed, or substituted documents? Have you made out false bills of cost, demanded unlawful or exorbitant fees, or charged anyone for services not rendered?

How often and how much have you cheated in this manner?

Physicians and Surgeons

Have you undertaken the care of the sick without sufficient science or experience? Have you been negligent in the treatment of serious or extraordinary cases? Have you hazarded

dangerous remedies or made merciless experiments on patients in hospitals or on the poor?

How often have you been guilty of these sins, and what were the results?

Have you failed to consult other physicians when necessary, or have you made choice of such as would connive at your mistakes?

Have you caused needless expenses by unnecessary consultations, useless visits, or costly and useless remedies, etc.

Have you followed the opinions of others contrary to the clear laws of God, or sanctioned an improper course of treatment? What injury and injustice have you caused thereby?

Have you undertaken surgical operations beyond your science or skill, or conducted them recklessly?

Have you willfully taken the life of a child? Have you directly or indirectly procured, permitted or encouraged abortion or sinful birth control?

Have you taught or encouraged others to hinder conception or to practice onanism?

Have you taught or encouraged the use, or abuse of opiates, liquors, etc.

Have you hastened anyone's death, at his own request, or the request of his relatives? Have you failed to warn those in danger of death, so that they could receive the sacraments in time?

Have you suffered a child to die without baptism?

How many times have you been guilty of these sins?

Druggists

Have you sold medicine or any other object to destroy life, to hinder conception, or to excite the passions?

Have you sold liquor to drunkards? Have you sold morphine or other opiates to those who abuse these drugs?

Those Having a Hotel, Bar, or Public House

Have you overcharged your guest, or adulterated your liquors? To what amounts, and how often? Have you given liquors to drunkards, or to those partially drunk, or allowed anyone to drink to excess in your house or place? How often?

Have you taken money from those whom you knew to be ruining their family by dissipation?

Have you made your house a place of dissipation on Sundays and even during Mass? Have you allowed gambling in your establishment, or tolerated blasphemy, obscenity or quarrels?

Have you allowed improper persons to visit or lodge there? Have you made it a resort of scandalous interviews, sinful amusements, immodest dances or other shameful abuses?

Have you kept immodest pictures and papers in your house? Is your business an occasion of sin to your neighbor, or injury to your family, and a hindrance to your own salvation.

NECESSARY PRAYERS

The following are the prayers needed tiers 1 and 2 of the Step 11A prayers for your convenience.

NOTE: If the prayer is done aloud in unison between two or more, an * is placed at the pause points to keep everyone together. If the prayer is said in an alternating fashion between two people, or in versicle – response manner, a “V.” is placed at the beginning of the first person’s part and a “R.” is placed at the beginning of the second person’s part. Prayers that are underlined are taken from the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola Retreat Manual and Family Prayer Book from Angelus Press.

Nothingness Itself Prayer

(If said publicly, pause at * and at commas and periods)

O God, I, who am nothingness itself, come before Thee, confessing that I am powerless against my sinful habit, my addiction, my hook* that Satan has used to pull me from the waters of Thy grace* and to make me his slave. I am enchained and prostrate at his feet * without so much as the strength to break these bonds * let alone to rise and return to Thee. I admit before Thee and all the Heavenly Court * that I am in this wretched state through my own fault * and that even with the best of my own efforts * I am powerless in this struggle. I am beaten, I am defeated, and I am damned. In my anguish I cry out to Thee, “Help, Lord, I perish”.

But Thou, O Lord, art my hope. Most beloved Jesus, Thou alone canst send the rain of Thy grace * to melt my hook, my chains, and my shackles, freeing me from this terrible bondage. In my nothingness, I am totally dependent upon Thee and Thy good favor. O merciful Redeemer, I beseech Thee, despise not this contrite and humbled heart, but unleash the storm clouds of grace, through Thy Most Holy Mother, that I may be victorious in this mortal combat within me. O Mary, my Queen and my Mother, pray to Jesus for me! Amen.

Morning Offering

NOTE: There are other acceptable versions of a Morning Offering. If you are already doing a different version that contains the same sentiments feel free to continue using your present one. This form is presented for those who are just starting out or for those who want to use a “tried and true” version.

O, Divine Heart of Jesus, through the Immaculate Heart of Mary, I offer Thee the prayers, works, joys and sufferings of this day, in reparation for my offenses, and for all the intentions for which Thou art immolated continually on our altars.

Prayers for the Rosary

Apostles' Creed

V. I believe in God the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth. And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, Who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended into hell, the third day He arose again from the dead, He ascended into heaven, sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty, from thence He shall come to judge the living and the dead.

R. I believe in the Holy Ghost, the Holy Catholic Church, the Communion of Saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting. Amen.

Our Father

V. Our Father, Who art in heaven, hallowed by Thy Name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

R. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Amen.

Hail Mary

V. Hail, Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee; blessed art thou amongst women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus.

R. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen.

Glory Be

V. Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost.

R. As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

O My Jesus

O, my Jesus, forgive us our sins, save us from the fires of hell, lead all souls to heaven, especially those in most need of Thy mercy.

Hail Holy Queen

Hail, holy queen, Mother of Mercy, our life, our sweetness, and our hope. To thee do we cry, poor banished children of Eve. To thee do we send up our sighs, mourning, and weeping in this valley of tears. Turn then, most gracious advocate, thine eyes of mercy towards us and after this, our exile, show unto us, the blessed Fruit of thy womb, Jesus. O clement, O loving, O sweet Virgin Mary.

V. Pray for us, O Holy Mother of God

R. That we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ.

Let us pray.

O God, Whose only begotten Son, by His life, death, and resurrection has purchased for us the rewards of eternal life, grant, we beseech Thee, meditating on the mysteries of the most Holy Rosary of the Blessed Virgin Mary, we may imitate what they contain and obtain what they promise, through the same, Christ, our Lord. Amen.

NOVENA PRAYER TO BLESSED MARGARET OF CASTELLO

O Blessed Margaret of Castello, O holy servant of God, patroness of the unborn and the unwanted; exemplary role model of humility, poverty, and love of God as well as shining example of charity to neighbor especially to the outcasts of society, we confidently pray and beseech thee to intercede on our behalf to our beloved Lord, enlisting the aid of His Holy Mother along with all the angels and saints for the spiritual and material success of the Blessed Margaret Family Help Center and for the following intentions: (mention your intentions here).

In thanksgiving for thy gracious assistance, O holy Virgin, we will spread devotion to thee amongst our friends and associates as well as pray that Holy Mother the Church will recognize thy favor with God and thy position amongst the ranks of the saints in heaven above by canonizing thee, "Saint Margaret of Castello". Amen.

WHY BLESSED MARGARET OF CASTELLO?



I'm sure that this question has probably popped into your head at one time or another, my friend, and I believe that it is a worthy question since most people have never heard of her. Therefore, it deserves a worthy answer. In brief, it is because she is a most worthy saint and deserving of our veneration. As I mentioned previously, I was the assistant principal of a small Catholic school in Cincinnati and taught there for four years. During that time we always ate our lunches in silence unless it was a first or second-class feast when we permitted the students to talk. Some might say that this was a rather draconian way to run a school but it sure helped the teachers' nerves! On the other days, we usually played a cassette of either peaceful music or played a saint's story, typically from Regina Martyrum Productions. As an unsolicited plug for them, their selection is quite wide and the stories are remarkably well told and I highly recommend them. The one story that had the greatest impact on me was

their story of Blessed Margaret of Castello, a 13th century Italian saint who was born deaf, blind, lame, and a hunchback. Having been "born with a silver spoon in my mouth", I was awestruck at how this poor handicapped girl could be rejected by her own parents and yet still live a life of virtue and holiness. She was so despised by her parents that they even refused to give her a name!

When the inspiration to open up a pregnancy center took hold of me, she seemed the obvious choice for a namesake; hence the Blessed Margaret Family Help Center, Inc was born. Over the years however, it has become clear that she should also be a patroness of the homeless or for home-related issues. Later, I learned that she had struggled against sins of impurity her whole life, so you could make a case for her to be another patron or co-patron, along with Venerable Antonio Margil de Jesus, for those struggling against a pornography or masturbation hook. So here I have two saints chosen for different reasons and at different times, having lived at different times with different characteristics being somehow related. Hmm...it's interesting how God blends together things, which, in our eyes, appear completely unrelated. It isn't until after He has brought them together that we can understand how it should have been perfectly

obvious their union was to begin with! In any case, as she was the namesake of the apostolate that got this book into print, here is a synopsis of her story. I'm sure you will be as affected by it just as I was.

THE LIFE OF BLESSED MARGARET OF CASTELLO, 1287-1320:

The source of my information is a book written by Fr. William R. Bonniwell, O.P. in 1952 called "The Life of Blessed Margaret of Castello". He got his information from a book with an anonymous author that was rewritten by a Canon of the Cathedral of Castello in 1345 so the original information was taken from contemporary sources but it had a rather circuitous path.

Blessed Margaret of Castello, also sometimes known as "Blessed Margaret of Metola", was born in Metola, Italy in the Papal State of Massa Trabaria in 1287. Due to the fact that this was Renaissance Italy with its politically important families, the original biographer felt it necessary to omit the family name so we don't even know "Little Margaret's" last name. We do know, however, that her parents were named Parisio and Emilia.

MARGARET'S PARENTS:

Her father was a very powerful soldier who held the office of "podesta", or Captain of the People, which made him essentially the Military governor, so he was a very powerful man with the right of life or death over the populace. His personal traits were that he was monstrously proud, unscrupulous, indifferent to suffering, and very irreligious. Hardly the ideal starting point for raising holy children, eh?

Parisio definitely "wore the pants" in his family. His wife, Emilia, was weak and completely dominated by him. However, she at least had some semblance of a conscience because she did fight to get Margaret baptized and she did occasionally visit her.

MARGARET'S LIFE:

Things started off very badly for Margaret. Being a proud soldier expecting the birth of his first-born son, Parisio was completely scandalized to learn that his handsome, strapping, new baby boy was actually a deformed, ugly hunchbacked, blind, and lame dwarf of a girl. Disappointed at the sight of this "thing" that Emilia had given birth to, his pride was sorely pricked by the embarrassment of having already laid on a huge birthday bash to celebrate the birth of his heir. So horrified were both Parisio and Emilia that they spread the rumor that the child had died at birth. They loathed her so much that they even refused to give her a name. She was given up to the care of a maidservant of the castle who was given permission to name her anything she wanted to – except Emilia. Somehow this woman recognized God's grace in this little

misshapen child because she was given the name Margaret, which means “pearl”. Of course the beauty of the pearl is hidden inside the oyster and only becomes known to those who take the trouble to pry open the oyster. So it was with Margaret. This “pearl” was hidden from public view but permitted the run of the castle until she was six years of age when she unfortunately ran into a guest who inquired her name and who her parents were. Having been raised in virtue by the anonymous maidservant, she honestly answered the questions and revealed the one secret that Parisio and Emilia dreaded to have made known. Once again, Parisio’s anger was enkindled.

He ordered Margaret to be removed from the castle and taken to a small chapel that was deep in the forest called St. Mary of the Fortress. Here she was walled up in a brick cell adjoining the chapel so that she could be permitted but one joy in her life - to live in the company of the Real Presence and to hear Mass. She could not physically leave the cell and her food and drink were passed in through an opening that faced into the chapel. She lived in this hideous state like a caged animal for 14 years until she was 20 years of age. (Every time I think of what Parisio did to her, I can only think of putting a zip tie around this monster’s neck and strangling him!)

It goes without saying that her parents were not religious, but having heard that miracles were occurring at the nearby tomb of Fra Giacomo in Citta di Castello, they decided that since God had given them such a hideously deformed daughter, He owed them the miracle of restoring her health. They traveled there with Margaret awaiting the expected cure. But “*God resisteth the proud*” – especially when their desires don’t suit His purpose and the miracle never came. Leaving her alone at Fra Giacomo’s tomb in the morning, they abandoned her and simply road back to the castle. (Here again are thoughts of a zip tie around the neck again!) Of course, being blind and deaf, poor Margaret hadn’t a clue what was going on. She waited the entire day in prayer. Finally, when darkness came she sought shelter in the Church. Cold, hungry, and alone, she was turned out as just another untrustworthy beggar who might steal something from the sanctuary. Finally, the poor of Castello befriended her and she became a homeless beggar alongside them.

As if these crosses weren’t sufficient, further suffering awaited Little Margaret. Having justly earned a reputation for sanctity, a nearby convent desired that she should join them. Once again, the biographer omits information that would sully someone’s reputation so we don’t know which order made this invitation. Margaret’s joy was immense – nothing made her happier than to be living her life for the Good God who made her. She strictly observed the Rule of the order. Unfortunately, no one else in the convent was doing so and they were downright embarrassed that this little pipsqueak was showing them up! Declaring her a disturber of the peace of the convent, they expelled her, so once again Little Margaret was homeless! (More zip ties!)

Calumniated by the worldly nuns, she had abuse heaped upon her by those who didn't know her and, once again, the poor of Castello befriended her. She would stay in one home after another in sort of a rotation amongst the townfolk. Each household that made room for her was transformed by her presence and public opinion eventually turned around in her favor.

Her favorite church was Chiesa della Carita, which means "Church of Charity" and it was run by the Dominicans. It was their headquarters for the Order of Penance of St. Dominic, a lay women's organization that was the precursor for today's Third Order of St. Dominic. For those who don't know what a "Third Order" is, it is someone who wants to live a more perfect life but can't enter into the religious life for various reasons. In Castello it was primarily meant for widowed women but, after persistent appeals from women who knew Margaret, an exception was made to let this young maiden join their ranks.

These women were permitted to wear the Dominican religious habit that included a black cloak or mantella. This led to them being called the mantellata. The pictures included here of Blessed Margaret as she now appears. Her habit and the mantella can plainly be seen. This was exactly the path to perfection that she had dreamed of and the day of her profession was one of the happiest of her short life.

HER SPIRITUAL LIFE:



Little Margaret turned her whole self into observing the Rule. Daily prayer was part of that rule. In addition to the required ones, she said all 150 Psalms, the Office of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and the Office of Holy Cross. Remember that she had been blind from birth so she wasn't reading them from a missal! She had this knowledge infused in her in some miraculous way. She was given to long episodes of deep contemplation. Her conversation was constantly of God – unless she was speaking of the Blessed Virgin or St. Joseph. Her devotion to him was unusual for the time because the cult of his veneration was not widespread. Therefore, she was a pioneer in devotion to the Foster Father of Our Lord. She practiced the most austere penances, including lack of sleep and self-flagellation. Her life was filled with acts of charity to neighbor and it was never too late or too far to go to visit the sick and the dying. One key apostolate was the visiting of the jail and bringing relief to the prisoners.

MARGARET'S MIRACLES:

A soul that reaches spiritual perfection is as united to God as is possible in this life and Margaret was certainly in this state of "Spiritual Marriage". In this state, it

is not unusual for visible signs of that soul's closeness to God in order to bear witness to the world. Her life was no exception. Her biographer tells of several episodes of curing the sick. The most interesting one to me is that she, who had been born blind, restored sight to a blind woman, even though she herself was blind. She even stopped a raging house fire by throwing her cloak into the flames.

MARGARET'S BURIAL

Little Margaret died on the Second Sunday after Easter, April 13, 1320 at the young age of 33. The public wanted her buried in her favorite church, Chiesa della Carita, in Castello, knowing her to be a saint. The friars resisted and wanted her buried in the cemetery. Only after a miracle occurred where her left arm moved to touch a crippled mute girl and healed her, did the Dominicans relent to the wishes of the people. She still lies at rest in her beloved church. As you can see from these pictures, her body is still incorrupt.



Her story moves me every time I read it. I'm grateful for the inspiration she has been to me personally as well as the graces she has obtained for the Center. I marvel at her peace, joy, and charity in spite of having not even the basic joys that we would wish on any child – not even the love of her parents! Despite every natural reason for being bitter, angry, even suicidal, she had monumental love for the God Who made her as she was and a gentle charity for everyone around her, even her parents.

Blessed Margaret of Castello, pray for us!

VENERABLE ANTONIO MARGIL DE JESUS: “LA MISMA NADA”



With the grace of God, I had the privilege of running a men’s support group for a period of 7 months to combat pornography and other sexual sins. It had only a few men who attended but in that time I was able to really get to know them as very dear friends. We prayed together, discussed our situations, and I believe that it was a very effective vehicle for God’s grace for every one of us. In addition I was able to fine tune and expand much of the material that I had written and placed on the Blessed Margaret website, both to present it to them in a meaningful way each week but also in preparation for writing this book.

For quite a while I had planned to begin a support group for the Blessed Margaret Family Help Center, Inc. As I stated earlier, I had intended to start with an alcoholics support group, kind of a Catholic AA, principally for a friend of mine who was an alcoholic who had not been successful in controlling his alcoholism even though he had been to more AA meetings than you could shake a stick at, so to speak.

As God permitted me to understand more about what the Catholic 12-Steps should be over the years since I first wrote the website material, it became obvious to me that what I was really called to do was to work with pornography addicts and that I was to use the Catholic 12-Steps, not for my alcoholic friend but really for men who were like me – addicted to pornography. I included all sins against the sixth and ninth commandments in my recruiting flyers for the group so when I talk about “pornography addictions” it’s really a shorthand for all sexual hooks, and not just pornography. The last nail in the “helping-the-alcoholics” coffin, so to speak, was when my friend moved out of town. Gee, it was pretty obvious that he wasn’t going to be involved in any alcoholics support group run in Cincinnati if he lived hundreds of miles away! It was finally clear to me that my hook was what I was supposed to focus on and not someone else’s.

Now, one of the original goals that we had put into the tax-exempt application with the IRS was to run addict support groups as one of our apostolates so it was logical to simply make the switch from alcoholism to pornography. The question was how to do it. I had the website material but literally nothing else, no

computer, no projector, no program, no name, nothing – just a plan. I've always marveled at how the Good God erases the slate that He wants to write on and He did just that. Several months after planning on starting the group, I received an email from, I presume, a man; he left no email address and no name. He simply touted the wonderful works of a saint I had never heard of. His name was Venerable Antonio Margil de Jesús (Mar HEEL, I think, since I don't speak Spanish. At least that's how I hear the priests at the Margil House pronounce it). He was a Spanish missionary in Central America, Mexico, and southwestern USA. Here is the entire text of this eye-opening email from someone whom I don't even know but to whom I owe the deepest thanks.

Subject: sexual addiction

Username:

UserEmail:

UserTel:

UserFAX:

ContactRequested:

Date: 02 Jul 2005

Time: 14:11:50

Comments:

I was addicted to sexual compulsion for about 24 years. This involved videos, pictures, and self-abuse. This was entirely by myself. I even browsed web pages at this very library for hours on straight. I usually went to confession about 2 or 3 times a month (usually to some priest with a cast-iron stomach). I am not making any jokes about it. I am admitting the depth of my sin.

I've been straight for 14 months. The reason for this, in my opinion, involves devotion to Venerable Antonio Margil of Jesus. He was a Franciscan missionary who lived from 1657 to 1722 and preached throughout Central America and the American Southwest. He spent long hours preaching and hearing confessions. He also seemed to have powers similar to Padre Pio (i.e., bilocation, performing miracles, and reading penitent's sins without their telling them). He also was said to have the rare ability to cure penitents of sexual addiction. I prayed to him in May of last year and broke my dirty habit. I still get tempted, but now I resist and keep busy with other things.

Information about "antonio margil" can be found with a web search. I hope that somewhere down the road he can get his two miracles and get canonized. I don't know if my situation involves a proven miracle, because I think this involves hard evidence. Then again, maybe he will get his two miracles. I pray to him daily (check out the "Alabado" on the web). I also pray for his cause and donate

*money from time to time to the Margil House of Studies in Houston, Texas.
Please pray for me so I don't relapse.*

I was mesmerized when I received it. Here was the perfect patron saint for a men's support group to fight pornography addictions. I HAD to find out more about him. Certainly obscure in the United States, he was so humble that he signed his letters; "La Misma Nada" which I am told translates to "Nothingness Itself". La Misma Nada typified the sense of humility and of one's own impotence that is necessary for Steps 1 and 2 so I took Venerable Antonio's moniker and made it the name of the support group. I also wrote an Act of Humility for those steps that I thought would mimic his humility and I hope it meets with this wonderful saint's approval.

There is a Franciscan House in Houston, Texas called the Margil House of Studies. In making the holy card for the Nothingness Itself prayer I had the joy of speaking to Fr. Lambert there about my plans and he graciously gave his permission for me to use their image of Venerable Antonio on the card.

Now for those who are interested in what our meetings were like, the following is a brief run-down on the order of the meetings.

Meetings were held once a week on Wednesday nights at 7 or 7:30 pm. I ran the meetings primarily through a PowerPoint presentation using my work laptop and an old projector that I borrowed every week from work. We started each meeting with the Prayer to the Holy Ghost, the Rosary, and invoking what I called "the Litany" or list of La Misma Nada's patron saints. The bold texts are the parts that the entire group said together.

Come, O Holy Ghost, **fill the hearts of Thy faithful and enkindle in them the fire of Thy love.**

V. Send forth Thy Spirit, and they shall be created.

R. And Thou shalt renew the face of the earth.

Let us pray.

O God, **Who by the light of the Holy Ghost, didst instruct the hearts of the faithful, grant that in the same Spirit we may be truly wise, and ever rejoice in His consolation. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.**

The Rosary

Our Lady, Refuge of sinners, Pray for us

St. Joseph, Pray for us

St. Augustine, Pray for us

St. Ignatius (of Loyola), Pray for us

Blessed Margaret (of Castello), Pray for us

Venerable Antonio (Margil), Pray for us

Holy Family, Help us

Next, I would present the night's agenda and read the ground rules. As this was about using the Catholic 12-Steps, the purpose of course was personal sanctity; we used only first names but we already knew one another so that really wasn't an issue; use of any and all natural non-anti-Catholic means were encouraged since you never knew what "trick" would be personally most effective; everything said in the group had to stay in the group because lack of confidentiality could be the quickest means to bring the whole program crashing down; and lastly, it was critical that we keep our discussions and descriptions from becoming near occasions of sin for us. Since we were talking about things sexual it could have been extremely easy for Satan to use what we were trying to do to cut the line to the hook as the very means of pulling us into sin.

Tonight's Agenda

7:00 Opening Prayer and Introduction
7:10 Rosary
7:30 Ground Rules & Who is Antonio Margil?
7:40 Addictions – The Hook and St. Augustine
8:00 Break
8:10 Open Discussion
9:00 Closing Prayer

La Misma Nada Ground Rules

- Purpose is to grow in sanctity through combat against one's addiction – using our addiction as leverage to gain holiness and heaven.**
- Grace builds on nature – use all natural non-anti-Catholic means necessary to obtain needed grace.**
- Complete confidentiality outside of the group – what's said in here stays in here!**
- Keep support group from becoming "near occasion of sin" – no unnecessary details that may cause "reaction" in self or others.**

Next came a review of last week's material that was supposed to last ten minutes (fat chance of that when I started to speak) and then a twenty-minute discussion of a new topic. I will say that I tried very hard to keep to the topic and stay on schedule – you'd have to ask the group members how often I might have droned on too long. Sometimes there were questions but I think that I talked them into wanting to get right to break, so there usually weren't too many of them.

When the talks were finished, we closed the first half of the meeting with the "Nothingness Itself" Prayer and had a five-minute break.

The second half was an open forum of discussing one's progress and how things were going or not going. I included how things were with me as well. Sometimes other problems emerged that gave me some insight as to what other factors were relevant in the different cases. That's how the idea for The Counterattack chapter was born. This was open-ended so we didn't worry much about the time limit. After the discussion ran out of momentum, we then closed the meeting with a Hail Mary, a Glory Be, and we repeated the "Litany" of the group's patron saints. After shaking hands, saying, "God bless and persevere" the group breaks up and everyone goes home – usually after about 10-15 minutes of outside socializing.

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“The Hook and I” was not written in a vacuum. As much as my pride would like to take credit for all the ideas in this book I just can’t lay claim to anything but the mistakes. Instead, besides God’s grace, I’ve relied very heavily on a number of sources both directly (and they are listed here) and indirectly (they are listed in Step 10).

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