



From Deacon Mark Miller's Desk

Busy life? Long hours? Stressful job? Too much homework? Spouse need help? Cooking/cleaning/laundry/ironing a 26-hour a day job? Sound familiar? Where, in the middle of a way-too-busy life, can we find the time to pray? Over 400 years ago, St. Ignatius Loyola proposed an answer that worked for his busy Jesuits. They still use it today, as do millions of other active, prayerful Catholics.

He called his answer "The Examen." It's a method or system of prayer intended for the end of the day when practically everyone has a few minutes left in his or her schedule. It only takes ten to fifteen minutes and involves reflection on the past 24 hours [and you probably slept about six of those!].

The Examen asks you to prayerfully reflect on the events of your day to see God's presence in your life and to discern the direction He wants you to take. You're not left on your own for those 15 minutes. The Examen is a structured prayer of five steps. The nature of The Examen means that every day's reflection becomes a unique experience. The Jesuit's Ignatian Spirituality site provides this guide you can use every day

1. Become 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. Gratitude is the foundation of our relationship with God. 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. One of St. Ignatius's great insights was that we detect the presence of the Spirit of God 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 sins and faults. But also look deeply for other implications. Does a feeling of frustration perhaps mean that God wants you to consider a new direction in some area of your work? Are you concerned about a friend? Perhaps you should reach out to her in some way.

4. Choose one feature of the day and pray from it. Ask the Holy Spirit to direct you to something during the day that God thinks is 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 him for help and understanding. Pray for hope.

St. Ignatius encouraged people to talk to Jesus like a friend. End the Examen with a conversation with Jesus. Ask forgiveness for your sins. Ask for his protection and help. Ask for his wisdom about the questions you have and the problems you face. Do all this in the spirit of gratitude. Your life is a gift, and it is adorned with gifts from God. End the Daily Examen with the Our Father.

Some spiritual directors encourage their clients to keep a journal as part of their examen prayer. Note the specifics God makes clear to you. If you're prompted to reach out to someone, write it down. Re-read your journal in the morning and follow up as needed.