

Examen

Discerning God – Growing in Grace

A daily examination of life is at the heart of the discipline called the *Examen of Conscience*. This practice aims to discern God in the ordinary experiences of the day and further aims to aid us in discerning how to live as faithful people of God. This practice is most often associated with St. Ignatius of Loyola but has its roots in the instruction of even earlier church fathers like St. Basil and others who admonished us to make an assessment of each day and to consider what we would do the following day.

There are a number of ways to practice this discipline, but most are organized around the basic movements I have outlined below. I have purposely kept these instructions brief and simple so that a basic practice can form. However, as you grow in grace, you may want to further explore this discipline.

Step One — Seek the aid of the Holy Spirit in discerning God in your day.

- † Begin your examen by praying something like, “God, send your Holy Spirit to me to enlighten me with understanding, as I gather up the pieces of my day and seek you and your calling in them.”

Step Two — Consider the day in gratitude for what it was and what it can teach you.

- † There is a great peace which belongs to those who can give thanks for each day — knowing the gift that it is. No matter the content of your day, it has been a day in which to live in God’s love. As we close the day and consider it, let us give thanks to God for it.

Step Three — Search for God by reviewing the day.

- † Review the events, feelings, experiences, and interactions of the day.
- † Pay special attention to the times in which you experienced *consolation and desolation*. Consolation might be described as feeling God’s presence or pleasure. Desolation might be described as feeling the absence or displeasure of God. Another way to get at this would be to ask, “When today did I succeed in being faithful and in knowing God’s grace?” And conversely, “When today did I fail to live up to the calling of my faith?”
- † Seek God in the other people you met and interacted with throughout the day. In what other person(s) was God present to you? How were their needs and their contributions meant to help you know what God wants of you?

Step Four — Consider what response is required.

- † What do the things you have noticed about your day suggest you *do*? In what ways could they be the tools of God meant to shape you and call you to become a fuller expression of the image of God? What do you need to omit from tomorrow’s feelings, activities, and remarks? And what might you add to your life tomorrow in order to grow in grace?

Step Five — Rest in Grace.

- † Give thanks again for your successes, and accept forgiveness for your failures, and rest in God’s love — knowing that tomorrow you will begin again to walk the life-long journey of faith with God’s grace to aid you on your way.

Consolation

- † Directs our focus outside and beyond ourselves.
- † Lifts our hearts so that we can see the joys and sorrows of other people.
- † Bonds us more closely to our human community.
- † Generates new inspiration and ideas, restores balance and refreshes our inner vision.
- † Shows us where God is active in our lives and where he is leading us.
- † Releases new energy in us.
- † When did I give and receive the most love today?
- † When did I feel most alive today?
- † When was I joyful today?
- † What was today's high point?
- † When was I most 'at peace' with myself, those around me, and God?
- † When did God seem near to me today?

Desolation

- † Turns us in on ourselves.
- † Drives us down the spiral, ever deeper into our own negative feelings.
- † Cuts us off from community.
- † Makes us want to give up on things that used to be important to us.
- † Takes over our whole consciousness and crowds out our distant vision.
- † Covers up all our landmarks.
- † Drains us of energy.
- † When did I give and receive the least love today?
- † When did I most feel life draining out of me?
- † When was I saddest?
- † What was today's low point?
- † When was I least 'at peace' with myself, those around me, and God?
- † When did God seem far from me today?

These descriptors and questions have been edited but come from:

The Inner Compass by Margaret Silf
and
Sleeping With Bread by Dennis, Sheila, and Matthew Linn