

The King Calls us to Himself and to Mission!

Our Response – Week 3 – The Examen

The Objective: Our first two activities have opened the door for Jesus to be at the very center of each day as it unfolds. This week, we'll learn how to let Jesus, through the Holy Spirit, bring each day to an amazing conclusion as we allow Him to show us the highlights and lowlights of the day.

Background: One of the great gifts St. Ignatius of Loyola gave to the Church is the Prayer of the Examen, or the examination of consciousness, in the Spiritual Exercises. This is not to be confused with an examination of conscience. The examination of conscience is a reflection on sin. Where have I sinned in what I have done or what I have failed to do? But the prayer of the Examen is an examination of consciousness. When was I conscious of God's love and presence, and when was I not? It is a focused reflection on the presence and movement of God throughout our day. Ignatius believed the prayer of the Examen was a gift from God to be shared as widely as possible. This week we will make use the Examen to bring our day to a wonderful conclusion.

What to Do: You will pray the Examen as your final act before you go to sleep. After you get the day's activities wrapped up, but before you turn over to go to sleep – that's when you take 5-10 minutes to pray the Examen. Some like to sit in a chair beside the bed, kneel beside the bed, or simply lay down in the bed. First, ask the Holy Spirit to help you as you look back over your day in two passes. The first review might be described as looking for the blessings of the day. You look back over your day (from the beginning) and look for the times you were aware of God's presence in your day AND where you responded to His presence. Think about those times when you were in sync with God and His will for your life in specific moments during the day. Thank God for those moments, those gifts, those times of blessing in your day.

Once you've completed this first pass, you begin the second review of the day. This time, ask the Holy Spirit to show you the times when you fell short; the times you didn't live up to the person God created you to be. The purpose here is NOT to beat yourself up by focusing on all the things you did wrong during the day. Rather, you want the Holy Spirit to reveal those situations where you simply missed the mark in some definitive way. If we are Jesus' disciples, we desire to learn from our mistakes, our bad decisions, and to come to an awareness of those areas where we can do better. If we did fall into major sin during the day, then we repent and tell God we are truly sorry – then put our plan together to get to Confession at our earliest convenience. But the overall goal here is to simply be aware of those times when we did not live up to the virtuous life we were created to live – so that we can strive to do better the next day with God's grace and help.

Once you've completed your second review of the day, thank Jesus for His infinite love and mercy. Ask Jesus to give you a restful, peaceful night's rest – then relax, knowing that Jesus will watch over you as you sleep.

Parents: Teach this prayer to your children and encourage them to go to bed with it. It will teach them that God is present throughout their day. Check in with them during the week and ask them how it's going. Stress that it's not a test, it's not a formal thing. God loves them and desires to help them grow in their faith in this way. It's discover how God is active in their life and to let God show them how they can do better in those areas where they may struggle.