**Pathways of Prayer….**

***The Examen***

Although not invented by, or unique to, St. Ignatius, the Consciousness Examen (or Awareness Examen or, more commonly, simply “the Examen”) is most often associated with him and with the order he founded. St. Ignatius judged this prayer so significant that he instructed his spiritual sons to NEVER skip it even if all other prayer dropped on a given day.

The Examen is a prayer of looking back over one’s day, reviewing it under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to find the presence and action of God within it. Rather than bracketing the “stuff” of daily life as a distraction to prayer, the Examen invites us to explore and plumb the depth of our day for God’s involvement within it. The Examen helps us appreciate where we have seen the face of God or heard God’s voice in the midst of ordinary life. An experienced hunter who sees animal tracks in the snow knows that a deer, fox or other creature has passed by. Similarly, the Examen helps us identify clues to God’s “passing by” when perhaps at the moment we were too busy or distracted to notice. This prayer method, then, assists us to “find God in all things.” Prayed daily, it makes us more attuned to the movements of the Holy Spirit in our life of discipleship.

Unlike the examination of conscience used before Confession, the Examen’s focus is not primarily on sin (although it includes a recognition of sin). This prayer’s goal is deep gratitude for God’s gifts, and growth in discernment about how well (or poorly) I respond to the will of God in my daily life. The Examen also effects interior transformation and greater freedom because through it I come to know better both myself and God’s dealings with me.

St. Ignatius recommended that the Examen be prayed twice daily for about 15 minutes, although most people practice it once a day in the evening. Traditionally there are five steps or movements. Initially they may seem mechanical, but over time the prayer takes on a natural flow.

Briefly noting down key points in a prayer journal after each Examen facilitates a conversation during spiritual direction about daily discernment and detecting God’s grace in daily life.



**5 STEPS OF THE EXAMEN**

This outline is based on St. Ignatius’ presentation in the *Spiritual Exercises* (n. 43), and is adapted from The Examen Prayer by Timothy M. Gallagher, OMV.

**Transition** I become aware of God gazing upon me with love as I begin my Examen. I recall that God has created and ordained all things.

**Step One: Gratitude** I note the gifts that God has given to me this day, thanking God for them.

**Step Two: Petition** I ask God for insight so that this Examen is a work of grace, not mere navel-gazing or ruminating over my day. I ask the Holy Spirit to shine His light so that I review the day with His eyes and guided by grace.

**Step Three: Review** With God, I prayerfully review the day hour by hour with its many activities and encounters. Did I experience something surprising or unusual today: a call or email from a friend I hadn’t heard from in years…a painful memory I had considered forgotten…something beautiful in nature…a news story that moved or disturbed me…As I walk through my day, I look for the stirrings of my heart (feelings) and mind (thoughts). Which have come from God? Normally the Holy Spirit acts to give us peace, joy, strength, encouragement. Which stirrings have clearly not been of God but represent suggestions from the enemy? I examine my choices in response to both sets of stirrings. How did God delight in me today? How was God proud of me?

**Step Four: Forgiveness** I own honestly any ways that I have turned away somehow from God today, whether by failing to love when an opportunity came long or by actively doing wrong in thought, word, or deed. I ask for healing and forgiveness from the God who removes my heart’s burdens. If necessary, I resolve to bring myself to Confession.

**Step Five: Renewal** The Examen ends by looking ahead briefly to the coming day with hope and confidence, entrusting it to God’s grace. With God, I concretely plan how to live the next day in accord with His loving desire for my life.

The Examen helps us grow in self-knowledge as well as in discerning God’s presence, action and will in daily life. Through it, we more easily find God in all things and love all things in Christ.