

Christian Prayer VI

The Examen

What is the Examen and where does it come from?

The *Examen* is a time of prayer that we use to review our life, to notice what has been going on, to ask for God's mercy for sins and failings, and to ask for God's continued help when we return to the business of daily life.

It is a form of prayer promoted by St Ignatius of Loyola in his *Spiritual Exercises*. Indeed it is the form of prayer that he found indispensable in helping to establish and sustain a truly faithful life.

Ignatius urged his Jesuit companions to make the *Examen* a daily habit. Whatever else was happening - sickness or pressures of work - he insisted that they should never omit the *Examen*. Twice a day, about midday and again before going to bed, they were to pause, and take a little time to use the *Examen* to review how they had lived their day.

St Ignatius described five 'moments' in the Examen

- I. The first is to give thanks to God for his blessings.
- II. The second is to ask for grace to know my sins and to be able to turn from them.
- III. The third is to recall what has happened in my day up to now – my thoughts, words, and actions.
- IV. The fourth is to ask pardon of God for my faults.
- V. The fifth is to resolve to live better by the grace of God.

And then the *Examen* is brought to an end by praying the Our Father... (the Lord's Prayer).

The Examen can be adapted to various circumstances.

Many who are not Jesuits have adopted and adapted this prayer method and find it invaluable.

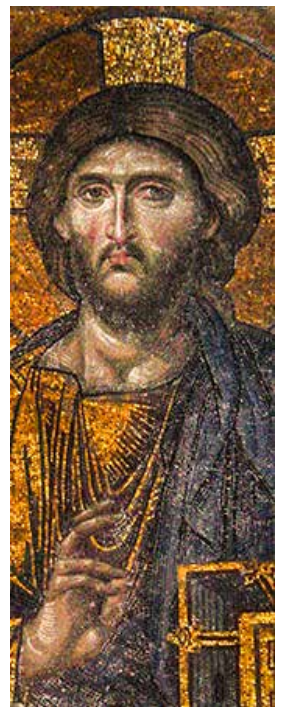
Some keep to the twice a day *Examen*.

Others use it once a day, and they generally establish a set time for their daily *Examen* - choosing a time according to their body clock and their other commitments! Some prefer first thing in the morning, others late evening, and still others last thing at night.

The *Examen* does not have to be prayed at a set time each day, but if we establish a habit in prayer the habit will, each day, help us find time for prayer.

In a school setting the *Examen* might be something for a class to do together - perhaps on a Friday – and perhaps especially using it to focus the class on how they have been during their time together during the week.

An adapted form of the Examen for weekly class use is provided overleaf.



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An adapted form of the Examen for weekly class use

°	Begin with the sign of the Cross	
°	Leader:	Let us spend a minute or two remembering the goodness and mercy of God, and asking him to help us remember the things we've been part of during this week.
°	<i>Pause for reflection</i>	
°	Leader:	Now quietly ask God to help you choose one thing from the week that has been a blessing for you, and that you wish to give thanks for.
°	<i>Pause for reflection</i>	
°	Leader:	Next quietly ask God to help you choose one thing from the week, that you are sad about or want to say sorry for.
°	<i>Pause for reflection</i>	
°	Leader:	And now – looking forward – ask God to help you know one thing in the coming days that you can ask him to help you with. ★
°	Leader:	Let us end our prayer by praying the Lord's Prayer: 'Our Father...'

- ★ You might consider setting up a classroom prayerboard.

If you do, then as part of the weekly Examen, invite students to write down on a slip of paper the thing they want to ask God's help with, and to pin the paper on the board (open for people to read or, if they choose, folded over so others cannot read it).

During the following week during times of classroom prayer, make a point of asking for God's continued help with these things.