

The Prayer of Examen

The "Prayer of Examen" is a traditional way to encounter the Lord Jesus in the everyday circumstances of life. More than just a means to look for moral failures throughout our day, this prayer helps us to grow in awareness of God's action, to notice our responses to his movements and to become aware of the subtle deceptions of the Evil One, who seeks to lead us away from God.

While the prayer of examen includes our shortcomings, its emphasis is upon a wider scope of the *spiritual movements* within the soul. These movements—often indicated by our thoughts and affections which then may lead to action—are the first focus.

As we grow to understand these interior workings of our soul, the spiritual forces that influence us and our own internal responses, we are then able to act in the ways appropriate to those redeemed by the Lord Jesus Christ and grow in the greater freedom of the children of God.

- Ask that he might continue to show you his love and allow you to effectively be his witness in your present circumstances and in the future, no matter what trials may be arise.

c. Look Forward

- What can you learn from your experiences? (e.g., "Every time I talk to this person, I leave angry and then become saddened. I have to learn how to...")
- Anticipate situations that may be difficult and pray for the grace needed. (e.g., "Lord, no matter what happens, give me the grace to love my co-workers today.")

Some things to remember:

- Much self-knowledge may be gained by noticing patterns that recur in your prayer of examen. Use your experience to get perspective for particular issues in your spiritual life. It is often helpful to pray this prayer twice a day: at midday and the evening.
- Spiritual awareness takes time to develop. This prayer is a great aid to this growth, but it will take time to learn how to do well.
- It is helpful to review your practice of the prayer of examen with a spiritual mentor who is familiar with this type of prayer.

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Prelude to Prayer

In order to emphasize the relational aspect of this prayer, begin with taking a moment to imagine how God sees you.

I will take a brief moment to "stand...a step or two before the place where I am to meditate...and with my mind raised on high, consider how God our Lord beholds me." Then I will "make an act of reverence or humility." (cf. Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius of Loyola 75.3)

Five steps of the Prayer of Examen

1. Thanksgiving

For your life in God, for the events of the day.

2. Petition for Light

Ask the Holy Spirit to bring light, that you would see what he wants you to see.

3. Review of God's Presence/Absence

Note: Don't try to go over every minute of the day, take your time at this point and rely on the Holy Spirit to enlighten your memory.

Look over the major experiences of the day and your responses to them. Focus on one or two experiences that stand out.

What interior moods, feelings, urges, reactions, emotions and/or thought patterns are associated with the experiences?

Consider: Are these affective movements and/or thoughts from God or lead towards God? Are these affective movements and/or thoughts not from God or lead away from God?

In particular, look for:

Spiritual consolations: increased love for God, hope, charity towards others, sorrow for sin, interior joy, quiet, peace, movement towards God, a sense of hopeful purpose, not self-absorbed. (cf. Sp Ex 316)

Spiritual desolations: darkness of soul, unrest, self-focused, desire for base things, lack of confidence, faith, hope or love, slothfulness, dryness, sadness, weight, separation from God, thoughts that lead away from God. (cf. Sp Ex 317)

How have these interior movements affected your actions?
Have your responses been led by the Holy Spirit?

4. Personal Response

In times of spiritual desolation:

- Cling to the truth of the Blessed Trinity's loving care for you.
- Pray against any particular sense of desolation. If you can see the root, consider some appropriate action and resolve to do it.
- If you have been neglectful or sinful in any way, ask for forgiveness; ask for the help needed and patience so that this desolation may not influence your daily decisions and responses to present circumstances.

In times of spiritual consolation:

- Thank God for his blessings, acknowledging that they are gifts from him.