

## Ignatian Examen

*Use this complete prayer service with Chapter 6 of Meeting Jesus in the Sacraments. You may also choose to use only individual parts of the prayer service.*

Needs:

- copies as needed
- quiet space, perhaps with a candle lit and lights dimmed

### *Introduction*

**Leader:** The Sacrament of Penance transforms you, energizes you, and brings you new life. The sacrament is meant to strengthen you and help you renew your commitment to living your baptismal commitment to be a disciple of Christ. One aspect of the Sacrament of Penance is making a good examination of conscience. The exercise of examining your conscience is a way to reflect on your relationship with God, deepen that relationship, and know yourself more fully. The Ignatian Examen was popularized by St. Ignatius of Loyola. It is a way to reflect more deeply about your day in relation to God, noticing when you have responded to God's presence and when you may have avoided or ignored God's presence. It is an excellent way to practice a daily examination.

### *Examen*

**Leader:** Find a position that is both comfortable and allows you to focus. (*Pause until all are settled.*) Take a few deep breaths and quiet your thoughts. Close your eyes if it helps. Place yourself in God's presence.

*(Read through each of the steps slowly, allowing for brief pauses for reflection.)*

1. First, ask God to *illuminate* your day. Invite him into this moment to fill you with an understanding of yourself as God sees you.

The Examen is not just about you, but you and God together. In this first step, open yourself to God's grace. Where do you need God's grace this day? Can you accept that God truly wants to be with you in this prayer?

St. Ignatius tells you that in order to have a reflective life oriented to God you need light and strength. The light of the Holy Spirit allows you to see yourself clearly, without the deceptions or distractions of daily life. Often times it is easy to let life just happen to you, or to have an attitude that can distort a proper view of yourself. Ask God too for the strength of the Holy Spirit to actively and honestly examine all the areas of your life.

Lord, help us to be attentive and aware of your presence in every aspect of this day. In your own way, ask God to give light to the areas of your life that need more reflection and understanding. Ask the Lord to give you the light and strength to know yourself better.

2. The second part is to *give thanks* to God. For St. Ignatius, gratitude is key. An awareness that God is good and generous and acts daily to show you his great love is the foundation of a strong relationship with him.

Gratitude is magnanimous; it includes not just material and physical things, but also perspectives, experiences, and moments in the day. Even if an attitude of gratitude is difficult to muster, it is important to recognize the truth of God's goodness to whatever level you can. When an attitude of gratitude is cultivated in your life it allows your heart to open more fully to God's grace. You become more and more aware that everything is a gift, that God has a deep and personal love for you as a person beyond anything you expect or deserve.

Give thanks to God for all the ways he has shown you his love and care today. Think about the parts of your day that have been good, meaningful, or enjoyable, whether trivial or big. Express gratitude for these moments. Now reflect on the larger gifts in your life—the gift of faith, your life, your relationships, your talents. Express gratitude for these things.

3. The third step is to *examine* your day. This is the heart of the Ignatian Examen. This part of the Examen is not simply an examination of conscious, but also allowing God to enter into the day and show you how your inner feelings and motives either come from him or from outside God. Look back on your day and ask God to point out the moments when you have especially noticed or felt his presence. Are there patterns to what brings you closer to God?

Think about your words and actions. Reflect on your motivations, intentions, and the feelings that were behind those things. When you reflect on a deeper level you might find that sin is more deeply rooted than you thought. Selfishness, pridefulness, a desire to be the center of attention. In a Christian life rooted in freedom, God's grace and love is the source of all actions, words, and thoughts. God desires you to be the best version of yourself. Have your actions, words, and thoughts sprung from a desire to honor God and others, or yourself?

4. The fourth step is to ask *forgiveness* for your faults this day. This is not the same as being forgiven in the Sacrament of Penance, but it can be a good preparation for receiving Penance. When you have examined the day, you might notice that sin has taken root in some area of your life. Discovering sinfulness and selfishness in yourself is never fun. Yet, having a response of true sorrow helps to move you closer to God. It does not dwell on sin in shame, which move you more into yourself, but rather is a movement of the heart that looks to God and depends on his grace. Asking forgiveness leads you to freedom to move past sin.

What things are there that you want to ask forgiveness for? What particular sins have kept you from God and others? How can you express your sorrow to Christ in your own words? How can you respond to Christ's loving mercy by asking for forgiveness? Ask for forgiveness if you have done any harm or if you need help getting over a particular sin.

This step also is a time to examine when you have chosen to follow Christ and do what is good. Where did you see yourself responding to grace? How have you made virtuous choices in your words and actions today? Praise God for those moments.

5. The last step is to make a *resolution* and plan to amend what needs amended and follow Christ more closely.

Tomorrow is another day. If you see each day as a gift and take each day as it is given, it can be easier to make resolutions that will help you tomorrow. Ask God to help you imagine the things you might be doing tomorrow, the people you might see, and the decisions you might make. How will you invite God to be in those difficult moments? How will you thank God in the good times? What are the desires in your heart to make change?

Ask God to help you make a simple plan for tomorrow and give you the resolve to carry it out. Look to him especially for help when you might be tempted to make the same mistakes you did today. Invite him to be in your life the rest of this day and tomorrow.

*Conclusion*

**Leader:** As we close this Examen, let us pray the prayer that Jesus taught us. (*Pray the Our Father together.*)