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A DAILY EXAMINATION

By: Father O'Dell

Advent is here. It's the season when the cold days start to grip us but the promise of Christmas is around the corner with the warmth of that season. For Catholics, Advent also signals a time of reflection and conversion.

During Advent we turn toward a reflection of the "end times." Christmas is really about the end of the world as we know it, because when Christ came as a new born babe – He did so to save us, and to open again the Gates of Heaven to us. The end times also refer to the end of our own physical lives in death. We are called to reflect on how we have been living our lives and what we need to change in order to more adequately prepare to embrace the promise of God's Kingdom Come.

One way that we can easily look at how each of us has "been doing business" is by making a daily examination of conscience. When we take time every twenty-four hours, usually right before bed, to think about how we've lived the day just past - and what we would like to do differently tomorrow - we are investing time and energy into improving the Christian life within us. It's a valuable and important tool to help us see how we have been following God's Will and where we haven't. Some spiritual writers have said that the examination of conscience is among the most important things we do each day - because it keeps us always in mind of what God is calling us to do.

An examination of conscience is simple. First, review the Ten Commandments and compare them to what you did that day. Look over the Seven Deadly Sins and ask yourself how they apply to your life. Think about what you've done right and ask God to help you do those things again tomorrow. List and thank God for all of the gifts He has given you today and ask Him to help you improve them in the future. I said that the examination is simple and it is, but it's not easy. It's never easy to look at your life and make an honest appraisal of it. Some advice might help.

Don't just look at the negative or sinful things. It's important to change these, but it is also important to look at what you have done right and maximize them in the future. The more virtue we practice, the greater the ability we have to resist temptation as it comes our way. Think of the examination of conscience as if it were an inventory. In an inventory you count the good and the bad. You get rid of the stock that is not good, and you add to the stock that is good so that it gets better.

Don't try to change everything overnight. Remember, we have just today - change what you can in your life for today, and beg God to give you the strength to change more things tomorrow. We make a big mistake when we make huge promises about what we are going to give up or turn away from. We usually end up failing miserably because we have bitten off more than we can chew. Trust that God will give you the strength and the courage and the grace to change what is possible just for today.

Don't leave the examination in your head - bring it into the reality of the Sacrament of Confession in your heart. This sacrament not only gives us the grace of forgiveness - it also gives us the grace and strength to change our lives and resist sin. We can't change on our own, but through the love and mercy of God - anything is possible to us.

If you aren't in the habit of making an examination of conscience each and every day, this Advent would be a great time to start a new practice. May God Bless and keep you.