

Prayer of Examen

More than any other prayer, the Examen is the central prayer of St. Ignatius. It is a prayer of looking back. It is not just reflecting on what has gone wrong (like the examination of conscience before Confession), but a wider look at what has happened during my day, trying to see where God has been moving. Where have I seen the Lord's face or heard His voice?

The Examen is best used regularly, even daily. Most people find it helpful in the evening when the quiet and stillness are greater, but before one is too tired to stay attentive.

It can be done well in 10-15 minutes, as uses the very "stuff" of my daily life as the matter for prayer rather than bracketing it.



The prayer covers five main points:

1. No matter what I am worrying about, STOP! God is with me—quiet perhaps, but always there. I recall that God has created and ordained all things. Everything I have is God's gift. *Is there something especially significant that I want to thank God for today?*
2. I ask God to shine His light into my heart so that when I look back over the day I may be able to see Him working in the things that have happened. *I can invite the Holy Spirit to help me see this day with His heart, His eyes, under the guidance of His grace.*
3. Now I prayerfully walk through my day starting from when I woke up. I recall the people I met and the things that have happened.
 - † On the whole, was it a "good" or "bad" day? How was the "weather" today: sunny, cloudy, stormy, etc.?
 - † Was it a typical day or unusual in some way?
 - † Whom did I meet today? What words and actions with them seem significant and perhaps channels of God's presence?
 - † Did I encounter something surprising: a call from a friend I hadn't heard from in years...a painful memory I had considered forgotten...a song that touched my heart...something beautiful in nature...a news story that disturbed or moved me...
 - † In all that happened, how did I feel? Would I describe my feelings using words such as joyful, angry, sad, energized, or scared? Were any of these emotions particularly strong or did they linger quite a while? God guides us through our moods and feelings, and normally the Holy Spirit acts to give us peace, joy, strength, encouragement, etc. If today I experienced negative or troubling feelings, where did they originate and how did I react to them?
4. An important question is: *What can I be proud of today?* There will be things...if I can't think of anything, I haven't looked closely enough! Also: *Did I turn away from God today somehow?* Perhaps it was more by failing to love when an opportunity came along than by actively doing wrong in thought, word or deed. If I notice any sins, I ask God for forgiveness and healing and, if necessary, resolve to bring it to Confession.
5. The prayer ends by *looking ahead to tomorrow* with hope and confidence, *entrusting it to God's grace.*

Practiced regularly, the Examen helps us grow in self-knowledge as well as in knowledge of God's presence and action in my daily life. It helps me to "find God in all things" and to love all things in Christ.