The Examen

A great way to pray is to look for God’s presence in your life. More than 400 years ago St. Ignatius Loyola encouraged prayerful mindfulness by proposing what has been called the Ignatian Examen. The Examen is a technique of prayerful reflection on the events of the day or a longer time period in order to detect God’s presence and to discern his direction for us. Try this version of St. Ignatius’s prayer.

1. PRESENCE. Become aware of God’s presence. Look back on the events of the day (or time period—a week, a month, a season, a year) 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. GRATITUDE (Consolation). Review the day or time period 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 or time period’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. REVIEW (Desolation). 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 or time period. 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 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 work? Are you concerned about a friend? Perhaps you should reach out to her in some way.

4. RESPONSE. Choose one feature of the day or time period and pray from it. Ask the Holy Spirit to direct you to something during that time 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.


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 Examen with the Lord’s prayer.