

Finding God in All Things

A Brief Daily Examen

Adapted from St. Ignatius of Loyola's work. For more, go to

<http://www.ignatianspirituality.com/ignatian-prayer/the-examen/consciousness-examen>

To live with God at the center of our lives means to be constantly seeking God's voice, God's Spirit, and God's presence. One way to sensitize ourselves to the abiding presence of God is to become more conscious of these movements throughout our day. St. Ignatius of Loyola developed an Examen of Consciousness as a way to sensitize ourselves to God, present always. What follows are its steps.

"The time of formal prayer can become a very sacrosanct period in our day but so isolated from the rest of our life that we are not prayerful (finding God in all things) at that level where we really live. The examen gives our daily contemplative experience of God real bite into all our daily living; it is an important means to finding God in everything and not just in the time of formal prayer... If we allow God gradually to transform our mind and heart into that of Jesus, to become truly Christian, through our living experience in this world, then the examen, with its separate elements now seen as integrated dimensions of our own consciousness looking out on the world, is much more organic to our outlook and will seem much less contrived. So there is no ideal length of time arbitrarily set for each of the five elements of the examen when it is practiced. Rather the examen is a daily organic expression of the spiritual mood of our heart. At one time we are drawn to one element longer than the others and at another time to another element over the others." George Aschenbrenner SJ

1. Begin with a prayer, asking for enlightenment. May the Light of Christ illumine the day, illumine the eyes of your heart and soul, so that you may see the Lord's abiding presence throughout the day. May the Holy Spirit help you see yourself as God sees you!
2. Enter into reflective thanksgiving. Meander through the hours since your last examen. Where have you experienced God's goodness, grace, guidance, presence, and love? Gratitude should center on the concrete and uniquely personal gifts God has given to you. Give thanks to the Lord.
3. Do a practical survey of actions. What has been happening in you? How has God been working in you? What is being asked of you? How have you responded to these inner movements?

Only secondarily are your own actions to be considered. Here is where the look back focuses on how God has been present and how you responded. It's not as much a look at personal vices and virtues as it is a look at the patterns of God's invitation and your responses. To keep God at the center of your life means that a lot has to change. This survey of actions with God's Holy Spirit guiding you, will enable you to see what God wants you to offer now to be changed.

For beginners it takes time to become interiorly sensitive to God before you gradually come to recognize the Spirit's call to conversion (maybe involving a very painful struggle!) in some area of your life. It is better for beginners to take this time to learn what God wants your particular

examen now to be rather than just taking some assigned imperfection to get started on. Discover this by listening to your heart/spirit. Where is your attention staying? What do you know deep within is a struggle? What do you find yourself returning to? This is where God is inviting you to begin to focus.

4. **Contrition and Sorrow.** The Christian heart is always a heart in song—a song of deep joy and gratitude. But the Alleluia can be quite superficial and without body and depth unless it is genuinely touched with sorrow. This is our song as sinners constantly aware of being prey to our sinful tendencies and yet being converted into the newness, which is guaranteed in the victory of Jesus Christ. Hence, we never grow out of a sense of wonderful sorrow in the presence of our Savior. ... This sorrow will especially spring from the lack of honesty and courage in responding to God's call in the particular examen. This contrition and sorrow is not a shame nor a depression at our weakness but a faith experience as we grow in our realization of our dear God's awesome desire that we love with every ounce of our being.
5. **Hopeful Resolution for the Future.** This final element of the formal daily examen grows very naturally out of the previous elements. The organic development leads us to face the future which is now rising to encounter us and become integrated into our lives. In the light of our present discernment of the immediate past how do we look to the future? Are we discouraged or despondent or fearful of the future? If this is the atmosphere of our hearts now, we must wonder why and try to interpret this atmosphere; we must be honest in acknowledging our feeling for the future, and not repress it by hoping it will go away. ... At this point in the examen there should be a great desire to face the future with renewed vision and sensitivity. We pray both to recognize even more the subtle ways in which God will greet us and to recognize the Spirit calling us in future situations. Finally we pray then to respond to that call from God with more faith, humility, and courage.