

- e) Interior motions are often very revealing. They can be the tip of the iceberg. By investigating below the surface you may discover in yourself attitudes and disorders which are un-Christlike, or attitudes which are Christlike. Ask yourself and the Lord, “Why am I experiencing these feelings? What thoughts led to them? What is their source?”, etc.
- f) It may be helpful to examine a particular area of your life (such as the area of your greatest weakness or disorder) in which the Lord is calling you to a deeper change of heart – to conversion. This is often called a particular examen, and may be done briefly at certain points through the day (morning and noon in addition to the evening).

#### **4. PRAY FOR THE GIFTS OF SORROW AND GRATITUDE**

As you come to an awareness (in step 3) of your failure to respond positively to the Lord, ask for His forgiveness and pardon. Say, “Lord have mercy!” Then from the heart ask for the grace and courage to grow.

You should also express your thanks to God for the ways that you have responded properly to the Lord. Thank God for these things in particular. Ask the Lord to strengthen these virtues within you.

#### **5. PRAY FOR HELP AND GUIDANCE FOR TOMORROW**

With trust in God, ask for His grace for the needs of tomorrow. For example, you might need to become more aware of what triggers your anger, and when this happens, to turn to the Lord for His immediate help. Perhaps you need God’s ongoing assistance in some task, job, ministry, or relationship with some person. Pray for it specifically.

(Compiled & edited by Fr. Scott McCaig, CC from various sources, especially from *Consciousness Examen* by Fr. Joseph McCardle, S.J.)

# CONSCIOUSNESS EXAMEN

“Lord, you have examined me and you know me.  
You know everything I do;  
from far away you understand all my thoughts...  
Examine me, O God, and know my mind;  
test me, and discover my thoughts.  
Find out if there is any evil in me  
and guide me in the everlasting way.”

(Psalm 139:1-2,23-24)

The purpose of this spiritual exercise is to develop authentic self-knowledge and an habitual practice of discernment. This exercise in growing awareness is suggested by St. Ignatius in his Spiritual Exercises and it contains five points. It is a fifteen-minute exercise that may be most profitably performed in the evening or shortly before retiring.

### 1. GIVE THANKS TO GOD OUR LORD FOR GIFTS RECEIVED

Begin by acknowledging your need to be grateful to God. He is the absolute Master and Creator of everything that exists. He is the source of all that is True, Good, and Beautiful. He is a loving, provident, bountiful Father, and you are a creature who is helpless and needy. Realize more deeply that all is gift from the hand of God (1 Cor. 4:7). Try to deepen your attitude of gratitude by thanking God for all things *in general*, e.g. for your existence, for His love and mercy, for a share in the divine life through baptism, for the air and the sun, for friends, for your vocation, for the Eucharist and all the Sacraments, etc. Praise the Lord and give Him thanks!

We might sometimes find ourselves in a mood of resentment or depression (or desolation) 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 don't feel, but to acknowledge, at whatever level we can, the truth of God's goodness to us.

### 2. ASK FOR THE GRACE TO KNOW YOUR SINS & ROOT THEM OUT

Many of our true feelings and motivations are genuinely hidden from us. The unconscious part of ourselves can have a powerful influence on what we feel and how we act.

Even apart from this, there is a natural tendency to rationalize our actions and to believe the sort of masks we put on for other people. Or we can deny or repress unpleasant or embarrassing things about ourselves. Or we can have attitudes of self-deprecation or contempt that distort our view of ourselves, others, and God. The possibilities of self-deception are endless. To truly know ourselves is not something that we are able to do alone.

Ask the Holy Spirit to enlighten you about what has transpired today, because you are only too aware of your own blindness to see Him in the events and persons of your day; and you also know your own ignorance in understanding the movements of your heart and mind and in understanding His ways in your life. So ask the Holy Spirit to show you what He wants you to see and understand today.

### 3. DEMAND AN ACCOUNT OF MY SOUL FROM THE MOMENT OF RISING TO THAT OF THE PRESENT EXAMINATION

(While experiencing step 3, apply step 4)

- a) Become *aware* of your day through a general survey. Relax in the Lord's presence and by looking back slowly over the events, persons, and circumstances of the day, listen to the Holy Spirit and allow Him to show you where He was meeting, encouraging and challenging you. Let the "corks" of persons and events float up to the surface of your consciousness. What specific events, thoughts, or experiences draw my attention?

If nothing comes to mind, try asking yourself some of the following questions: "When did I feel a sense of love, peace, joy, life, inspiration? When did I feel exhausted, confused, angry, mean, gloomy, tempted?"

- b) Focus on the *interior motions* that you experienced in, with, or because of these persons, events and circumstances. Interior motions may be **thoughts** (such as judgments about God, self, people, the world, plans, lines of reasoning, lines of association, or imaginings), **feelings** (such as peace, warmth, coldness, sweetness, bitterness, buoyancy, or depression), or **passions** (such as love, hatred, desire, fear, joy, sadness and anger). These motions may come strictly from ourselves, but may also come from, or be influenced by, God and His angels, or the enemy and his angels.
- c) Next, seek to understand these motions by interpreting them in the light of Gospel truths. They may be *ordered* or *disordered*, i.e., either helping you toward God or pulling you away from God. This will be a good indication as to their source.
- d) These motions are not sinful or virtuous in themselves (in this sense they have no moral value). It is how we *respond* to motions which may be either virtuous or sinful. The good ones are to be received and the evil ones are to be expelled. Examine your internal and external actions and responses to these motions in that light.

Ask yourself, "Where was this interior motion leading me? Towards love of God and neighbor, or away from God into self-centeredness? Did I respond properly by cooperating with grace and rejecting evil?"

Recognize that all these events were opportunities for growth permitted by the Lord that day. Consider where you found Him, and where you failed to recognize Him.