

“EXAMEN”

Being Vigilant in Our Day-to-Day Lives

I. Introduction

The Examen, a prayer practice deeply rooted in the spiritual tradition of St. Ignatius of Loyola, is more than a daily routine, it is a way of learning to “read” our lives with the eyes of faith. Its purpose is to help us become attentive to God's presence, recognize the movements of our hearts, and respond more generously to His grace.

The Examen begins not with self-analysis but with God's loving initiative. Before we examine our actions, we acknowledge that God has already been present throughout the day, in our work, relationships, successes, struggles, and even our failures. The purpose of the Examen is therefore not merely to evaluate ourselves but to recognize God's action in our lives and cooperate more fully with His grace.

For missionaries and formandi, the Examen is an essential practice for integrating prayer, discernment, and mission. By learning to “find God in all things,” we grow in freedom, authenticity, gratitude, and apostolic availability. Over time, the Examen becomes not simply an evening prayer but a way of living attentively in God's presence throughout the day.

II. Theological and Spiritual Foundations

1. Biblical Roots

- *Psalm 139:23–24*: “Search me, O God, and know my heart...”
- *Lamentations 3:40*: “Let us test and examine our ways, and return to the Lord!”
- *John 16:13*: “When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth.”

Scripture calls us to constant vigilance, discernment, and self-examination as we walk with God.

2. Ignatian Spirituality

- St. Ignatius saw the Examen as a gift for discerning God's presence in daily life.
- The Examen is not focused on fault-finding but on *awareness* and *growth*.

3. Missionary Relevance

- Encourages missionaries to read the signs of the times and the signs of their hearts.
- Promotes interior freedom, discernment, and readiness for apostolic service.

4. Anthropological Insight

- The Examen integrates head, heart, and action: thinking (awareness), feeling (affectivity), and willing (choice).
- It helps formandi grow in emotional literacy, accountability, and moral responsibility.

5. The Examen in the Claretian Tradition

- St. Anthony Mary Claret cultivated a continual awareness of God's presence and sought to discern God's will in the ordinary events of daily life. His missionary fruitfulness flowed from a heart that was constantly attentive to the inspirations of the Holy Spirit, open to ongoing conversion, and committed to responding generously to God's call.
- The Claretian Constitutions and the *General Plan of Formation* likewise emphasize continual conversion, discernment, and openness to the Spirit. The Examen therefore becomes more than an Ignatian practice; it is a valuable means of sustaining missionary zeal, deepening vocational fidelity, and renewing one's availability for mission.

III. The Five Steps of the Examen

Step 1: Recall the Presence of God

- Sit quietly, centre yourself, and breathe deeply.
- Imagine God gazing at you with love.
- Prayer: “Lord, help me to see my life through Your eyes.”

Step 2: Gratitude for the Day

- Name concrete moments of joy, beauty, and consolation.
- Give thanks for relationships, opportunities, and challenges that made you grow.
- Prayer: “Thank You, Lord, for all that has been gift today.”

Step 3: Ask for Light

- Invite the Holy Spirit to guide your review with honesty and compassion.
- Prayer: “Spirit of Truth, open my eyes to see as You see.”

Step 4: Review the Day

- Walk through the events of the day in sequence: morning, afternoon, evening.
- Notice interior movements: consolation (peace, joy, love) and desolation (fear, anger, confusion).
- Ask key questions:
 - Where was I closest to God?
 - Where did I resist His invitation?
 - What were my strongest emotions? How did I respond?
 - Did I love, forgive, serve, listen? Or did I harm, neglect, or close myself off?

Step 5: Heart-to-Heart Conversation with Jesus

- Speak freely with Jesus as with a friend.
- Express sorrow where needed, gratitude where appropriate, and hope for tomorrow.
- Make a concrete resolution (small and realistic).
- Conclude with a prayer, such as the Our Father.

IV. Practical Guidelines for Formandi

- **Regularity:** Practice the Examen twice daily (midday and night).
- **Environment:** Find a quiet, comfortable place; turn off distractions.
- **Duration:** 10–15 minutes per Examen is sufficient.
- **Posture:** Be relaxed but attentive (seated, feet grounded, slow breathing).
- **Journal:** Write down key insights, emotions, patterns, or resolutions.
- **Honesty:** Avoid self-condemnation; approach with mercy and openness.
- **Focus on Growth:** Notice trends over time — what is God inviting me toward?
- **Remember the Goal:** The purpose of the Examen is not to discover how imperfect you are but to discover how faithfully God has accompanied you throughout the day and how you are invited to respond more generously tomorrow.

V. Common Mistakes to Avoid

The Examen bears fruit when it is prayed with simplicity, honesty, and confidence in God's mercy. Formandi should be aware of some common pitfalls:

- Turning the Examen into a mere examination of conscience focused only on faults.
- Forgetting to begin with gratitude and God's loving presence.
- Expecting extraordinary spiritual experiences every day.
- Analysing every detail instead of praying with the events of the day.
- Becoming discouraged by distractions or periods of spiritual dryness.
- Making unrealistic resolutions that are difficult to sustain.
- Treating the Examen as an obligation rather than a conversation with God.

The goal is not perfection but growing attentiveness to God's presence and greater cooperation with His grace.

VI. Practical Exercises for Formation Sessions

1. **Guided Examen in Group:**
 - Formator leads the group through the five steps with pauses for reflection.
 - Share (voluntarily) one insight or feeling that emerged.
2. **Emotion Mapping Exercise:**
 - Invite formandi to identify the predominant emotions they experienced during the day.
 - Reflect together:
 - Which emotions brought me closer to God and to others?
 - Which emotions invited me to grow?
 - Which emotions need healing rather than suppression?
 - Discuss how emotions can become valuable indicators in the process of discernment.
3. **Scripture-Based Examen:**
 - Use a verse (e.g., *"Be still and know that I am God"* – Ps 46:10) as the entry point.
4. **Thematic Examen:**
 - Focus on a theme (e.g., relationships, speech, time use) for a week.
5. **Community Examen**
 - Once each month, the community may celebrate a shared Examen.
 - Suggested questions:
 - For what are we most grateful as a community?
 - Where did we experience God's presence together?
 - Where did we fail to support one another?
 - What is the Holy Spirit inviting our community to become?
 - What concrete step shall we take together during the coming month?
 - This practice strengthens communal discernment, reconciliation, and missionary unity.

VII. Accompaniment Guidelines for Formators

- **Teach Gradually:** Introduce one step at a time until formandi are comfortable with the whole process.
- **Model the Practice:** Share your own experience of the Examen occasionally.
- **Listen Without Judgment:** When formandi share their insights, affirm their growth rather than focus only on faults.
- **Help Notice Patterns:** Encourage them to observe recurring themes or struggles.
- **Encourage Perseverance:** Remind them that dryness or distraction is normal; consistency bears fruit.
- **Help Formandi Recognize Grace:** Encourage formandi to notice not only their failures but also the many ways God has been present and active throughout the day. Help them understand that growth begins with recognizing God's initiative before evaluating their own responses.

VIII. Assessment Tools

1. Self-Assessment: Cooperation with Grace

Instead of asking only whether the Examen was completed, encourage formandi to reflect on how they responded to God's invitations.

During today's Examen I noticed...	My response
God's invitation	Responded immediately

God's invitation	Responded later
God's invitation	Ignored it
God's invitation	Still discerning

2. Journaling:

- Review journals monthly to notice growth in gratitude, emotional awareness, and freedom.

3. Formator Observation:

- Look for increased serenity, empathy, and interior freedom in daily interactions.

4. Peer Sharing:

- Small group sharing to validate insights and encourage accountability.

5. Monthly Growth Indicators

- Invite formandi to rate themselves (1–5) on the following areas:
 - Gratitude
 - Awareness of God's presence
 - Emotional awareness
 - Interior freedom
 - Discernment
 - Charity
 - Availability for mission
- The purpose is not comparison but noticing gradual growth over time.

VIII. Resources for Further Study

- **Books:**
 - *The Examen Prayer* by Timothy Gallagher
 - *Sleeping with Bread: Holding What Gives You Life* by Dennis, Sheila & Matthew Linn
 - *Awareness* by Anthony de Mello
 - *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius* (especially the General Examen)
- **Apps:**
 - Reimagining the Examen (Loyola Press)
 - Pray As You Go – Guided Audio Examens
- **Scriptural Passages for Reflection:**
 - Ps 139:1–18, Ps 32, Lk 24:13–35, Jn 15:1–17

IX. Conclusion

The Examen is far more than a prayer technique; it is a school of attentiveness that gradually forms the heart of a missionary disciple. By reviewing each day in the light of God's presence, we learn to recognize grace, discern the movements of the Spirit, and respond more freely to God's invitations.

For the Claretian missionary, the Examen nurtures continual conversion, deepens apostolic discernment, and renews missionary availability. It transforms ordinary experiences into moments of encounter with God, enabling missionaries to preach with authenticity, accompany others with compassion, and serve with joyful generosity.

Practised faithfully, the Examen becomes not merely an evening prayer but a lifelong way of walking with Christ—recognizing Him in every circumstance and responding each day with greater love, freedom, and commitment to His mission.

Appendix

Guided Examen Script 1 – Full Daily Review (7 minutes)

Step 0: Preparation (30 sec)

- Sit comfortably, relax, breathe slowly.
- Be aware of your body, your emotions, and your surroundings.

Step 1: Recall God's Presence (1 min)

- Imagine God is here with you, watching over your day.
- Pray: "Lord, help me see my life through Your eyes. Open my heart to Your Spirit."

Step 2: Gratitude (1 min)

- Slowly review your day in your mind.
- Name at least 3 specific gifts or joys you experienced.
- Thank God for each one.

Step 3: Ask for Light (30 sec)

- Invite the Holy Spirit to guide you with honesty and gentleness: "*Spirit of Truth, help me see my thoughts, words, and actions clearly.*"

Step 4: Review the Day (3 min)

- Walk through your day: morning → afternoon → evening.
- Notice where you felt peace, joy, or connection, and where you felt tension, anger, or fear.
- Reflect with these questions:
 - When did I experience God's love today?
 - Did I share God's love with others? How?
 - Did I hurt or neglect anyone?
 - What emotions dominated my day, and how did I respond?
 - What am I thankful for, and what do I regret?

Step 5: Conversation with Jesus (1 min)

- Speak freely to Jesus: gratitude, sorrow, hope, or desires.
- Ask for forgiveness where needed, guidance for tomorrow, and resolve to grow.
- Conclude with the Our Father or another brief prayer.

Guided Examen Script 2 – Midday Check-In (5 min)

Step 0: Preparation (30 sec)

- Pause wherever you are. Sit or stand comfortably.
- Breathe slowly, notice tension, release it.

Step 1: God's Presence (30 sec)

- "Lord, I pause to remember You are with me. Let me see You in this day."

Step 2: Gratitude (1 min)

- Identify one or two small blessings or moments of beauty since morning.
- Thank God aloud or silently.

Step 3: Ask for Light (30 sec)

- Invite the Spirit: "Show me where I have responded well or poorly today."

Step 4: Review (2 min)

- Briefly review the morning:
 - Where was I attentive?
 - Did I act with patience, love, or humility?
 - Did I ignore God's presence or a person in need?

Step 5: Talk with Jesus (30 sec)

- Share one thing with Jesus that stands out.
- Ask for help for the afternoon to respond to God's invitations.

Guided Examen Script 3 – Focused on Relationships (5–6 min)

Step 0: Preparation (30 sec)

- Sit comfortably, breathe, release distractions.

Step 1: God's Presence (30 sec)

- Invite God to be present and attentive to your interactions today.

Step 2: Gratitude (30 sec)

- Name people who enriched your day or showed God's love.
- Thank God for each encounter.

Step 3: Ask for Light (30 sec)

- "Holy Spirit, help me see where I loved well and where I fell short."

Step 4: Review (2–3 min)

- Recall your interactions: family, friends, colleagues, strangers.
- Reflect on these questions:
 - Did I act with kindness and respect?
 - Did I listen or interrupt? Encourage or criticize? Forgive or judge?
 - Where was God present in these moments?

Step 5: Conversation with Jesus (1 min)

- Speak to Jesus about your relationships.
- Ask for forgiveness for any failings and for grace to love better tomorrow.
- Conclude with a prayer of dedication.

Tips for Formators:

- Lead the group slowly; allow pauses for reflection.
- Encourage participants to journal insights afterward.
- Start with 5 min, then gradually extend to 10–15 min as comfort grows.

Digital Examen

As technology increasingly shapes daily life, it is helpful to review our digital habits in the light of the Gospel.

Reflect briefly:

- How did technology help me serve God and others today?
- When did it distract me from prayer, work, or relationships?
- Did I communicate online with charity and respect?
- Did I use social media responsibly?
- What digital habit is God inviting me to change tomorrow?

This brief review helps integrate digital life into Christian discipleship and missionary witness.

Examen Weekly Planner for Formandi

Theme: Daily Awareness and Vigilance

(10–15 minutes per day, adaptable for group or personal practice)

Day 1 – Gratitude and God's Presence

Focus: Recognize God's gifts and presence in your day.

- **Step 1:** Sit quietly, breathe, and sense God near you.
- **Step 2:** List 3–5 moments of blessing today.

- **Step 3:** Ask the Holy Spirit to open your eyes to these gifts.
- **Step 4:** Reflect: How did I notice God today? What small joys might I have overlooked?
- **Step 5:** Speak to Jesus: Thank Him for His presence. Resolve to stay attentive tomorrow.

Journal Prompt: “What is one gift from God today that I almost missed?”

Day 2 – Personal Growth and Desires

Focus: Examine motives, intentions, and longings.

- **Step 1:** Recall God’s loving presence.
- **Step 2:** Give thanks for opportunities to grow today.
- **Step 3:** Ask the Spirit to reveal your true desires and intentions.
- **Step 4:** Reflect: Where did my actions align with God’s will? Where did I act selfishly?
- **Step 5:** Talk to Jesus about one habit or attitude to nurture or change.

Journal Prompt: “Which of my desires today reflected God’s love, and which reflected fear or ego?”

Day 3 – Relationships and Service

Focus: Notice how you connect with others.

- **Step 1:** Invite God into your heart, recalling His love for all people.
- **Step 2:** Thank God for encounters today—big or small.
- **Step 3:** Ask the Spirit to reveal where you served or failed to serve others.
- **Step 4:** Reflect: Did I act with patience, kindness, or generosity? Did I harm, neglect, or misunderstand anyone?
- **Step 5:** Speak to Jesus: Ask for grace to love better tomorrow.

Journal Prompt: “Which encounter today allowed me to be an instrument of God’s love?”

Day 4 – Emotions and Inner Movements

Focus: Identify emotional patterns and their impact on choices.

- **Step 1:** Centre yourself and invite God’s presence.
- **Step 2:** Thank God for moments of peace, joy, and insight.
- **Step 3:** Ask the Spirit to help you notice your emotional responses.
- **Step 4:** Reflect: What emotions dominated my day? How did I respond? Which emotions helped me grow, and which held me back?
- **Step 5:** Talk to Jesus about one feeling you want to surrender or transform.

Journal Prompt: “How did my emotions today either open me to God or close me off?”

Day 5 – Failures, Regrets, and Forgiveness

Focus: Humbly review shortcomings and seek God’s mercy.

- **Step 1:** Invite God’s presence with openness and honesty.
- **Step 2:** Thank God for patience and second chances in your life.
- **Step 3:** Ask the Spirit to show moments where you fell short.
- **Step 4:** Reflect: Where did I fail to love, forgive, or act wisely? What can I learn from these failures?
- **Step 5:** Speak to Jesus: Confess, ask forgiveness, and commit to growth.

Journal Prompt: “What mistake today taught me something about myself and God’s mercy?”

Day 6 – Decisions and Discernment

Focus: Notice how God guides your choices.

- **Step 1:** Recall God's presence in your life.
- **Step 2:** Thank God for the freedom and opportunity to choose.
- **Step 3:** Ask the Spirit to illuminate your decision-making today.
- **Step 4:** Reflect: Did I follow God's guidance? Where did I rely on fear, habit, or pride instead?
- **Step 5:** Talk to Jesus: Ask for wisdom in future choices and clarity for discernment.

Journal Prompt: "Which choice today reflected God's will, and which reflected my own desires?"

Day 7 – Integration and Vision

Focus: See the week as a whole and align life with God's call.

- **Step 1:** Sit in God's presence and review the week.
- **Step 2:** Give thanks for growth, lessons, and grace experienced.
- **Step 3:** Ask the Spirit to reveal patterns, lessons, and invitations from God.
- **Step 4:** Reflect: How has God been shaping my heart this week? What am I being called to embrace or change?
- **Step 5:** Speak to Jesus: Commit one concrete resolution for the coming week. Conclude with the Our Father.

Journal Prompt: "What is the main lesson God has taught me this week, and how will I live it out?"

Practical Notes for Formandi

- Use this planner **flexibly**; you may swap themes depending on needs.
- Each day, **10–15 minutes** is sufficient.
- Journaling is **optional but highly recommended** for tracking growth.
- Pray with **honesty, humility, and openness**—the goal is awareness, not perfection.

Guide for a Particular Examen on Virtues

Focus: Becoming attentive to God's action in the development of specific virtues in daily life.

I. Introduction

A particular Examen focuses on **one virtue at a time** (e.g., patience, humility, charity, courage). Instead of reviewing the entire day broadly, you concentrate on how that virtue appeared—or was missed—in your thoughts, actions, and interactions.

Purpose:

- Increase awareness of God's presence in your moral and spiritual growth.
- Strengthen intentional practice of virtues in daily life.
- Identify obstacles and patterns that hinder living out the virtue.

II. Preparation

1. Choose a Virtue

- Example: Patience, humility, charity, prudence, courage, gratitude, or forgiveness.
- You may rotate virtues each day or week.

2. Settle Yourself

- Sit comfortably, relax, and breathe slowly.
- Bring the chosen virtue to mind, asking the Spirit to help you notice moments of growth and challenge.

3. Prayer for Guidance

- *“Holy Spirit, guide me to see where I have lived this virtue and where I have fallen short. Help me grow in the likeness of Christ.”*

III. Five Steps of the Virtue-Focused Examen

Step 1: Recall God’s Presence

- Imagine God present in your heart and in all encounters of the day.
- Ask God to help you see how He invited you to practice the chosen virtue.

Step 2: Gratitude

- Thank God for opportunities you had to practice the virtue today.
- Include even small gestures—e.g., listening patiently, offering a smile, showing restraint.

Step 3: Ask for Light

- Invite the Spirit to illuminate both **consolation** (moments you lived the virtue) and **desolation** (moments you struggled).
- Reflection question: *“Where did God invite me to grow in this virtue today?”*

Step 4: Review the Day with the Virtue in Mind

- Walk through your day, noticing situations where the virtue could have been practiced.
- Ask yourself:
 - Did I act in alignment with this virtue?
 - Did I resist it? Why?
 - How did my thoughts, words, or emotions support or hinder the virtue?
 - Who helped me practice this virtue or challenged me to grow?
- Example Prompts by Virtue:
 - **Patience:** Did I remain calm under pressure? Did I listen fully to others?
 - **Charity:** Did I act with generosity or selflessness? Did I judge or withhold love?
 - **Humility:** Did I acknowledge others’ contributions? Did I seek recognition or control?
 - **Courage:** Did I face a difficult situation faithfully? Did I avoid a necessary challenge?

Step 5: Conversation with Jesus

- Speak to Jesus about your successes and failures in living the virtue.
- Ask for forgiveness, grace, and concrete steps to grow.
- Resolve to act intentionally in moments tomorrow.

IV. Practical Guidelines

- **Frequency:** Daily for one virtue, or rotate 2–3 virtues per week.
- **Duration:** 5–10 minutes is sufficient.
- **Journaling:**
 - Note situations where the virtue was evident or absent.
 - Record patterns or recurring challenges.
- **Integration:**
 - At week’s end, review progress across virtues.
 - Identify one virtue to continue focusing on next week.

V. Sample Virtue-Focused Reflection Prompts

Virtue	Reflection Questions
Charity / Love	How did I show love today? Did I withhold love from anyone? How did God’s love show to me?
Patience	Where did I grow impatient? How did I respond to delays, interruptions, or annoyances?
Humility	Did I acknowledge the contributions of others? Did I act for praise or recognition?
Courage	Did I face a challenge faithfully? Did I avoid a task out of fear?

Gratitude	Did I notice the blessings today? Did I take anything for granted?
Forgiveness	Did I forgive others or hold grudges? Did I seek reconciliation?

VI. Accompaniment Guidelines for Formators

- Encourage formandi to focus on **one virtue at a time** for intentional growth.
- Use group sessions to discuss insights (voluntarily) without judgment.
- Help notice recurring patterns: Are certain virtues consistently difficult to live? What spiritual practices can support growth?
- Offer gentle guidance and prayer support for forming a habit in the chosen virtue.

Virtue-Focused Examen Tracker (Weekly)

Day	Chosen Virtue	Situations Where Virtue Was Practiced (Consolations)	Situations Where Virtue Was Missed (Desolations)	Feelings / Reactions	Insights / Lessons	Resolution for Tomorrow
Monday						
Tuesday						
Wednesday						
Thursday						
Friday						
Saturday						
Sunday						

How to Use the Tracker

- Chosen Virtue:**
 - Pick one virtue to focus on for the day (e.g., patience, charity, humility).
 - Rotate virtues throughout the week if desired.
- Situations Where Virtue Was Practiced (Consolations):**
 - Note concrete examples where you lived the virtue.
 - Include small or seemingly insignificant moments.
- Situations Where Virtue Was Missed (Desolations):**
 - Honestly record where the virtue was absent.
 - Focus on learning, not self-condemnation.
- Feelings / Reactions:**
 - Observe your emotions and internal movements in those situations.
 - Were you anxious, joyful, proud, humble, frustrated?
- Insights / Lessons:**
 - Identify patterns, triggers, or lessons.
 - How did God's grace show in these experiences?
- Resolution for Tomorrow:**
 - Write a concrete, practical step to grow in the virtue tomorrow.
 - Example: "Practice patience by listening fully before responding."

Tips for Formators:

- Encourage formandi to fill the tracker **daily** or at least **every evening**.
- Review patterns weekly in accompaniment sessions.
- Highlight growth rather than focusing only on shortcomings.
- Use insights to help set intentional virtue goals for the next week.