



Deacon

Tim's Corner

CAN YOU HEAR GOD SPEAKING?

God listens to everything we think and say, and if we *listen during prayer*, we *can* hear His answers. We all want to improve our daily connection with God. Some types of prayer can help us to be receptive to God's prompting, to the point where we *know* what His answers to us are! We can hear God in at least four ways: (1) We encounter His presence in the natural world, which God created and pronounced "good" (Gn 1:31). (2) We hear God's voice in Scripture, the "word of God." (3) We hear God speaking in the teaching of the Church, and (4) God speaks to us in our experience. In our daily lives, He is in our relationships, our work, our decisions and accomplishments, our dreams and our disappointments. The Prayer method of the Daily Examen is a way to hear the voice of God in our experience.

The great saints, mystics and masters of prayer have long taught that cultivating a habit of prayerful reflection on our daily experience is a key to spiritual growth. Since the early times of the Church, Christians have reflected on the events of the day in order to detect God's presence and to discern His direction for them- - - to seek our Creator's will for us in an intimate, prayerful way!

One version of the Examen is the examination of conscience to prepare for the Sacrament of Reconciliation. But it is useful for much more than that. It can help us to see God's hand at work in our whole experience.

St. Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556), founder of the Society of Jesus (the Jesuits), believed that the Examen is a gift that has come to us directly from God, and that God wants it to be shared as widely as possible. Ignatius made it a rule of prayer for the Jesuit Order that they practice the Examen twice daily- at noon and at the end of the day.

The prayer has been described as "Rummaging for God." We look back on the previous day, rummaging through the "stuff", and finding God in it. We know He is there; we just have to look for him. If our prayer sometimes becomes too formal and abstract, the Daily Examen can help us avoid that and keep our feet on the ground. Our prayer will be grounded in the reality of our day. Each day we can look back on the last 24 hours with God, talk with him... and our prayer will never run dry. We will always have something to pray about! Look on the next page for one way to conduct a Daily Examen.



This five-step Daily Examen is based on the one described by St. Ignatius of Loyola in his "Spiritual Exercises," perhaps the most influential book about prayer ever written.

- Step 1. *Become aware of God's presence.* Look back on the events of the day in the company of the Holy Spirit. The day may seem confusing to you- a blur, a jumble, a muddle. Ask God to bring clarity and understanding, to show you where He was at work in each situation.
- Step 2. *Review the day with gratitude.* Gratitude is the foundation of our relationship with God. Walk through your day in the presence of God and note its joys and delights. Focus on the day's gifts. Look at the work you did, the people you interacted with. What did you receive from these people? What did you give them? Pay attention to small things- the food you ate, the sights you saw and other seemingly small pleasures. God is there in the details.
- Step 3. *Pay attention to your emotions.* One of St. Ignatius' great insights was that we can detect the presence of the Spirit of God in the movements of our emotions. Reflect on the feelings you experienced during the day. Did you feel boredom? Elation? Resentment? Compassion? Anger? Confidence? What is God saying to you through these feelings? In this reflection, God will most likely show you some ways that you fell short. Be sure to make note of these sins and faults. But look deeply for other implications as well. Are you frustrated? If so, perhaps this means that God wants you to consider a new direction in some area of your work. Are you concerned about a friend? Perhaps He wants you to reach out to the friend in some way.
- Step 4. *Choose one feature of the day and pray about it.* Ask the Holy Spirit to direct you to something during the day that God thinks is particularly important. It may involve a feeling, positive or negative. It may be a significant encounter with another person or a vivid moment of pleasure or peace. Or it may be something that seems rather insignificant. Look at it. Pray about it. Allow the prayer it provokes to arise spontaneously from your heart, whether it's intercession, praise, repentance or whatever.
- Step 5. *Look toward tomorrow.* Ask God to give you light for tomorrow's challenges. Pay attention to the feelings that surface as you survey what's coming up. Are you doubtful? Cheerful? Apprehensive? Full of delighted anticipation? Allow these things to turn into prayer. Seek God's guidance Ask Him for help and understanding. Pray for hope. St. Ignatius encouraged people to talk to Jesus like a friend. End the Daily Examen with a conversation with Jesus. Ask forgiveness for your sins. Ask His protection and help. Ask for His wisdom, too, about the questions you have and the problems you face. Do all this in the spirit of gratitude. Your life is a gift, and it is adorned with gifts from God. Conclude with the Our Father.