

The Ignatian Examen

St Ignatius, in his teaching of the Examen, expected that God would speak through our deepest feelings and yearnings, what he called consolation and desolation. Consolation is whatever helps us to connect in love to ourselves, others, God and the universe. In his language - whatever leads to an increase in faith, hope and love. Desolation is whatever blocks that connection.

So what follows is this: if we can reflect upon what in our life connects us to life, love, faith, hope, peace, the qualities of the spirit, we can track where God is most available to us - or more precisely, where we are most available to God. And the opposite - if we can see where we are being drained of life and then think about how we block God in those areas, we will find the places where we are not available to God. This is not the same as feeling merely good or bad. The point is this: to discern God's presence and will is no longer a case of looking "out there." To discern God's presence, we need to look inside ourselves.

In the Examen, we review our recent past to find God and God's blessings in life. We also look back to find moments in the day when things didn't go so well—when we were hurt by something that happened to us, or when we caused hurt or made a mistake. We give praise and thanksgiving for the blessed moments. We ask forgiveness and healing for the difficult and painful moments. Having reflected on this past day, we then turn to the day yet to come and ask God to show us the potential challenges and opportunities of tomorrow. We try to anticipate which moments might go one way or the other for us: toward God or away from God. We ask for insight into what graces we might need to live this next day well; patience, wisdom, fortitude, self-knowledge, peace, optimism? We ask God for that grace, and we trust that God wants abundant life for us. The **Examen** is traditionally done at the end of each day.

How To Make Your Own Examen

Be comfortable. Become more fully aware now of being in the presence of God: in the presence of love who says

You are precious in my eyes and honored and I love you...

Consolation

Begin to reflect on the recent past... don't try too hard. Now let come what comes at first when you ask these questions:

When did I feel best able to give and receive love?

What caused in me an increase in faith, hope and love?

Where was I drawn to God? In fears, in joy, in pain, in creativity? In prayer, in liturgy, scripture, creation? In work or leisure? In family, friend, colleague, church community, neighbor?

Out of all my recent experiences, is there one experience that I feel most grateful for? How does God feel about that experience? How does God feel about me?

Relish these moments of consolation and give thanks.

Desolation – Sorrow and Regret

Look again back over your life. Ask God to fill you with God's Holy Spirit so that the Spirit can lead you through this difficult soul-searching. Filled with God's Holy Spirit, you need not be tempted to hide, deny, or engage in self-pity or self-loathing.

When was I aware of God's absence?

When did I feel least able to give or receive love?

What caused in me a decrease in faith, hope and love?

When did I fail to respond to God's love at work in me? Allow yourself to look at the experience without judgment.

In the light of God's love, what would you like to say to God about that time, event, experience? What does God want to say to you?

Ask God for healing, peace, comfort and forgiveness. Ask God for guidance.

Know that you are God's own beloved. End with the prayer Jesus taught us.
Our Father ...

Excerpted and adapted from Reimagining the Ignatian Examen by Mark Thibodeaux, SJ