Prayer of the Examen

The examination of consciousness

The prayer of the examen, or examination of consciousness, is a practice intended to bring us into a deeper awareness of God’s presence and leading in our everyday. It highlights God’s concern with the minutia of our lives: the big events and small, our thoughts and activities, what we do to others and what is done to us, and even our emotions. The examen acknowledges God’s willingness to use all of these to lead us into deeper relationship with him and greater partnership in his kingdom.

When we pray the examen, we review our day with God. There are various questions we can ask to facilitate this review, but at its heart, the examen is sharing our day with Jesus and seeking his direction in prayer. The faithful practice of the examen will cultivate a deeper awareness of God’s presence and his voice in our everyday lives.

It is not an examination of conscience, which is a reflection on sin. The prayer of the examen is an examination of consciousness. It may lead us to confession of sin, but it has a broader focus. It is a detailed reflection on the presence and movement of God in our ordinary lives.

The prayer of the examen not only helps us identify God’s presence in our lives but also helps discern his leading. Ignatius of Loyola taught that recognizing God’s presence should lead us to act accordingly. The result of the examen for Ignatius was God’s active direction in our lives. We should practice the examen with an intent to be what Ignatius call his order to be, “contemplatives in action.”
PRAYING THE EXAMEN

Become aware of and rest in the presence of God
Take a breath. Remember God is always present. He is in and around us. He is in the air we breathe. Take another breath. Breathe in the presence of God. Pay attention to your breath if it helps. Trust in the presence of God. Rest in it. Don’t rush through the opening of the examen. God is with you. He is in you. He loves you right where you are. Take another breath and just be.

Review the day with gratitude
Think about the time between now and your last examen. What are you thankful for in the last 24 hours? What gifts has God given you? Think through the last day and pause to give thanks to God for each gift.

Review the day in God’s presence
Reflect on the specific events of the day. Think through hour by hour. Pay careful attention to your emotions along the way.

When did you feel a strong sense of love? What made you angry? Did you experience a deep sense of joy? What about excitement? What scared you today? When did you feel sad?

Engage your emotions. Where is God in the emotion? Remember God is with you. If it helps, imagine him seated with you.

Respond
Choose the emotion, moment, or experience that stands out. Which moment, experience, or emotion God is inviting you to explore more intentionally? Is one shouting for your attention? Is there one you are particularly anxious to engage?

Talk to God about the one you choose. What do you want to ask him or tell him about it? What is he saying? Enter a conversation with him. Speak and listen. Is there something you need to do or stop doing? Ask God for direction. When you leave the examen, what action will you take as a result of your conversation with God?

Looking forward
Look forward to the next twenty-four hours. What is coming in the next day? What feelings surface? Where do you need to be especially aware of God’s presence? Pray for your day to come.

QUESTIONS TO GUIDE THE EXAMEN

When did I feel strong emotions today? When did I experience joy? When was I angry? What scared me? When was I sad? When did I feel love?

Examining our emotions

When did I sense God’s presence? When did he feel absent?

Examining God’s presence

When did I move toward God? When did I move away from him?

Examining God’s direction

How did God speak to me today? When did he seem silent?

Examining God’s voice

What did I think about today? What thoughts were pleasing to God? What thoughts were not?

Examining our thoughts

RESOURCES

Rummaging for God: Praying Backward through your day by Dennis Hamm, SJ

Consciousness Examen by George Aschenbrenner, SJ

A New Liturgy no. 6 The Examen http://www.anewliturgy.com/06.html

The Examination of Consciousness, a video from Father Albert Haase https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YkrVT5PExtU

Prayer by Richard Foster