

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 a bit 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 little numbers up, 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 its own individual step. You also might notice that there are two parts to Steps 11 and 12. I did this because there are certain parts to those two steps that needed to be covered earlier in the program. These parts didn't warrant their own separate steps but I didn't want to burden you with the rest of the information that pertains to those two steps so I split them; you get a piece of each where I think it'll do you the most good.

Anyway, 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. As they say in real estate, it's location, location, location. 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)

The house by the sea: location, location, location!
{GRAPHIC NOT INCLUDED}

As Catholics, this shouldn't be a problem to figure out. If you are even reasonably aware of what Our Holy Religion 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.

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, the people who have been affected by my sins, 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 sincerely confess my sins to a priest, being genuinely contrite.

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-at-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.

Before the walls were put up it was easy to see what you were doing as long as it was daylight. However, once the walls are installed we've just cut off our source of light so we need to add some temporary lighting if we're going to do our best work in the interior of our home. These lights might be run off of a temporary drop provided by the electric company or we might have a generator that runs them. They could stand on tripods, be "trouble lights", or even bare bulbs that hang temporarily from where the permanent light fixtures will go. We might even have a space heater to warm the place while we work on it if the weather's cold. All of these temporary fixtures will be replaced by their permanent counterparts once we've got our occupancy permit. This is analogous to Step 12A where we will begin to help others, especially others who share our hook. If there is a La Misma Nada group convenient to us we will begin to attend that and actively participate in it. If there isn't such a group, we will seek guidance from our priest to find a suitable substitute. Our temporary motivation is to help ourselves through the psychological boost of helping others and this will provide a temporary "light" for us while we work on our souls. Eventually, as we progress to the point of having the line to our hook cut short more permanently and as we become more enlightened, we will gradually replace this self-motivation for helping our neighbor to the more permanent one of love of God.

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, 11A, and 12A:

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.

12. (A) I will perform the works of mercy. I will especially perform those works that impact souls who suffer with my addiction.

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** 12Steps - 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 and vents, 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 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 definitely not sitting with our feet propped up.

Now, my astute friend, this brings us to the insulation that we apparently forgot 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 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 keeps the heat of my own passions 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

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 by cleaning up the mess and adding 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 work crew now 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 strive 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 striving for.

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 12B, performing the works of mercy for the sake of God and no longer ourselves. 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 12B:

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.

12. (B) I will perform the works of mercy. 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.
12. (A). I will perform the works of mercy.

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. **(Love of God)**
12. (B) I will perform the works of mercy. **(Love of Neighbor)**

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 are 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 friend, 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. True, when you first start out you will be

adding each new step in turn, mastering it, and then moving on to the next step. Once you've completed your first pass through the Catholic 12-Steps you will be then be performing all of the steps at the same time. Don't worry. By then you'll have changed your life so that it won't be a burden. 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 God.

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! That will complete our fourth and final preliminary task before we finally get down to the nitty-gritty of exploring each step in turn and actually waging war on our hooks.