

EXAMEN

<http://orientations.jesuits.ca/carruthers.html#decisions>

Thanksgiving:

Begin by getting comfortable. Recall that you are in the presence of the Trinity, that the Father desires to give Himself to you through the Son and in the Holy Spirit. The Trinity beholds you. Thank the Trinity for your existence and ongoing life. We can thank the Trinity for the gifts of Creation, Redemption and Sanctification. Other gifts that we may spontaneously be grateful for are our vocation, the Eucharist, our talents and abilities, significant relationships, the air, the sun - whatever comes to mind. Besides these gifts, given the focus of the Awareness Exercise there may be some favours or some people specifically in the past day that immediately come to mind; they may be meaningful or seem unimportant. Do not choose what you think you should be grateful for, rather, by merely looking over the day see what emerges, what you notice, even slightly. Allow gratitude to take hold of you. Praise and thank God.

A word about thanksgiving: St. Ignatius once said that the most abominable sin he could imagine was the sin of ingratitude. He knew that an awareness of God's goodness and generosity is the foundation of our relationship with God. Once we recognize God's goodness, we spontaneously feel gratitude.

Also, gratitude is the foundational motive for all of our service to God. If we are grateful to God we will offer to Him all that we are and all that we have for His service. If our gratitude cools, our service will collapse into empty routine.

As our spiritual life deepens, we become more and more aware that all we have is gift (1 Cor 4:7), given to us far beyond anything that we might expect or deserve.

Sometimes we might find ourselves in a mood of resentment or depression where a feeling of gratitude is hard to muster. At that time, it is all the more important for us to express thanks to God. Not to pretend to feelings we do not feel, but to acknowledge, at whatever level we can, the truth of God's goodness to me.

Light

Ask the Holy Spirit for a spiritual and interior knowledge (light) of how the Trinity has been present with you this day. Ask the Holy Spirit to show you what God wants you to see.

We need to ask the Holy Spirit to enlighten us about what has transpired today because we are only too aware of our own blindness to see Him in the persons and events of our day. We can be ignorant of the movements of our heart, rationalize our motives, deceive ourselves about what is going on. To truly know ourselves is not something we are able to do on our own. We need to ask the Holy Spirit for the light that can reveal us to ourselves. Knowledge of God necessarily involves knowledge of self. In this way we can come to understand the ways of the Trinity in our life.

Review

This is a review of the past day in order to find God in all things of that day. Recall the persons, events and circumstances of the day, allowing the Lord to show you where He was meeting, encountering, challenging, being present to you in all things. One can begin by first recalling the persons, then the events, then the

circumstances. In each of these you can focus first on your words and actions, and then on your thoughts and feelings. Where were the signs of the Spirit? How did you respond?

What interior events were significant for you? Notice what stands out even slightly, such as joy, pain, turmoil, increase of love, anger, harmony, anxiety, freedom, enchainment, isolation, presence of God etc. Which ones were leading me toward God, and which were leading me toward myself? Where and when did I sense I was being led by God's Spirit? How did I respond to these persons, events and experiences?

Some Questions for Step 3

To Help Me Be Attentive To What Is Happening to Me and in Me
That I May Find God in All Things:

- Did I feel drawn by the Lord any time today?
- What have I learned about the Lord and his ways today?
 - in ordinary circumstances - in stray moments
- How did I meet the Lord today? In fears - joys
 - work - misunderstanding - sufferings?
- Where have I found it difficult to find the Lord today?
- How did the Lord's word come alive to me today in - my prayer time - scripture - other readings - liturgy
- In what ways have I encountered Christ through members of the community?
- In what ways have I been a sign of God's presence and love?
- How have I felt moved to go out of myself in concern for the
 - lonely - discouraged - sad - needy?
- How am I becoming more alert to God at work in the world?
- Have I experienced a growing awareness of - my being loved - my sinfulness?
- What area of my life do I feel most called to conversion?

The review of our day is not simply earnest introspection, it is prayer. It is going through our day with God, attentive to our inner feelings and thoughts and desires which is where we experience God's call in the midst of everyday activity.

In the spiritual life it is important that the head and the heart be integrated. Some fall into the danger of reducing the spiritual life to thoughts. Others fall into the danger of reducing the spiritual life to feelings. Both are important and need to be paid attention to. This Exercise does that. We also mentioned that the Father draws us to Christ. He does this through holy desires. This Exercise assists us to pay attention to and discern those desires.

This Exercise can be done anywhere - in a plane, on our sick bed, out for a walk, etc. As such, at those times when we may not be able to celebrate Mass or say the Office, we can find intimacy with the Lord each day by praying the Examen Prayer.

Eventually, we look for interior experiences of consolation and desolation which enable us to discern the presence of the Trinity and how we are to respond. It is important to know whether we are in consolation or desolation because when we are in consolation we are likely to make good decisions, and when we are in desolation we are likely to make bad decisions.

When we sense the presence of the Holy Spirit in this Exercise we pause and savour the experience allowing the texture of His presence to deepen within us. If we are having difficulty sensing the presence of the Holy Spirit, we simply bring this person, event or circumstance to the Holy Spirit, expose it to Him and wait. Desolation, although not necessarily right away, eventually gives way to consolation.

Response

Once we have reviewed our day we may have an awareness of the dynamic of God's offer and our response or lack of response that has been operating in our life that day. The fourth step is our present response to that awareness.

Insofar as we have discovered God's presence and our graced, free response, our present response is one of gratitude and wonder for the work of God in our soul. Genuine freedom always comes as a surprise to us, because it involves a sort of self-transcendence that we know we do not have in ourselves. When we discover that in our day, we need to praise God for it. And so we thank God for the persons, events, circumstances and unselfish attitudes in ourselves that have mediated His presence to us.

Conversely, when we discover our lack of response and self-centeredness during the day, then our present response is remorse and contrition. Contrition is not to be confused with shame. Contrition moves us out of ourselves and towards God. Shame simply moves us deeper into ourselves. So we ask God for His forgiveness in failing to respond to His presence.

It can also happen in reviewing our day we become aware we are being nudged to focus our attention on something in particular, for example, some recurring selfish response. Discuss this with Jesus. What kind of response is required, e.g. desire for change, some specific action to be taken...?

Tomorrow

We conclude this prayer by asking the Holy Spirit to help us be more attentive and responsive to His presence tomorrow. For example, you may need to pray to overcome something, to be more sensitive to God's activity in your environment, to let go, to deal with some issue, to be open to conversion in some area, to make some decisions, to act against some destructive forces in the various worlds of your life. We live the spiritual life one day at a time. With trust in God we ask for His "bread" for the needs of tomorrow. We do not look at changing our whole lives, we simply look at what we want to change tomorrow, and ask God's help for it. We conclude this prayer in trust, surrender, and confidence in God, and in making an offering of ourselves to Him. God's love and presence will be with us again tomorrow and we desire to respond more fully.

Fruits of this Exercise — If practiced daily, it is not long before certain effects start to be experienced.

After a week or so the following fruits may be noticed:

- a deeper peace within oneself
- a greater awareness of God at work in my life through other people
- a greater awareness of God at work in the lives of others
- a deeper sorrow for one's sins and lack of response to God
- a yearning to praise and thank God more
- a more contemplative approach to one's life in and through activity

a deeper awareness of the presence of God in one's life
a deepening sense that one's vocation is a personal service to the Lord
a more intimate sense of being united with the Trinity in one's ministry