



Week 4: To Examen is to know and therefore to heal

The “consciousness Examen” was a central part of discernment in the exercises of St. Ignatius. It helps us gradually learn to attend to our everyday experience and to notice our response to that action.

Richard Foster explains this ancient practice by saying that we prayerfully reflect on the thoughts, feelings, and actions of our day to see how God has been at work in our lives and how we respond. Perhaps the sunlight glistening through raindrops on the rose fills me with grateful reassurance of God’s loving presence. Perhaps my tendency to blame others for my troubles is my resistance to God’s invitation to face my own intolerance and find healing.

The practice is both simple and profound. As we come to the Examen we recall that we are in the presence of God who is holding us in love. We ask the spirit for help to become aware. We review our day, both the good and the difficult. We give thanks for what has been given and simply ask forgiveness for the ways we have resisted God’s action. And finally we open our hearts to become increasingly responsive to the spirit’s gracious movement in our lives.

Prayer of Examen

Begin by finding a quiet place where you won’t be disturbed. Then sit comfortably, with good posture and both feet on the floor. Allow yourself to relax and close your eyes if you like.

1. Recall you are in the presence of God

As you sit in silence, focus on God’s deep and abiding love for you. We are always in the presence of God. Try to become aware of God’s presence in an attentive way. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you recall your day with love and to let you look on all you see with love.

-- pause --

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

-- pause --

2. Recall your day with gratitude

Now remember the small pleasures of the last day; things like a good night's sleep, a good conversation, the smell of morning coffee, the laugh of a child. These are all gifts from God. As you remember these small gifts from God, take a moment to reflect on the gifts that you gave today, whether to God or to others.

How did you bring your strengths, your sense of humor, your abilities, your encouragement, your patience to others today?

When you have finished, pause briefly and thank God for these things.

-- pause --

3. Ask for guidance from the Holy Spirit

In a moment you will begin to retrace the steps of your day. Before you do,

Ask the Holy Spirit to guide and direct your mind. The Spirit will lead and guide you into the truth and mystery of your heart.

Ask the Holy Spirit for the capacity to recall your day with clarity and an understanding of your limitations.

-- pause --

4. Review your day

Now go back to the start of your day yesterday and allow it to play like a short movie in your mind. Pay attention to the details.

What were your feelings?

What motivated you to respond to certain situations in the way that you did? The purpose of this is to draw out the positive and the negative aspects of your day.

-- pause --

As you are reviewing your day, ask the question, "Where did I fail today?" Was there a moment when you lived out of anger or bitterness?

Were there things that you avoided?

Don't allow yourself to dwell on these things or seek to resolve them. Simply allow yourself to identify them and move on.

-- pause --

Next, ask the question, "When did I love?" Was there a moment, or several moments, in which you made the choice to live out of love. Perhaps it was a kind act like holding the

door or spending intentional time with your family. Remember the ways that you chose to love this day.

-- pause --

Next, search for any patterns or habits during the course of the day. Do you make coffee at the same time? Do you chat for a few minutes with a certain neighbor [co-worker]? Are you always watching TV at a certain time [staying late at work]? As you detect these patterns, what emotions do you sense coming to the surface for each habit? Do these habits help you face your day with love? Do they hinder you from facing your day with love?

-- pause --

5. Reconcile and Resolve

Finally, picture yourself seated next to Jesus, talking as you would with a friend. Maybe there was something in your day that you don't feel good about. Tell Jesus about this and express your disappointment and ask him to be with you when you face that moment again. Allow yourself to feel the sorrow in your heart as you share this, but also remember and give thanks for Christ's continual restoration of your heart. Remember all of the good moments of your day and thank Jesus for His presence with you in those moments.

-- pause --

6. End with the Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy Name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, On earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins, As we forgive those who sin against us. And lead us not into temptation, But deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.