

The *Examen* Handbook

A Guide for Leading Others
through the Prayer of the *Examen*



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Theology of the Examen

Spirituality

Spirituality is the way a person makes sense of, or makes connections between, themselves, others, creation and the Other. There are many spiritualities according to different faith traditions (eg, Christian, Buddhist, Muslim) and many spiritualities within each of those traditions. There are some spiritualities that do not include God (eg, some New Age spiritualities).

Ignatian spirituality is defined in a few ways. The most succinct formula is “finding God in all things”. One of the early companions of Ignatius described it another way as “being a contemplative in action”. Both say the same thing. For Ignatius, the world is user-friendly. You can find God “outside”. Monks contemplate God mainly in their chapel choir stalls at prayer. Jesuits find God “in action”, in their daily engagement with the world as well as in church.

When Ignatius founded a religious order (which he never originally intended) he ensured that his men were not to be tied to monastic communities like the monks or friars for prayers, but were to be free to be on mission and trusted to say their prayers individually rather than communally. God’s presence was not to be tied to a church or chapel or prayer room, but found in all things.

For Ignatius God is certainly to be found in traditional ways (scripture, liturgy, sacraments, etc) but also in creation, in human history, and in other people. And God can certainly make Godself present directly (eg, appearing to Moses, to St Paul, in Jesus, and to many saints, including St Ignatius). But God more often reveals Godself indirectly – in manifestations, little epiphanies, tell-tale signs, God’s traces.



The Basis of this Ignatian Spirituality

Some critics have said this Ignatian spirituality is simply the error of pantheism, that is, everything is God (God is the mountain, God is the tree, God is the other person, etc). Not so – this spirituality proposes that God is to be revealed in the beauty of a mountain or a tree, or that God’s Spirit dwells in the other person. God, the Creator, is at all times greater than God’s creation.

Our starting point is *incarnational theology*. It is a theology that is rooted in this world. Not an “up there” or “other worldly” approach. The world is God’s creation and God’s gift to us. God has affirmed its goodness, for example, in the Genesis creation account – “God saw that it was good”. Then, in a cosmic act of self-emptying and compassion, God’s Son took flesh (in-carnation) and became one of us. Therefore creation is doubly sacred – as God’s gift to us and with God’s indwelling. Incarnational theology holds that God is to be discovered working in human history, in ongoing creation of the world, and in ourselves. Ignatian theology and spirituality is easy to teach and to appropriate, because it springs from our lived experience.

Ignatian spirituality is holistic (complete, all-round). If our Jesuit educational philosophy embraces the formation of the whole person (mind, heart and hands), then our spirituality embraces the whole world. We do not impose a spirituality on the world, but sensitively discern the presence of God already active in the world. So there is no dichotomy, but a synthesis of matter and spirit, body and soul, reason and faith, culture and belief.

Each informs the other. There is no partitioning of the world, two realms, God’s kingdom versus the world, neither speaking to the other. Rather there is a complementarity. Grace builds on nature.

Those with an Ignatian spirituality experience a God who may be encountered on a weekday, as well as a Sunday. They can point out the face of Christ, not only in sacred icons that adorn our walls, but also in the faces of our sisters and brothers. God is to be found in class and in chapel, in learning and in living, in ourselves and in the other.

The Examen

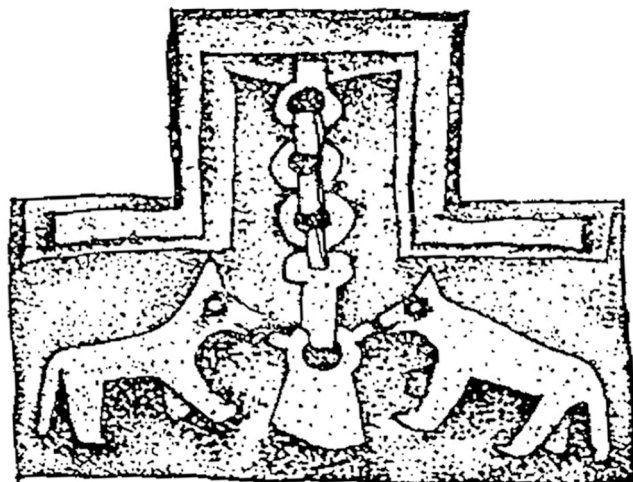
On the basis of this theology and this particular spirituality, Ignatius encouraged his followers to use a particular prayer wherein the pray-er would recall those moments in the day when they felt God's presence, and those times when we might have drifted from God. It goes by various names: **The Examen, Awareness Examen, Examination of Consciousness (not Conscience only).**

It is called *Examen* (from the Latin) not meaning an exam or a test (and therefore a "pass" or failure") but more like a "review" of progress. It is called an *Awareness* or *Consciousness Examen* because it is a review of how you have been aware, or conscious of, God's presence in your day. It is not only an *Examination of Conscience* (which, in the traditional sense, is a review or tallying of one's sins, usually before confession) though this might form part of it.

It is easy to review the day. We have a natural facility for it. How many of us can easily re-enact a quarrel we had during the day? How readily we think of that cutting, clever thing we might have said to our foe! But we also know how to re-live good and precious moments of the day — intimacy, friendship, God's peace. Such recollections can even make you smile again, or bring a tear. We all have that ability. The *Examen* builds upon that capacity.

In practising the *Examen*, we consider questions like:

- where did I meet God during the day?
- how attuned am I to God speaking?
- what is leading me away from God?
- how do I block God?



Effect of the Examen

Regular use of the *Examen* in prayer reminds us of God's active presence in the ordinariness and the extraordinariness of our day. It also reminds us of where we have been navigating off course, bearing away from our true selves and away from God.

In addition, for the purposes of refining our skills of discernment (making right choices in important matters), the *Examen* keeps us in touch with the movements within our heart that are reinforcing what our true desires and hopes for ourselves are – what is life-giving and ultimately fulfilling (and therefore what God wants of us, too).

General Format of the Examen

(Some Background for Staff to Explain the Sequence)

1 Sense of God's Presence and Thanksgiving

Have the boys become still with some centring (stilling/quietening) exercises. Since this prayer is about interiority, ask the boys to sit comfortably, put things out of their hands, quieten down, close their eyes (they may like to rest their heads on their arms if they are at a desk). Invite them to leave all distractions, "busyness", thoughts of things to be done, aside. Be still. **[This could take about 20 seconds.]**

Invite the boys to thank God for something (one thing will do) for which they are grateful today. This reminds them of their relationship with God: Creator and creature, Giver and gifted. **[This could take about 15 seconds.]**

2 Prayer for the gift of the Spirit – Enlightenment

Have the boys ask the Holy Spirit for the gift to review the day (or the time since the last *Examen*) honestly with integrity – not to be selective, not to filter out the less-than-good, but to be objective and see themselves as they are. Or, maybe they could ask for the gift to see the day through Jesus' eyes. **[This could take about 15 seconds.]**

3 Review of the Day

When asking the boys to review their day, ask them to recall simply the most significant events or feelings. What was significant? Where was their heart lifted? Where were they touched by the God's Spirit? What event do they enjoy remembering? What do they think was the basis or the cause of the enjoyment? What was God saying to them there? Where was there any negative or false spirit (or Spirit) at work? What were they disappointed with? What did they learn? What do their actions, thoughts, desires, feelings, tell them about their relationship with God?

Encourage them to stay for a time with what is fruitful. They should not feel driven to spend time with every feeling and experience of the day.

Not too many words or instructions here – give them space to let the memory surface. Prompt and stand back. **[This might take 2 minutes.]**

4 Response

Ask them to have a conversation with God. Talk to God (or Jesus) about what was significant. Maybe contrition (an expression of sorrow for something recalled) is appropriate. If there is no conversation, then it is not strictly prayer, but simply a review of the day or a self-help exercise – and this is also valuable! **[This might take 20 seconds.]**

5 The Future

What help might they ask of God for tomorrow? Is there something difficult ahead, a challenge? Do they need to be reconciled with someone? **[This might take 20 seconds.]**

Conclude with a simple well-known prayer (eg, *Glory Be*, *Lord's Prayer*, *Prayer for Generosity*, *Hail Mary*) and Sign of the Cross. Invite them to “come back to the room”, to the present, when they are ready.

COLLEGE DIARY

AWARENESS EXAMEN

1 First try to relax and be at peace.
Thank God for something you are grateful for.

2 Ask God to help you look back over the day.

3 & 4 Ask yourself:

What are the good things that happened to me today?

What good things did I do today?

I thank God for all these things.

Now ask yourself:

What was not so good about today: the things that annoyed me, frustrated me, hurt me, mad me feel sad?

Ask God to help you with these things.

I also ask myself what things did I do today that were not so good.

I tell God that I am sorry for these things.

5 Now look ahead.

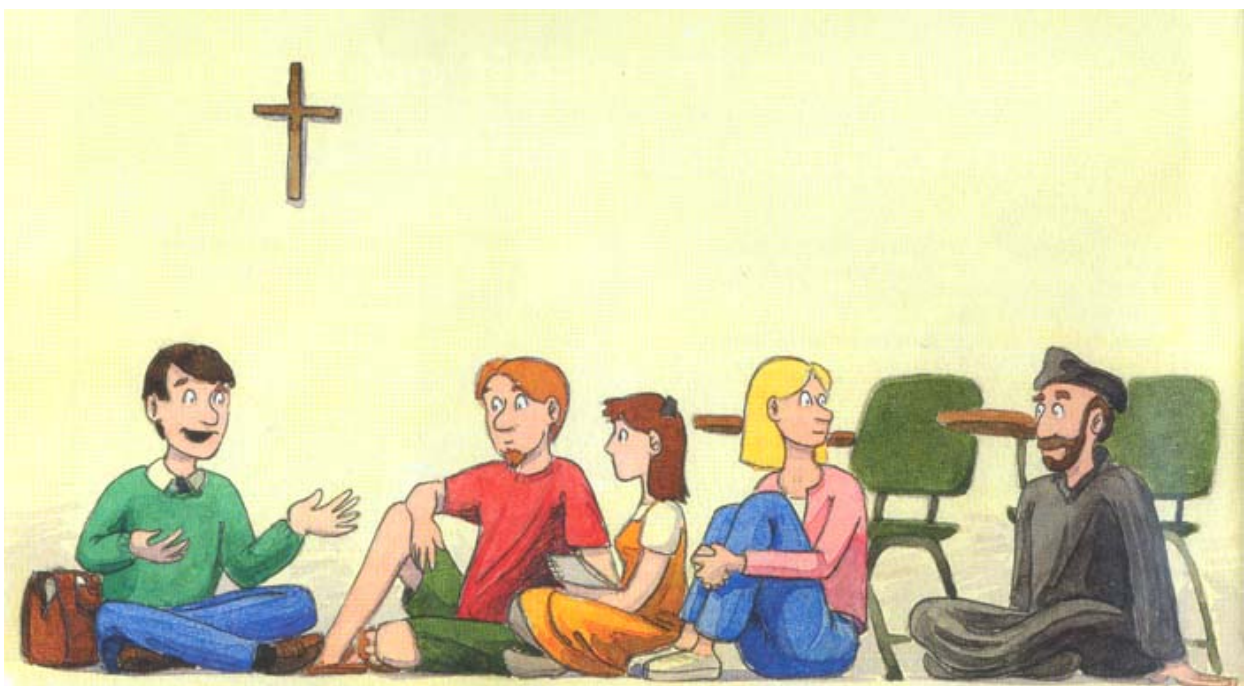
Ask God to help you be a better person tomorrow than today.

Finish with the prayer that Jesus taught us: the *Our Father*.

EXAMEN FOR YOUNG BOYS

- 1 Begin with some centring, quietening down. Maybe rest heads on hands on desk.
- 2 Thank God for something special of which you are especially aware.
- 3 Go over the day in your mind.
What was the best thing I heard?
What was the best thing I saw?
What was the best thing someone did for me?
What was the best thing I did for someone else?
Is there anything I regret or feel sorry for?
- 4 Tell something to God about your day as a friend talks to a friend.
- 5 What can I do to improve tomorrow?

Conclude with the *Glory Be*.



EXAMEN FOR OLDER BOYS

1 Quiet and Thanksgiving

Spend a moment settling down and letting go of distractions. Clear our minds.

As we look over the day, we seek to appreciate all the good things that have happened to us and to thank God for these. But firstly thank God for something for which you are grateful at this moment.

2 Asking for Insight

We now pray for the gift of the Holy Spirit to help understand ourselves better. We ask for the wisdom to see ourselves more clearly.

3 Looking at Our Day

Now ask yourself how we have spent our day. Why do we act the way we do? Is it from love? Generosity? A deep desire to be helpful to others? Is it from selfishness? Pride? Fear? Confusion? Tiredness? Frustration? How have we felt today? What is the source of those feelings? As we ponder our activity today, we begin to see patterns and connections, which open our eyes to our own goodness and generosity as well as our weakness and self-centredness.

4 We Ask Forgiveness

We now turn to Christ, admit our sinfulness and ask forgiveness. Whilst this is a moment of sorrow, it is also one of wonder and gratitude at God's love, and of desire to do something for God.

5 Looking to Tomorrow

Finally, as we look to tomorrow, we ask for God's grace and help. We ask to touch particularly those areas, which have come into focus during our prayer. Are there some attitudes in us that we would like God to change? Are there some decisions we need to make? Would we like to be more sensitive to God's presence in our day? Ask for what you need.

Conclude by saying the *Prayer for Generosity*.

THE I/WE EXAMEN

- 1 Relax in the presence of God. Be aware of God's loving presence in, and all around you.

Thank God for something God has loved into your life since your last *Examen*.

- 2 Beg to be given the 'mind and heart of Christ', to see the reality as Jesus sees it. Reflect prayerfully over your day.

- 3 Go through the day with the Lord, checking the "WE", what Jesus and you experienced together, against the "I" alone.

As you reflect over the day, then, see everything about which you can say "WE" (even if you were not conscious of God's presence at the time). For example: WE ate breakfast; WE went off to work; WE did our chores; WE were truthful when it really mattered.

And see what you cannot say "WE" about, but have to say "I". For example: I got angry with those children; I judged that person rashly; I failed to be kind to that one.

- 4 As we prayerfully reflect over our day in this way, God makes us keenly aware of the ways in which God touches us and is present to us all during the day. It is clear when we have walked other ways. Talk to God about it.

Renew in love your sorrow for ever disappointing or offending our Father, and convey that to God.

- 5 Accept an invitation God gives you to repair any damage, and behave better next time you face the same kind of situation in which you failed today.

End by praying the *Our Father* slowly.

THE FACES OF OTHERS EXAMEN

1 Become still and settled. Let go of all that is drawing your attention away from this moment.

Give thanks to God for all the people's faces that come into your life. Whether they test you or bring out the best in you, they have Christ dwelling in them – even if sometimes in heavy disguise.

2 Ask God for the grace to see Christ in all the faces you have encountered this day.

3 Review the day so far (or the time since your last *Examen*). Recall some of the significant people you met or with whom you conversed or interacted.

Which were the good experiences? The faces you always welcome? The ones that brighten up *your* face and *your* day. Why do they affect you this way?

On the contrary, which are the faces that annoy you? Or intimidate you? Which are the hostile faces? Why is that? Could you change that reaction or that outcome in any way?

Where are the faces you chose to ignore? The ones from whom you look away? Where you did not want to become engaged? Where your presence, your greeting, your conversation, could have made all the difference.

4 Talk to God about those faces you looked on with life and energy; where you looked with fear and anxiety; and those faces from which you chose to look away.

5 What do you want to do tomorrow, with God's help?

Conclude by asking Mary's intercession with the *Hail Mary*.

THE NOVICES' EXAMEN

1 No matter what I am worrying about ... Stop! God is with me - quiet perhaps, but always there. Everything I have is a gift from God. Is there something that I would especially like to give thanks for today?

2 I ask God to shine his light into my heart so that when I look back over the day I may be able to see God working in all things that happened.

3 Now I remember through the day starting from when I woke-up.

I remember the people that I met and the things that have happened. On the whole, was it a "good" or "bad" day? Was it a normal day, or unusual in some way? Whom did I meet during the day? Did I come across something surprising? Does something special come to mind?

In all the things that have happened, how did I feel? Was I joyful or sad, angry or frightened? Maybe I felt great and was really happy?

What caused my feelings and did they change during the day?

God guides us through our moods and feelings. Normally, the way of God is (in a deep sense) peaceful and consoling. If your day was disturbed or if you were uneasy, can you sense where that uneasiness was coming from? We are affected by many different feelings. The better we come to know these influences, the easier it will be to see the perhaps subtle movements of God in our lives.

4 An important question to ask is: what can I be proud of today? I will give thanks for this.

But also, did I turn away from God during the day? Maybe I turned a blind eye when it suited me?

I will say a prayer asking forgiveness for anything I may have done to ignore or hinder God's love during the day that has passed.

I will ask especially for the graces of healing and strength.

5 The final part of the prayer is to look forward to tomorrow.

We are people of hope. Let us remember that God will be with us then.

Let us bring the prayer to a close by praising God with the *Glory Be*.

THE MONDAY EXAMEN

Reviewing the Weekend Sport

1 Become still and settled. Let go of all the distractions that are occupying your mind at the moment.

Give thanks to God for all the opportunities that co-curricular life at school, or in your local club or district team, is bringing you.

2 Ask God for the grace to see the movement of the true and false spirits moving in your heart in your weekend games.

3 In your mind's eye, go over the weekend match, race, or competition. Begin with the journey to the venue. Then move to the time when you met up with the team. What were the conversations/anticipations like? Recall meeting with the coach – the encouragement and advice.

Remember the game. What were the highlights? When were the feelings of exhilaration? When did you sense a real team spirit? On the other hand, when were you down or dispirited? How did you deal with that feeling? Did you turn it around? Or did it lead to negativity?

If you won, did you do so in the best way? We all know of “bad losers”, but were you “bad winners”? If you lost, what do you recall of the way the team or individuals acted? Was there any “blame game”? Whatever the outcome, what significant words or conversations do you remember? Do you admire them, or regret them?

What did you learn about yourself? The team? About what is important?

4 Is there anything you would like to share with God about the game? What will you say? Do you need to express sorrow or regret for anything?

5 As you look forward to next week's encounter, is there any grace or gift or help you would like to ask of God?

Conclude with the *Prayer for Generosity*.

- 1 Be aware of God's presence.** Look back on the events of the day in the company of the Holy Spirit. The day may seem confusing to you – a blur, a jumble, a muddle. Ask God to bring clarity and understanding.
- 2 Review the day with gratitude.** Walk through your day in the presence of God and note its joys and delights. Focus on the day's gifts. Look at the work you did, the people you interacted with. What did you receive from these people? What did you give them? Pay attention to small things – the food you ate, the sights you saw, and other seemingly small pleasures. God is in the details.
- 3 Pay attention to your emotions.** Ignatius' insight was that we detect the presence of the God's Spirit in the movements of our emotions. Reflect on the feelings you experienced during the day. Boredom? Elation? Resentment? Compassion? Anger? Confidence? What is God saying through these feelings?

God will most likely show you some ways that you fell short. Make note of these failures. But look deeply for other implications. Does a feeling of frustration perhaps mean that God wants you consider a new direction in some area of your life or work?
- 4 Choose one feature of the day and pray from it.** Ask the Holy Spirit to direct you to something during the day particularly important. It may involve a feeling – positive or negative. It may be a significant encounter with another person or a vivid moment of pleasure or peace. Or it may be something that seems rather insignificant. Look at it. Pray about it. Allow the prayer to arise spontaneously from your heart – whether intercession, praise, repentance, or gratitude.
- 5 Look toward tomorrow.** Ask God to give you light for tomorrow's challenges. Pay attention to the feelings that surface as you survey what's coming up. Are you doubtful? Cheerful? Apprehensive? Full of delighted anticipation? Allow these feelings to turn into prayer. Seek God's guidance. Ask God for help and understanding. Pray for hope.

St. Ignatius encouraged people to talk to Jesus like a friend. Have that conversation. Remember your life is a gift, and adorned with gifts from God. End the *Examen* with the *Our Father*.

USING OUR GIFTS (James Rodgers, adapted)

- 1 Relax. Feel open. Open your heart. Put things out of sight, out of grasp, out of thought. Let go. Recall that we are in the presence of God. We are always in God's presence but here and now, we place ourselves in God's presence. Give thanks for *one* thing, one gift I have been given, one trace of gold I have found.
- 2 Ask for help from the Holy Spirit. Ask the Spirit to come into our hearts and help us freely and honestly review the happenings of our last day.
- 3 Look back briefly and re-live our day with gratitude. Recall the events.

What gifts have I received today? What gifts have I given? I thank God for all of these, their source. In the words of Peter Steele SJ, "each breath a gift; each glance a blessing".

- 4 Search for the movements of our heart which may have been divided between helping and disregarding, listening and ignoring, criticising and forgiving, speaking and silence.

This is not a time for dwelling too long on shortcomings but a gentle look at how we have not used or else mis-used God's gifts. Do not let the false spirit be undermining. With hope, ask for help or forgiveness.

- 5 Look ahead to tomorrow. Have a heart-to-heart with Jesus. Ask for direction, for support.

Finish with Ignatius' prayer, the *Suscipe*:

Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty,
my understanding and my entire will.
Take, all I have and call my own.
Because, whatever I have or hold, you have given.
So, I return it all to you and surrender it.
Give me only your love and your grace.

INNER FREEDOM (Mark Thibodeaux SJ, adapted)

- 1 I begin in the usual way: quietening, centring, coming to a stillness. Then I thank God for a blessing, a gift, I am aware of today – a good mood, a kind word received, undeserved good health, another day with friends, an achievement.
 - 2 I imagine that I will be reviewing the day with God or Jesus by my side. I imagine that we will look not only at the externals (as in a clip from a videocam), but that we can look at the deeper internal movements. I ask to see clearly the various emotions that fill my heart.
 - 3 I look back over the day and ask myself, “When was I most spiritually free?” That is, when was I emotionally well-balanced and desirous of being a positive, hope-filled, faithful and loving person? I observe firstly when I was feeling free from negativity, from thoughts and emotions unworthy of me. When was I most *alive*, bringing joy and energy and companionship to others? When was I most in sync with Jesus who came “to bring life to others, life to the full”?
- In contrast, I look back to when I was most unfree, when I was driven. Where was I most carried away by my own fears, resentments, cravings, anxieties or despairing thoughts? Or when did I feel pressured to act according to the group? When did I not speak up when a value, or someone’s integrity or feelings, were at stake? When wasn’t I independent enough to be the person I would really like to be? What can I see is getting in the way at times?
- 4 I speak to God or Jesus, who has been sharing this review with me. There is much to be thankful for. Express thanks. But we are, all of us, in a process of growth. So we work at and reshape the clay that we are, looking to what God is calling us to be and what we ourselves want to become. I pick just one of my “unfreedoms”. That’s all, just one. Which will it be? Which one holds me back? I ask God for the gift of freedom. I spend a moment thinking what I might do to be more life-giving and love-giving. How might I let this “unfreedom” go?
 - 5 I look to tomorrow and ask God’s or Jesus’ help with my desire.

I conclude this prayer with the *Lord’s Prayer*.

A RELATIONSHIP

(Mark Thibodeaux SJ, adapted)

- 1 I begin as usual, quietening down, letting go of thoughts and tensions. Ignatius believed gratitude to be one of the greatest virtues. So I thank God for something I am blessed or gifted with at the moment.
- 2 Today I am going to reflect on a particular person. I ask God for the gift of freedom to see that person and the relationship between us as clearly and objectively as possible.
- 3 Looking over the recent past, I ask God to show me the person who has been on my mind or in my heart, a lot. I picture that person in my mind's eye, maybe hear their voice or recognise a familiar gesture.

My recollection is shared with God and I identify (if I can) why this person is so prominent in my attention lately. It could be a mate I am working closely with and well on a project – a member of my team or class. Or perhaps there has been a falling-out, an argument with someone. Maybe a small matter unresolved is widening the gap over time. Possibly someone I am jealous of. Maybe it is someone I have affection for or am in love with. Is it someone ill or bearing a heavy emotional burden? I try to name the strongest emotion in this present relationship: love, ambivalence, gratitude, anger, attachment, hurt, worry, confusion?

- 4 I speak to God, as a trusted listener, about how I am feeling at the moment. Is the relationship life-giving or draining? Has it changed, or is it changing? Is it liberating, or is it closing me off to others or to opportunities. Recall some moments when it has been full of life and energy. Be thankful for that, as it was then a channel of God's love. Whether it is still rich or is in a testing time at the moment, ask what are my hopes and desires for the relationship into the future. What are my wishes and dreams for it? Speak to God about these desires.
- 5 After these reflections, now is the time to present your hopes to God. For example, "Lord, help us to overcome **X** and to focus on **Y**." Now look to tomorrow: how might I now commit to think, to speak, or to act in a certain way with this person?

Conclude the Examen with Ignatius' *Prayer for Generosity*.

PRESENT OR ABSENT
(Mark Thibodeaux SJ, adapted)

- 1 I begin by coming to a steady presence – to myself and to God – letting go of distractions, listening only to my breathing and hearing only the incidental noises which surround me. I thank God for whatever I feel enriched by at the moment. God is the source.
- 2 Today the theme concerns *focus*. So I ask God for the grace to reflect attentively and honestly on the period of time my prayer will embrace.
- 3 God asks me to be fully present to the moment, the task and the person at hand. Anything less sells me, or the other, short. With that in mind, I review the last day. I recall those times when I was really attentive to the task or to the person. Perhaps it was when someone really needed a sympathetic hearing or a helping hand, and I stepped in. I recall the feeling. Or a difficult or complicated job that I committed to and completed. Or a moment when I was deeply aware of the goodness of a situation, or an appreciation of the company of my friends or family. Or a time when I accepted a new challenge – physical, emotional, spiritual or intellectual – and, though challenging, told myself I would see it through.

Then I observe if there were times when I was lost in another world, in the past or the future. Or lost in broodings. Or lost in the latest e-distracted on phone or other device. Losing focus and time, attention and achievement. Where is my particular weak point? I look honestly with God at the down-side of such inattentiveness and loss of time.

- 4 I imagine how much better things could have gone were I stronger with myself. How my talents could flourish. How much more I could add to a common enterprise with others. I ask God to help plot a realistic balance in my life between healthy diversions and a concerted commitment to task. I ask for the gift of strength and staying power.
- 5 I now look to tomorrow. What will require my full attention? In which moments am I liable to be tempted to be lost in thought or some distracting diversion? Where would I now like to commit myself to the task or to the other? Freely and fully.

I conclude with the *Prayer for Generosity*, noting its strong desires.

THE POWER OF WORDS

Reviewing What We Have Heard

(This Examen might be used after an Assembly, hearing a guest speaker, a liturgy.)

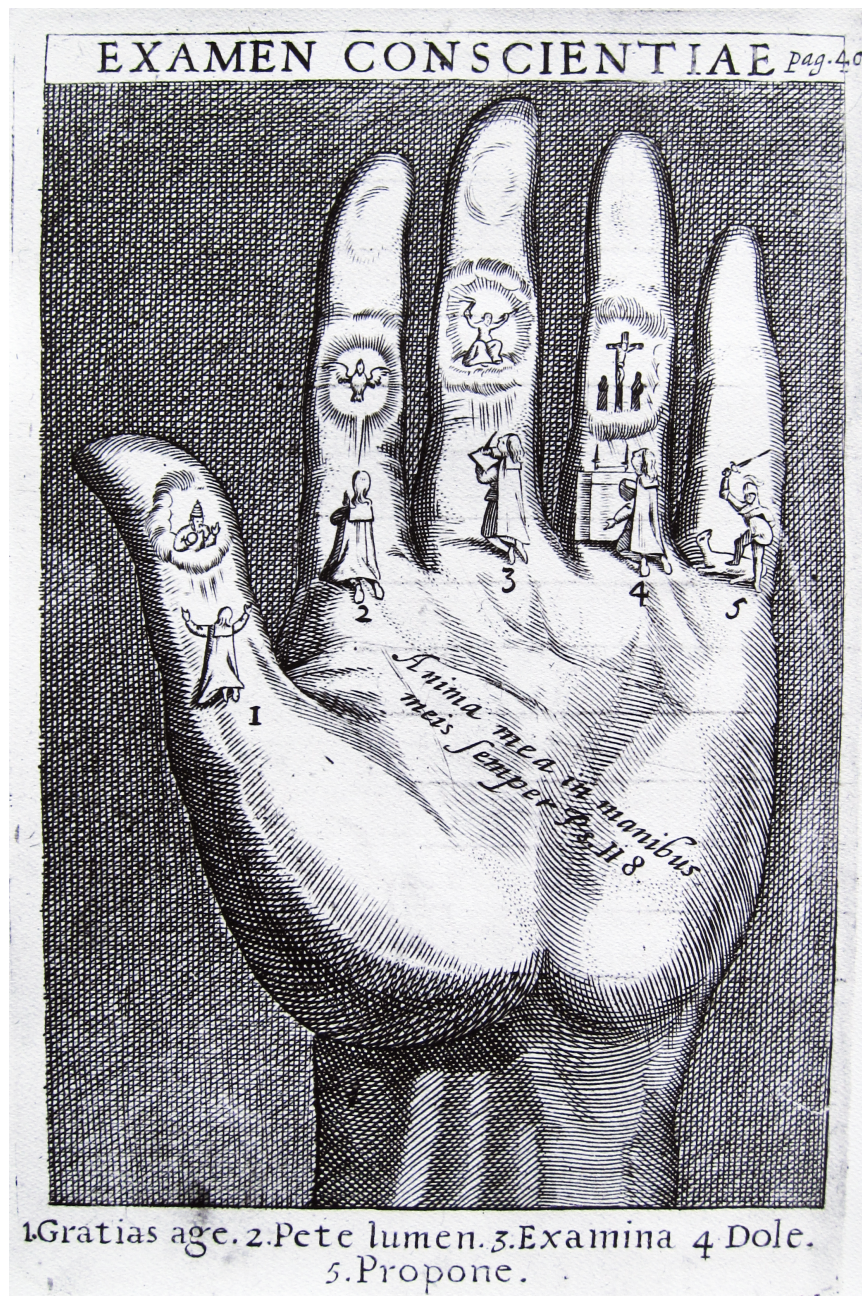
- 1 I leave the busy-ness of the day, become quiet, inwardly focused. Allow something to come to mind for which you are really thankful for at the moment – another person, an achievement, life, an experience.
- 2 Ask God for the grace to trace the last day and to bring to mind many of the things I have listened to and heard. Ask the freedom to be reminded even perhaps of some things I half-heard or tuned out of.
- 3 As I go through the day, I re-hear some of the words that have come my way. They may be snippets of conversations with close friends in the playground, or strangers that crossed my path. They may be lyrics of a song I listened to. They may have their source in a novel or a news item I read. It may be a reflection a boy gave at a student Mass. Perhaps something inspirational or challenging at an Assembly from a staff member or a guest speaker. They may be uplifting or challenging, or a source for further exploration. They may have saddened or annoyed me, made me laugh or think. Which did I enjoy? What reaction or emotion followed? Why was that? What deeper part of me did they appeal to? What does that tell me? Where is God's voice in it? Give thanks for what you have heard deeply.
- 4 Then recall what did I choose not to hear, or to ignore in the day? To whom were my ears closed? Sometimes it is right to step away from gossip or untruths. But other times it may stem from a too-ready judgement, from self-righteousness, or from arrogance. Have I been unreasonably or hurtfully closed-off? Am I content with that, or would I like to make a change? Tell God about how you feel. Ask God's help.
- 5 Look ahead to the day to come. There will be many words to listen to. Where would you like to be most attentive? Which words will nourish you most – even if they might be challenging. Ask the Word of God, Jesus, to be your help and guide.

Conclude with the prayer of Mary, who heard God's word and then bore God's Word. The *Hail Mary*.

EXAMEN FROM THE JESUIT CONFERENCE OF AMERICA (adapted)

- 1 No matter where you are, with others or alone, you are of God's making and live in the midst of God's creation. Your God who gave you life is concerned for you. Ask the Holy Spirit to open your heart. Pause and spend a moment looking at this day's gifts. Be concrete: recall the taste of jam on toast, the fragrance of a flower, the smile (yours or someone else's) in response to a kind word, an act of patience that gave someone ease. Be grateful – say thanks.
- 2 Before you explore the mystery of your human heart, ask the help of the Holy Spirit so that you can look at your actions and motives with honesty and patience. The Holy Spirit enables you to see, with growing understanding, the direction your life is taking. The Spirit gives you freedom to look at yourself without condemnation but without complacency, and thus be open to growth.
- 3 Recall the events of your day. Search out, also, the internal events of your day. Look through the hours to see how you reacted to what was before you. Ask yourself with what and with whom were you involved and review your reactions to them. Situations may show that your heart was divided – wavering between helping and disregarding, scoffing at and encouraging, listening to and ignoring, rebuking and forgiving, neglecting and thanking. See what opportunities for growth in faith and hope and love were given you and how you responded. What moved you to act the way you did? See where Jesus entered your decisions and where you were open to receive his influence. That influence comes through other people, through Scripture, through your own good impulses.
- 4 Now, having reviewed this day of your life, look at yourself – not harshly, but not complacently. See your need of God and God's concern for you. Express sorrow for sin and then especially praise God for the times you responded to people or events in ways which reflected the love he has for all. In these acts of sorrow and gratitude you grow in appreciation of God's great love and care for you.
- 5 What will you pray for as you anticipate tomorrow?

In conclusion, pray to the Trinity with the *Glory Be*.



This image, from an old text of Ignatius' *Spiritual Exercises*, represents a memory aid for the *Examen Conscientiae* ("Examination of Conscience"). Each finger represents a step in the Examen. Across the palm is written, "My soul is continually in my hands." (Psalm 118:108). Then each finger in word and figure, suggests the step:

- 1 *Gratias age* (give thanks). 2 *Pete lumen* (ask for light).
- 3 *Examina* (review). 4 *Dole* (express sorrow). 5 *Propone* (resolve).

(These must have been challenging times – the figure in the final "asking help for tomorrow" step is slaying a beast!)

