

IGNATIUS EXAMEN

St. Ignatius of Loyola lived from 1491 to 1556. He was the youngest of about a dozen siblings, born into a fairly notable family in the castle of Loyola in the Basque region of northern Spain. He received excellent training as a military officer and a nobleman, which bolstered his temperament as a proud, vain, and ambitious young man. He notes in a memoir, “as a youth, I was accustomed to sinning. I was especially fond of gambling, womanizing, and dueling. My life was quite disordered.”

As captain of the Spanish Army battling against the French, he was hopelessly outnumbered. He insisted on continuing the fight, but a cannonball took him out at the legs. He sustained life-threatening injuries that required multiple corrective surgeries. At this time he still had vain dreams of parading around in court - to the point at which when surgery left his legs aesthetically unpleasing, he insisted the doctors re-break his legs and correct things so that he would look good in his tights.

The following year, during recovery, Ignatius experienced a kind of spiritual rebirth which led to a call to religious life. With a limp, a calling, and a re-examined life, Ignatius would later establish the Jesuit Order — otherwise known as the Society of Jesus.

This prayer is known as the Ignatian Examen. For the Jesuits this is a twice or three times per day prayer. It is a prayer that creates space to review your life. Many have thought of it as a prayer where one creates space for the Holy Spirit to guide you through the review of your day. This version of the prayer will be in five parts. Give each part as much time as you need. At the end you may want to sit silently for a few moments to really digest what has been revealed to you.

Step One: Place yourself in the presence of love

In the midst of our scattered and hectic schedules it is easy to forget where our real being resides. We often wonder where God is - when the truth is God has never moved. Our small selves become so consumed with its agenda that we forget where we really are. Like the fish looking for the ocean, it's easy to miss the reality that has been holding us up the whole time.

Take a moment to re-gather yourself — to re-member yourself. Find yourself in the presence of God, and allow this infinite cradle of love to be your guide through the rest of this practice.

Take a few moments to gather yourself now.

Step Two: Review your life with gratitude

Allow the presence of Love to be the lens through which you review your day. Let the Holy Spirit of Love be your tour guide. Start in the morning, with those first waking moments before you even opened your eyes. Don't just give thanks for this moment. Embody gratitude in that moment. Now follow Love's spirit moment by moment, hour by hour, and be grateful.

Ask to see the day as God sees the day. Ask to hear the day as God hears the day. Ask to perceive the day with the heart of Love.

Take a few moments to review your day with gratitude now.

Step three: Notice God's presence

As you sit suspended in Love, notice the times when love, generosity, peace, hope, joy, and light broke through into your life. Be specific about where you were, what you saw, what you smelled, and who you were with when this happened. Notice what was happening within you as you experienced God's presence in your day. What does that do in you now? Let these moments be your teacher. Allow them to call you toward your true self.

Take a few moments to notice God's presence throughout your day now.

Step Four: Notice the absence of God's presence

As painful as some of these moments can be, they can be your best teacher. Remember, you are suspended, held up, and completely surrounded in Love right now and in every moment. In the security of this embrace, let the Spirit guide you to the moments when love felt absent. Greed overcame generosity. Anxiety displaced peace. Pain covered joy. Darkness snuffed the light.

Be specific about these moments. Allow Love to inspire forgiveness and reconciliation. Let Love strengthen your heart and forge you into your true self. Maybe this dark moment was an offense committed against you. Allow Love to repair the pain, to strengthen your character with more confidence for tomorrow, and instill a new sense of empathy for the pain of those around you.

Take a few moments to notice the absence of God's presence in your day now.

Step Five: Look forward to tomorrow with anticipation.

Turning now to the 24 hours ahead of you, trust Love to give you everything you need for the tasks and responsibilities to come. Resolve that by grace, patience, and compassion, you will allow Love to flow freely in you and through you more tomorrow than you did today.

Take a few moments now, as much time as you need, as you prepare for the day ahead.