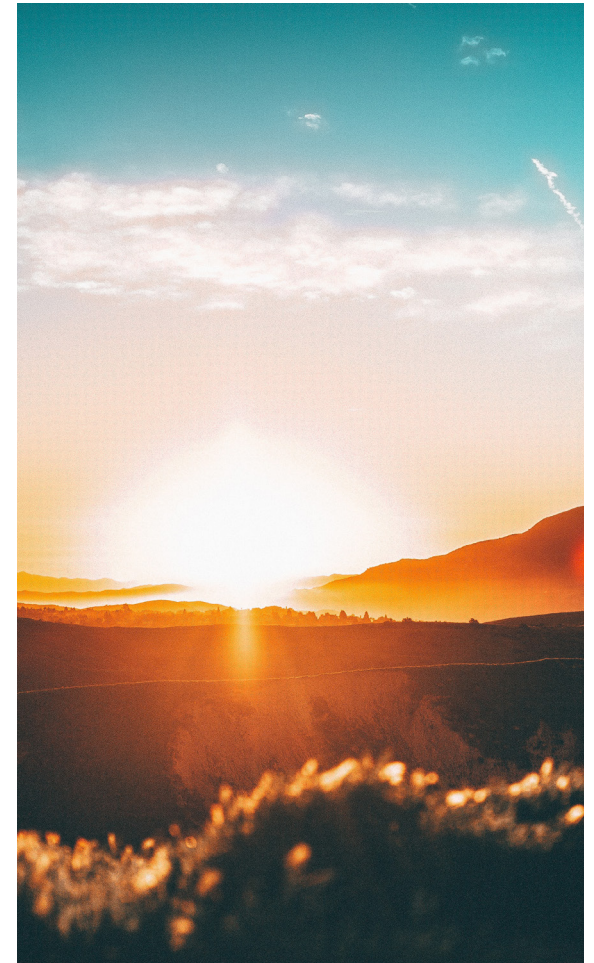


Examen of Consciousness



Finding God
in all things

Ignatian Spirituality

Examen of Consciousness is based on the spirituality of St. Ignatius of Loyola, founder of the Jesuit order. A former courtier and soldier, St. Ignatius gave himself to Christ during recuperation from a war wound. His book, *The Spiritual Exercises*, epitomizes his spirituality and serves as the basis for the work of spiritual companions and directors.

Central to Ignatius' spirituality is the belief that God speaks to us through the events experienced in our everyday lives. Other characteristics of his spirituality include:

Relating to people as individuals

God calls each individual in a particular way, and so, rather than impose their own way on anyone, spiritual or retreat directors listen to what God may be saying in the experience of each person's life.

Motivated by a sense of service or mission

Ignatian spirituality encourages a relationship that produces commitment to a common cause.

Positive attitude toward all things

St. Ignatius affirmed that all things in creation are made by God and given as gifts of love for our good, a revelation of Himself that we might respond to God appropriately.

Need for constant discernment

Where is God present in the world today and where is God calling us? While God's gifts are for everyone, we must discern which are meant for us, at each moment and to what extent, and which are not.

The idea is not to beat ourselves up about failures or mistakes but to commit ourselves to living lives closer to what God wants for us. Looking back in reflection, with God's help, it is easier to see our cooperation or the lack of it. With practice you can "feel" or get a sense of what was good and genuinely from God, and the opposite. This fuels our commitment to living the next day in a more aware, discerning and proactive way, literally making our prayer active and alive. It takes practice and patience, but it works very effectively over time to make our Christian commitment a reality in terms of how we act and decide.

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What is the Examen?

This five-step exercise comes from St. Ignatius of Loyola. It is a prayerful review with God of one's past 24 hours. It can be done for 10-15 minutes in the middle of the day or at its end. It helps one recognize the influence of God's Holy Spirit as opposed to all other spirits (pride, greed, selfishness, materialism).



Step 1—Act of presence

I quiet myself. After I am settled, I direct my attention to God. I recall that this wonderful God is ever present and attentive to me. In my own words, I welcome God. Then I briefly offer myself back to God, my life.

Step 2—Act of thanksgiving & gratitude

I take a moment to thank God for my life, for my own person and particularly for this day of my life. I want to become more grateful for the gifts and blessings of my day.

Step 3—Asking for understanding and self-acceptance

I ask the Holy Spirit for:

- The light to see clearly what God wants me to notice from my day, what in me is in harmony with God and what undermines my relationship with God.
- The gift of accepting myself as I am, trusting that the Holy Spirit is active in both the graced parts and sinful parts of myself, that God loves me and works in me in and through both parts.

Step 4—Reviewing the past 24 hours

I review my day.

I walk through the past 24 hours from task to task, person to person, and thank God for the life I have experienced. I let the Lord Jesus show me where He was present and active in me and in others, where God's Spirit was obviously blessing me with gifts: work, relationships, challenges or in some event that made me happy, and where God's Spirit was less obvious: the experience of failure, or being discouraged and tempted.

I take note of my feelings.

I recall how I've felt as I reviewed my day: angry, sad, happy or afraid. These feelings reveal where God's Spirit is moving in me and where those influences contrary to God are active.

I focus on the strongest feeling.

I focus on the feeling, whatever it is — whether "good" or "bad," that most caught my attention. This feeling reveals that something

important is happening in my relationship with God. Is it leading toward God or away from God? I talk with God about this and ask for insight. If my attention to this feeling is leading me toward God, I give thanks or praise for it. If it is leading me away from God, I ask for the grace of conversion, to see the attitude or value underneath the feeling and the ability to re-orient myself.

Step 5—Looking toward the next 24 hours

As I look forward to the next 24 hours, I ask the Lord to be present to me and through me with His love and support. I also ask for the openness and courage that disposes me to recognize and accept the Lord's surprises: unanticipated joys, unexpected meetings, new ways of approaching others or in something that is difficult for me. I ask that I not be so set on my plans that I cannot be open to God also in unexpected circumstances or encounters.

I may need to ask the Lord for strength to overcome something I fear or dread, maybe to persevere in something, to be more sensitive to God's activity in my life, maybe to let go of something or someone, to love more, to be converted in some relationship, to accept the "thorn in my flesh." Perhaps I will ask for help and guidance, for deeper love and care, or for greater trust and courage.

I will conclude with an "Our Father" or a "Glory be..."

In the beginning, you may frequently refer to the outlined steps. As you become more comfortable, you will find less need to refer to the guide, if at all.