

Examination of Conscience

Based on the Ignatian Examen

Adapted from Joseph Tetlow, SJ. in "Choosing Christ in the World."

"How do things stand between me and God? Where am I coming from, and where is my life in Christ growing?" I can answer such questions satisfactorily only if I take the time to reflect. Here is a way of examining this deep and dynamic personal relationship. This examination can be used on a regular basis, as part of a daily examen, or in preparation for celebrating the Sacrament of Reconciliation. The emphasis of the Examen is not so much on "What am I doing wrong?" but on "How am I growing in my relationship to the God who loves and cherishes me?" It tries to identify the underlying attitudes, fears, anxieties which prevent us from living more fully in faith, hope and love.

- **Think about the good things that have come into your life.** Review the details of your daily life during the period under review. Recall the people, events or circumstances for which you are grateful. Notice any harmful or sinful actions, attitudes, emotions or desires for which you are not grateful. Ask for the ability to see clearly and in hope how you are growing more fully alive to God in and through these blessings.

- **Think about what your actions, omissions, attitudes, thoughts and desires** tell you about your relationship with God, yourself, and others.

- > Sometimes, a single event or several events stand out dramatically. Ask yourself what this action means. What are its origins? What were the circumstances under which it occurred? Does it embody the love of God, or does it reflect fear and distrust?

- > At other times, no single event stands out, but you might find a pattern emerging -- a series of events, all of which seem to stem from a common cause or lead to a common result. Ask yourself what this pattern means about your trust in God and love of God.

- > At still other times, the "climate" of one's life -- our overall attitude or mind-set -- might be the important thing that emerges from your examen. This attitude might range from gratitude and joy to anxiety and despair. Notice if this attitude is growing or receding. What are the circumstances which contribute to this attitude? What are its root causes? Ask what this mind-set shows about you and your relationship with God.

- **Take what you have learned to the Sacrament of Reconciliation** or to a conversation with your spiritual director. Bring to God the larger needs that you feel right now: an old resentment that you seem unable to shake; an inveterate habit that you badly want to get rid of; a kind of mindless living through the day without thanking and praising the Creator. Pray that God will help you hear and accept what God is trying to tell you. Listen to what the priest or director says. Let God surprise you with insight and console you with faith and hope.

- **Finally, determine to be more grateful, more trusting, more confident** in God's love and your ability to live in God's grace. Resolve to reshape mind-sets that stand between you and God. Resolve to change an attitude, shake off a fear, or grow in some other special way. Offer this larger movement in your life to God. Resolve to accept any other change or challenge that would come, were God to give you the larger gift you ask for. God is the master of our lives and ourselves; place your trust there and not in yourself.