

Dear Friends,

Some 1500 years after three close companions of Jesus' – Peter, James and John - received the remarkable gift of seeing Jesus transfigured in a manner that anticipated his resurrection, another of Jesus' companions also received a gift from God. Who was that companion and what was the gift? Ignatius of Loyola and the Examen.

Included in the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius is a prayer known as "the Examen," a word that comes from the Latin for examination. Ignatius believed strongly that the Examen was a gift that came directly from God, and that God wanted him to share it with others. So, one of the rules of prayer that Ignatius wrote for his fellow Jesuits was the requirement that they practice the Examen twice daily—at noon and at the end of the day. Today many Christians practice this prayer, though not always twice a day.

There are many versions of the Examen. Each has five steps based on Ignatius' original rule. The version I use and recommend to you as part of your prayer this Lent and as an aid in preparing for the Sacrament of Reconciliation is the following:

1. Become aware of God's presence. Look back on the events of the day in the presence of the Holy Spirit. Ask God to bring you clarity and understanding.
2. Review the day with gratitude. Gratitude is the foundation of our relationship with God. Review your day in the presence of God. Focus on the day's gifts. Look at your work, the people with whom you interacted. What did you receive from them? What did you give them?
3. Pay attention to your emotions. One of St. Ignatius' great insights was that we find the presence of the Spirit of God in the movements of our emotions. Reflect on your feelings during the day. What was God saying through those feelings? God will most likely reveal ways you fell short. Take note of these sins and faults. But look deeply for other implications, as well. Does a feeling of frustration, for example, mean that God wants you to consider a new direction in some area of your life?
4. Choose one feature of the day and pray from it. Ask the Holy Spirit to direct you to something during the day that God thinks is particularly important. It may be a significant encounter with another person. It may be something that seems rather insignificant. Look at it. Pray about it. Allow the prayer to rise from your heart.
5. Look toward tomorrow. Ask God to give you light for tomorrow's challenges. Pay attention to the feelings that surface as you survey what's coming up. Are you doubtful? Cheerful? Apprehensive? Allow these feelings to turn into prayer. Seek God's guidance. Ask for help and understanding.

Finish the Examen by talking with Jesus. Ask forgiveness for your sins. Ask for his protection and help. Ask for Christ's wisdom regarding the questions you have, the problems you face. Do all this in the spirit of gratitude. End the Examen with the Lord's Prayer.

Peace and blessings,  
Father John