

Ignatian Spirituality -A summary of the Prayer of Examen

The prayers and methods of praying suggested here are based on nearly five-hundred years of Jesuit spiritual tradition. The Jesuits have developed a "method," a way to seek and find God in all things. They call this the prayer of *examen* (a methodical scrutiny of the conscience.)

Although it sounds a bit "heavy" and traditional, it is a surprisingly refreshing approach to spirituality that has stood the test to time and is very relevant to us in the 21st Century. In particular we are encouraged to reflect, to contemplate.

In this "prayer" we try to find the movement of the Spirit in our daily lives as we reflect on our day. This prayer can be made anywhere: on the beach, in a car, at home, in the library.

There are five simple steps to the Examen, which should take 10-15 minutes to complete, and what follows is just one interpretation of these five steps in discerning the movement of God's Spirit in your day, becoming more aware of God in our daily life.

Before you start:

Try to be in a place where you are least likely to be disturbed, and where there is the least amount of external noise. Sit comfortably and still yourself; relax, be aware of your breathing, your body and how you are feeling.

1. Recall that you are in the presence of God.

No matter where you are, hilltop or valley, country or city, in a crowd or alone, you are a creature in the midst of creation. As you quiet yourself, become aware that God is present within you, in the creation that surrounds you, in your body, in those around you. The Creator who brought you forth into being is concerned for you. The Spirit of God, sent by Christ, will remind you that you are gifted to help bring creation to its fullness. Ask the Holy Spirit to let you look on all you see with love.

2. Spend a moment looking over your day with gratitude for this day's gifts.

Be concrete and let special moments or pleasures spring to mind! Some suggest that a systematic call on the senses is a useful starting point. Recall the smell of your morning coffee, the taste of something good that you ate, the laughter of a child, the fragrance of a flower, the smile brought forth by a kind word, a sunset, the soothing feel of a hot shower.

Ask yourself the question:

Is there something that you would like to specially thank God for today?

3. Ask God to shine the light of His Spirit into your day.

You may need help to see the hand of God at work in and around you. Ask God for that help. Ask Him to let the Holy Spirit be at work lighting up special moments in your day, helping you to see them as instances of God at work. Ask that you will learn and grow as you reflect, thus deepening your knowledge of self and your relationship with God.

4. Now review your day. This is the longest of the steps. Recall the events of your day. Reconstruct it as near as possible in chronological order. Recall conversations, phone calls, emails even exchanges of body language. Some situations may show that your heart was divided—wavering between helping and disregarding, scoffing and encouraging, listening and ignoring, rebuking and forgiving, speaking and silence, neglecting and thanking. Remember, this is not a time to dwell on your shortcomings; rather, it is a gentle look with God at your day. It is an opportunity for growth of self and deepening your relationship with God. Notice where you acted freely—picking a particular course of action from the possibilities you saw. Try to identify any situations where there may have been some conflict or tension in the air, a terse word or some negative body language.

In such instances ask yourself the question: “What was the most loving response I could have possibly made in that situation?”

Allow God to speak, challenge, encourage and teach you. Allow yourself to listen to the inner voice of God speaking as thoughts run through your mind. Thus you will come to know that Christ is with you.

5. Looking forward to tomorrow.

Here you speak with Jesus about your day. You share your thoughts on your actions, attitudes, feelings and interactions. Perhaps during this time you may feel led to seek forgiveness, ask for direction, share a concern, express gratitude, etc. Plan for some damage repair if that is required. You may need to make a point of speaking with a colleague tomorrow about an incident that happened today. Maybe there was a situation that you did not handle particularly well. Ask God for the words to say to fix that up. Having reviewed this day of your life, summarize again in your mind the amazing presence of God in your day. Express sorrow for things that you did not handle well, asking God to forgive you where you have erred. Give thanks for God’s love and amazing grace, and especially praise God for the times you really felt his presence in your day.

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Acknowledgements:

Ian Cribb SJ, Sevenhill SA (“Finding God in all things” Retreat September 2008)

Adapted from material at <http://www.norprov.org/spirituality/ignatianprayer.htm>