



Christian Life Community

*praying our life
and living our prayer*



The Review of the Day or 'Examen'

A Christian Review of a Busy Day



My day is the place where I meet God moment to moment. My day is also the place where I fail to meet God moment to moment. My God is continuously revealing himself to me in the places, events and people of my day. So it would seem rather important to look at this day in which my commitment to God finds, or fails to find, its expression.

My day is the place where I respond, or don't, to the moment to moment calls to love and service of those around me. My day is where God is moment to moment exercising his loving providence over me. My day is where I allow, or don't, God to work his will for me. How can I grow in an awareness of and sensitivity to God working in my own life? The simple way is to look back over the day at some time when I have

the leisure to do so. Not just to look back in general terms, but to look back seeking to find where God has been active for me in my life today.

Prayerful reflection is an important aspect of Ignatian spirituality. St. Ignatius Loyola, founder of the Society of Jesus, was especially keen on this prayer of reflection on the day. For the Jesuits he invented, he insists on two fifteen-minute periods of such prayer each day. This prayer has variously been called **The Examen**, the **Examination of Conscience**, and more recently, the **Examen of Consciousness**, or the **Review of the Day**. It is almost as if Ignatius were saying, "How can you say you are living a Christian life if you never reflect on it? How can you say you are doing God's will if you never look to see what you are really doing? You want to serve Christ and live a more Christ-like life, well then, reflect on how your day has been, and let the experience of the day teach you what it will."

Most Christians believe God is working through his Spirit in their lives. Unfortunately, few reflect positively on this crucial fact of their lives. The Examen is a short prayer exercise which can help develop in me a greater awareness and sensitivity to the concrete ways God has been working in my day for me. This greater sense of God with me leads me to a more accurate and spontaneous response to the initiatives of his presence. Traditionally there are **five aspects or moments** to the prayer of Examen, and on any one occasion perhaps one or more aspects will predominate. So these five aspects are not a syllabus to be got through. I give any one of these aspects the time I desire and need.

[These five aspects are described overleaf]

The practice of the Examen will help foster a growing sensitivity to God, the Trinity, moment to moment at work with me and for me, and through me for others. My life becomes one of greater ease in "seeking and finding God in all things", as St. Ignatius would put it.

David Keith Townsend, SJ

Taken from the Christian Life Community's
Newsletter "FOCUS"

Further reading:

Reflective Living: God's plan and the 'Examen'

Una O'Connor IBVM and Brian Grogan SJ

World Christian Life Community publication, obtainable from
Christian Life Community in England and Wales

The Examen Prayer: Timothy M. Gallagher, OMV

Crossroad Publishing Co (2006)

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The First Aspect: Thanksgiving

The first aspect is the fostering of an attitude of thanksgiving or gratitude. There is nothing that has not been given me. I am always on the receiving end of gift. I myself am God's greatest gift to me. I am the gift by which I can know every other gift. I am the gift in which I can know my own giftedness. So I spend what time I need to become aware of my need to be grateful, to see the giftedness of my own life and living. As this gratitude touches me, I express it how I will to Father, Son and Spirit.

The Second Aspect: Enlightenment

The second aspect is to ask for light. I beg the Spirit to enlighten me to see what the Spirit wants me to see. In other words, it is not my analysis of the day which is important. Nor is it my judgement of what is fine and fitting that is central. Nor has this enlightenment anything to do with my own leanings towards morbid introspection. I ask the Spirit to show me in the everyday events and people in my life where and how God was present and working for me. I am seeking to find God. The Examen is positive. Without this prayer for light I could all too easily poke around within myself in such a way that scabs are knocked off wounds that would heal very well if only I left them alone.

The Third Aspect: Review of the Day

The third aspect of the Examen is to play back the day in such a way as to find God in all of that day of mine. I remember the places I have been in; I recall the activities I undertook; I see the people I was with. In other words: places, occupations, and people. I ask the Lord to show me where he was present, in me and in others. To say that God is everywhere may be very true, but it is not helpful here. It is probably more helpful to remember that God has been acting for me where his Spirit has been at work for me. I notice the Spirit has been at work for me when I become aware of the gifts of the Spirit. Hence I become aware of God present and at work for me wherever I notice the traces of the Spirit in those places, in those occupations and among those people of my day. So where have I been aware of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, trustfulness, gentleness and self-control? (Cf.: Gal, 5:22). I notice each place and express my gratitude. Where I was able to open myself to the work of the Spirit I give deeper thanks. Where I closed myself to those gifts I ask for sorrow, and express my forgiveness in some appropriate way seeking reconciliation.

The Fourth Aspect: Sorrow and Gratitude

The third aspect of the Examen automatically flows into the fourth aspect, which is the deepening of the gifts of sorrow and gratitude. I beg the Lord to deepen my awareness of not allowing Him to work for me in His gifts, or of not allowing Him to work through me for another, or through another for me. I praise the Lord for those times I did let Him work for me, when I co-operated with His gifts.

On any one occasion of praying the Examen I may just wish to take one gift of the Spirit, for example joy. I see where I noticed joy in my day and give thanks; the places where I entered into the joy of another or allowed another to enter into my joy; the times joy was shared. These were the concrete moments when God was acting and working in His gift of joy for me and for others. Conversely, I become aware of the times and the places when I prevented God acting for me in His gift of joy; when I wouldn't enter into the joy of another or when I was a kill-joy. I see this now and express my sorrow. And so similarly with the other gifts of the Spirit which are continuously poured out on my life moment to moment.

The Fifth Aspect: Tomorrow

The fifth and final aspect of the Examen is to take a look ahead and to ask for what help and guidance I foresee I will need. I can foresee fairly clearly the next day or half-day; what places will I be in? What people will be with me? What occupations will I take on or be involved in? With this person I will need the gift of patience; in this place, perseverance; with this occupation, the gift of gentleness, if someone is not to be unduly hurt, etc. I ask for what I see I need very simply and humbly with trust in the loving providence of Father, Son and Spirit - God-with-me.





A Review of the Day

(The 'Examen')

- ***Thanksgiving***

I spend what time I need to become aware of my need to be grateful

- ***Enlightenment***

I beg the Spirit to enlighten me to see what the Spirit wants me to see

- ***Review of the Day***

I recall the activities I undertook; I see the people I was with: places, occupations, and people

- ***Sorrow and Gratitude***

I beg the Lord to deepen my awareness of not allowing Him to work for me, through me, or through another;

I praise the Lord for those times I did let Him work for me, when I co-operated with His gifts

- ***Tomorrow***

I take a look ahead and to ask for what help and guidance I foresee I will need

