

Lenten Examen

Lent is a season of reflection and as a helpful tool to assist in that reflection, we present the practice of Examen. This practice was proposed by St. Ignatius Loyola over 400 years ago and is still used by many Christians today. Examen is particularly powerful when done at regular intervals (daily, weekly, seasonally) in that one becomes familiar with the pattern and it is easier to discern one's growth over the interval. May we suggest that during the season of Lent to begin on Ash Wednesday with an Examen of the previous year and then on subsequent Wednesdays, reflect on the week.

Find a comfortable place to sit. You may wish to have a journal and pen with you to record your thoughts. Take a few deep breaths and ask God to guide your reflections.

Ask: Where have I seen God?

Look back over the past interval and become aware of God's presence. Invite the Holy Spirit to bring moments and events to your mind.

Ask: What am I thankful for?

During this past interval, what are you most thankful for? Pay attention to even the small things: the food you ate, a conversation you had, something beautiful you saw, little pleasures.

Ask: How have I been feeling?

Pay attention to your emotions. One of St. Ignatius's great insights was that we detect the presence of the Holy Spirit in the movements of our emotions. Reflect on the feelings you experienced during the interval. Boredom? Elation? Resentment? Compassion? Anger? Confidence? What might God be saying through these feelings?

Ask: What should I pray for?

Allow God to highlight something you have reflected on, be it an event, a small joy or a feeling. Take that highlight and turn it into a prayer. Let the prayer flow from your heart and let it take whatever form it needs: intercession, praise, repentance, or gratitude.

Ask: How do I feel about tomorrow?

So far this exercise has been a looking back, now we shift our gaze forward. 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 him for help and understanding. Pray for hope.

You may wish to conclude this time with the following prayer:

Jesus, friend and companion on the journey of life, thank you for walking with me. Thank you for your gifts and blessings along the way. Help me to be more aware of them. Continue to guide and strengthen me in this season of Lent as I seek to know you more and experience more of your presence in my life. Amen.

If you have not taken any notes on your experience so far, you might want to write some things down now. Keeping a written record can be extremely helpful especially when it comes to the next time as you may notice patterns and recognize God's voice more easily.

It is our hope that this practice of Examen will help you to (in a paraphrase of St. Richard of Chichester) know God more clearly, love God more dearly and follow God more nearly. Amen.