

The Examen Prayer

Of all the sins possible, Ignatius seemed to detest the sin of ingratitude the most. He writes, in a letter of March 18, 1542:

It seems to me, in light of the divine Goodness, though others may think differently, that ingratitude is one of the things most worthy of detestation before our Creator and Lord, and before all creatures capable of his divine and everlasting glory, out of all the evils and sins which can be imagined. For it is a failure to recognize the good things, the graces, and the gifts received. As such, it is the cause, beginning, and origin of all evils and sins. On the contrary, recognition and gratitude for the good things and gifts received is greatly loved and esteemed both in heaven and on earth.

Perhaps God doesn't necessarily want us always to be saying "thank you" so much as to be noticing how much we are loved and cared for by Him and, in turn, to respond by living a life of gratitude. Grateful people tend to be more generous and magnanimous with others.

The Examen Prayer of St. Ignatius, rooted in his Spiritual Exercises, has us begin with a sense of gratitude. Recalling our blessings, we remember how much we have to be grateful for. By noticing the gift, we are put in touch with the Gift-Giver, leading us to live with an "attitude of gratitude."

In his book *The Examen Prayer*, Fr. Timothy Gallagher, OMV, shares a helpful insight by a religious sister on the fruit of regularly practicing the prayer: "The examen is like a mini-retreat. It helps me to remember what is important. It helps me to get my priorities realigned. Through the examen, I remember the important things: that I'm lovable, that God loves me, that God loved me into creation. I remember the whole point of why I'm here: for God's, my own, and others' happiness. Then I can act out of this awareness during the day."

Fr. Gallagher offers a helpful format of the examen (sidebar, right). By praying just 10 minutes a day, we can develop an attitude of gratitude that shapes who we are, how we live, and how we love.

Transition

I become aware of the love with which God looks upon me as I begin this examen.

Gratitude

I note the gifts that God's love has given me this day, and I give thanks to God for them.

Petition

I ask God for an insight and a strength that will make this examen a work of grace, fruitful beyond my human capacity alone.

Review

With my God, I review the day. I look for the stirrings in my heart and the thoughts that God has given me this day. I look also for those that have not been of God. I review my choices in response to both, and throughout the day in general.

Forgiveness

I ask for the healing touch of the forgiving God who, with love and respect for me, removes my heart's burdens.

Renewal

I look to the following day and, with God, plan concretely how to live it in accord with God's loving desire for my life.

Transition

Aware of God's presence with me, I prayerfully conclude the examen.

Reflection

Grant me, O Lord,
to see everything now with new eyes,
to discern and test the spirits
that help me read the signs of the times, to relish the things that are yours,
and to communicate them to others. Give me the clarity of understanding that you gave Ignatius. Amen.

— *Pedro Arrupe, SJ, former Superior General of the Jesuits*