



IGNATIAN DAILY EXAMEN

This meditation is based on the Ignatian Daily Examen.

OVERVIEW

The Daily Examen of St. Ignatius of Loyola is a method of praying by reflecting on the day.

Scripture

EPHESIANS 1:17-18

I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people.

Quotations

Be slow to speak, and only after having first listened quietly, so that you may understand the meaning, leanings, and wishes of those who do speak. Thus you will better know when to speak and when to be silent.

— *St. Ignatius of Loyola*

For those who love, nothing is too difficult, especially when it is done for the love of our Lord Jesus Christ.

— *St. Ignatius of Loyola*

Introducing the Practice

Saint Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556) did not initially set out to become a priest. He entered the army at age 17 and fought as a soldier in Northern Spain throughout his twenties. While recovering from a battle wound at age 30, Ignatius read the gospels and stories of Christian saints. He experienced a renewal in his faith at this time and decided to dedicate his life to serving God. Ignatius would go on to become an ordained priest and to found the Jesuit Order – an association of priests who were dedicated to both contemplative spiritual growth and active service in the world.

St. Ignatius introduces us to the Daily Examen in his Spiritual Exercises. This practice begins from the recognition that God reveals himself to us in countless ways throughout the day, yet we are often too busy or caught up in ourselves to notice. The Examen is a daily prayer exercise that invites us to recognize the presence of God, not only in moments of silent prayer, but throughout all the events of our day. This practice helps us move from a self-centered way of living to a God-centered way of living. By prayerfully reflecting upon the events of our day, we become more aware

of the ways that our thoughts, feelings, and attitudes affect our actions – in other words, the way that our being affects our doing. Prayerful reflection on the day draws us into a new way of being – a loving way of being from which compassionate actions naturally follow.

The Examen is divided into five parts. Broadly, these parts are (1) thanksgiving, (2) grace and light, (3) examination of the day, (4) sorrow, and (5) looking forward. Saint Ignatius gives us the following outline in his Spiritual Exercises:

Method for Making The General Examination
Made of Five Elements or Points

1. To give thanks to God, our Lord, for all the benefits received
2. To ask for His grace to know and expel our sins
3. To question our soul about the sins committed during this same day, examining ourselves hour after hour from the time of our awakening, in thoughts, words, and actions, in the order given in the Particular Examination
4. To ask forgiveness for the faults committed
5. To propose with God's help to correct ourselves

Then, afterward, to recite the Our Father.

Preparing for the Practice

Have everyone spread out to find a comfortable place to sit where they can still hear the voice of the person guiding the practice.

The Spiritual Practice

Close your eyes and take a few deep breaths as you center yourself for a time of prayer.

- We begin by giving thanks. Expressing gratitude helps us to focus on the positive blessings in our lives rather than on the negative hardships. Ask yourself: What do you have to be grateful for today? What are the big things that are easy to give thanks for, and what are the smaller things that you often forget to give thanks for? (2-3 minutes of silence)
- It is often easy for us to get so caught up in our own anxieties that we do not see our lives as God wishes us to see them. Take a deep breath in, and as you breath out, release all the stress and control you are holding on to, opening your heart to the wisdom of the Holy Spirit who lights up our darkness and shows us the way of peace, joy, and love. (2-3 minutes of silence)
- Think back to the moment that you first woke up this morning when the day was young and your eyes first witnessed the light. Trace the events of the day through each successive moment, from that first moment of awakening all the way through to the present moment. As you go through the events of the day, reflect on your inner reactions. How did you feel in each moment of the day? What was your attitude toward life in each moment? In what ways were you aware of God? (3-5 minutes of silence)

- As you think through your day, you may come across some moments where God felt far away. You may observe some moments when you did not act as you would have liked to act or when you did not do all that you could have done. When you come across one of these moments, focus on the thoughts and feelings you had around it. How did your attitude affect the way you acted or failed to act? (2-3 minutes of silence) Notice these moments so that you can recognize similar moments as they happen in the future - but then let these memories pass away. There is no need to judge or condemn yourself and no need to hold onto these things. Awareness of these moments alone will destroy what is not good and illuminate what is good. Know that God accepts you in all your imperfections and that you are free to accept yourself. (2-3 minutes of silence)
- Ask God to shed light on your day tomorrow. As you think about the potential joys and challenges that tomorrow may bring, pay attention to the feelings that accompany these future events. Allow these feelings to become prayers. Pray that God may renew your thoughts, feelings, and attitude so that you may face whatever challenges lie ahead with peace, confidence, and trust in the God who lights your path. (2-3 minutes of silence)

Duration: 15-20 minutes

Discussion Questions

1. How did it feel to go through the events of your day in this way?
2. Were you able to see God's presence more clearly in any moments of your day by going through it in this way?
3. How can this method of praying change the way that we live our active lives of faith?