

EXAMEN

More than any other prayer, the Examen is the central prayer of St. Ignatius of Loyola. It is a *prayer of looking back*. But it is not just reflecting on what may have gone wrong (that would be very narrow and could be quite harmful) but is a wider look at what has happened during my day – the good things and the bad things – trying to see where God has been moving and working in my life.

The focus of any prayer should be GOD. At first it may appear that there has been a Divine absence in my day; but God *has been* there.

The Examen tries to answer the obvious next question:
“Where?”

Over the centuries, experience has shown that the Examen is most powerful when it is used regularly. Many people find it helpful in the quiet time before they go to sleep. It takes around a quarter-of-an-hour. The prayer itself moves through 5 stages:

1. No matter what you are worrying about, no matter how annoying people have been during the day . . . *STOP!! . . . I will slow down and try to put myself in the presence of the living God . . .*

God is with me – quiet, perhaps – but always there. The God who is not to be found in the earthquake, the fire or the storm . . . but the God who is quiet, whispering wind. . . as quiet and as close as the beating of my own heart. I will recognize the presence of God with me . . .

Remember that this God has created all things. Everything that I have is a gift from God. I have been given many things in my life – health, family, friends, work, etc. . . . – but is there something that I would especially like to give thanks for today? Choose one thing and offer that silently back to God as a token for all the rest.

2. In my own words, I ask God to give LIGHT to my heart; so that, as I look back over the day, I may have the sensitivity and gentleness to see God working more clearly in the things that have happened.
3. I will now begin to look quietly through the day, starting from when I first woke-up this morning. . . So what happened during my day? . . .

At this point it is important to keep in mind that all you are meant to do is look at what has taken place: it is important to be neutral, not to jump in with judgments about others or yourself. As the memories unwind, just look calmly and honestly at the day that has passed. Here are a few questions which you may find of help. . .

*On the whole, was it a "good" day or a "bad" day?
Was it a normal day – or was it unusual in some way?
Who did I meet during the day?
Did I manage to pray at any time?*

Did something stay in the memory: maybe something I read? . . . Perhaps I met a long-lost friend? . . . or an awkward old enemy? . . .
Does something special come to mind? . . . a beautiful sunset? . . . a story? . . . something I was told? . . . something on the TV? . . . etc.

Now, in all these things that happened, what were my feelings? Was I joyful or sad? Or did I get angry, moody or frightened? Or maybe I felt "great!" and I was really happy? . . . Do I still feel the same at the moment?
Did my feelings change during the day? Can I see what was causing them?

God guides us through our moods and feelings. Normally, the way of God is (in a deep sense) peaceful and consoling. If your day was disturbed or if you were uneasy in some way, can you sense where that uneasiness was coming from? Like a sailor who is buffeted by many different winds, we are affected by many different feelings. The better we come to know these swirling breezes, the easier it will be to see the subtle movements of God in our lives.

So: did I see the face of Christ during my day? Was he there – but I failed to recognize him? Or maybe I saw him and greeted him on the road?

4. An important question to ask myself is: what can I be proud of today? (There will be things. If you can't think of anything, then you haven't looked hard enough: don't move on before you think of what it might be!)
I will give thanks for this.

But did I also turn away from God during the day? Maybe I turned a blind eye when it didn't suit me? Did I recognize God in that homeless man? Or that annoying child? Or that spiteful old woman?

God is the God of MERCY – so, in other words, I will say a prayer asking forgiveness for anything I may have done to ignore or hinder God during the day that has passed. I will ask, especially, for the graces of healing and strength.

5. The final part of the prayer is to look towards the dawning of the new day. Is anything of note due to be happening tomorrow? Are there going to be times when it will be especially good to feel the presence of God? As Christians, we are fundamentally a people of HOPE – a hope that is based on knowledge that God will always be with us. Let us pray that tomorrow we may be more

sensitive to the quiet presence of God among the people and in the places where we happen to be.

If we regularly practice the Examen, we will slowly begin to glimpse ourselves and our moods more clearly. With the help of God we will be able to see in our prayer the ways that God moves in our day. As our hearts become more sensitive, we will begin to recognize God more quickly; eventually we will start to be sensitive to the God who isn't just in "holy" things, but the God who is in ALL things.