

The Ignatian Examen: Prayer for Finding God in All Things for this New Year

based on the *Prayer for Finding God in All Things: The Daily Examen of St. Ignatius Loyola*, by Sr. Joan Roccasalvo, C.S.J.

Our consumer society gravitates around evaluations of all kinds. Large corporations regularly conduct surveys that measure sales and profits. Products undergo improvements to ensure positive results with consumers. The end goal? A more satisfying experience in one's life using the product and an appreciation of the benefits, goals and outcomes of one's experience. The daily examen of St. Ignatius Loyola focuses not on a *better life* but on "abundant life, life to the full," as Jesus promises (Jn 10:10). Truly an outcome worth one's investment of time and energy.

Thus, the daily examen is that time set aside daily for prayer when I evaluate the hours of my day in the light of faith. In this I may assess my relationship with God and with myself, others, and with the world around me since I last paused in my day for prayer and an "examen."

"We must habitually pray over our thoughts, speech and opinions, aspirations, desires, decisions; over our physical, spiritual, material and mental needs; over our vows and our state of calling to better discern the will of God and respect our neighbor, in the spirit of charity." St Ignatius Loyola

The daily examen is of importance for busy people to pray because in doing so, we can more easily find God in all things, with the proper use of the reflective prayer of the **Examen**:

The process draws on these principles of spiritual awareness and development.

1. All things are "GIFT."
2. All things are SACRED; God lives more consciously within all created things: In inanimate things, in plants, in animals, and in you and in me in a holy and engaging process.
3. God is PROVIDENTIALLY at work always and everywhere in all created things.
4. All good things descend FROM God for us and for our benefit.

Pedro Arrupe, S.J. reflects on finding God in the context of love:

"Nothing is more practical than finding God, that is, falling in love in a quite absolute, final way. What seizes your imagination will affect everything. It will decide everything. It will decide what will get you out of bed in the morning, what you do with your evenings, how you spend your weekends, what you read, whom you know, what breaks your heart, and what amazes you with joy and gratitude."

Thus, our task in love is to discover ways in which we can daily discern the presence and power of God in our lives each day during this new year. Then comes the question - when should we give ourselves over to prayer during these days that will form the designs for the dawning new year? The suggestion is to pray using the examen format at least once a day and ideally twice each day: once by midday, and at the end of the workday, or before retiring.

Where can the examen be prayed? It can be prayed anywhere that is convenient, examples are on public transportation or at home where we are at least less set upon by our daily duties or when mothers, dads or caregivers can catch a few minutes when young children or the sick and infirm are safely occupied. Praying the examen provides a "breather" in these demanding roles when we are almost always on call. The examen is well adapted to individual needs for our busy days both in and out of the home.

How long does the examen take to pray? About ten to twenty minutes. It helps to plan for a definite, regular time to pray it and a regular time to reflect on what we have learned, seen, and heard in our moments of prayer with the Lord. Some people also keep a written record of their examens.

And Ladislav Orsy, S.J., a Jesuit author, praises daily life as the raw material for praying with the examen:

"To destroy our taste for the ordinary is to interfere with the foundations of our life. We need peaceful monotony to enjoy surprising happenings. At the time of monotony, the spirit of the inner man awakes. Not distracted, he or she can reflect on himself or herself and on the outside world. The quiet rhythm of the ordinary is the best framework for thinking in depth. Great deeds and movements never originate in shallow thoughts; all giant trees have and need deep roots...."

Format for prayer:

St. Ignatius Loyola's *Examen* is an opportunity for peaceful daily reflective prayer. It invites us to find the movement of God in all the people and events of our day. The Examen is simply a set of introspective prompts for you to follow or adapt to your own character and spirit.

The Beginning happens with a pause and a slow, deep breath or two to become aware that you are in the presence of the Holy. Then use the following steps to guide your prayer process:

Thanksgiving

Ask for what am I especially grateful for in the past day . . .

- The gift of another day...
- The love and support I have received...
- The courage I have mustered...
- An event that took place today...

Petition

You are about to review the progress of your day so far. Ask for the light to know God and to know yourself as honestly as God sees and knows you.

Review

Where have I felt true joy today?

What has troubled me today?

What has challenged me today?

Where and when and for what did I pause today?

Have I noticed God's presence in any of this?

Response

In light of my review, what is my response to God for the gifts of care and awareness I have discovered in my life today?

A Look Ahead

As I look ahead, what comes to mind for my attention?

With what spirit do I want to enter tomorrow or the next phase of this day?

End your prayer time thanking God for the opportunity to pray and consider ways to grow this day and for opportunities you have discovered to be more conscious of God's power and presence in your life. End the session with this or another prayer of praise and thanksgiving to God.

"Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning is now and ever shall be world without end. Amen!

If you have questions or would like more practice with such pray opportunities, please be in touch!

JBZ