

THE SHAPE OF THE EXAMEN

I. THANKSGIVING

'All that I have is yours' (John 17:10)

Examen is prayer and every prayer we make through Jesus Christ; cut off from Him we can do nothing. The stronger my faith the greater my sense of emptiness and of God's goodness. Gratitude for God's love-in-deeds was a powerful element in the life of St Ignatius. I

Thanksgiving will help me to discover God's daily gifts and gradually to recognize that all is gift:

What have I got to be grateful for today?

How much do I take for granted?

What has made me ungrateful, dissatisfied, frustrated?

Am I becoming more grateful and contented?

II. PRAYER FOR THE LIGHT

'The Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in my name will teach you everything.'
(John 14:26)

Only the Holy Spirit can help me to know myself as a son/daughter of the Father and a companion of Jesus. I need to have my eyes opened: I need light to see whether my gratitude is in proportion to the worth of so many gifts. The Holy Spirit teaches me each day about Christ, about my life in Christ and about my use and acceptance of gifts. The gifts of the Holy Spirit are: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, trustfulness, gentleness and self-control (Gal.5:2).

III. EXAMINATION

Too much attention to our own victories and failures can make us self-absorbed and confirm us in the illusion that we manage our own lives. Examination is rather a question of asking how I respond to God's loving action in my life:

How was I drawn to God today: a friend, an event, a book, the beauty of nature?
Have I learnt anything about God and His ways: in ordinary occasions, spare moments?

Did I meet Him in: fears, joys, work, misunderstandings, weariness, suffering?

Did His Word come alive in: prayer, scriptures, liturgy?

Did I bring Christ to my community? Did they bring Christ to me?

Have I been a sign of God's presence and love to the people I met today?

Did I go out to: the lonely, the sorrowful, the discouraged, the needy?

Was I aware of God's work in my own locality, my country, in other nations of the world, in the Church at large?

Have I had a keener sense of being loved, of sinfulness, of desire to give back what I have received, of dependence?

Is there some part of my life still untouched by Jesus Christ and where He is calling me to a change of heart?

IV. SORROW

A true awareness of my sinfulness is still a gift granted in love by the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. I can express sorrow for the ways in which I have failed to respond to His love at work in me. This can lead to:

Wonder at constantly being brought home.

Joy and gratitude because I share in the victory of Christ.

Mistrust of self and trust in God.

Serene acceptance of my weakness.

Conviction that I am being converted from a sinner into a son/daughter of God.

V. HOPE FOR THE FUTURE

Gifts in the past and gifts in the future; all the meetings and events of the next few hours will be full of gifts and full of their Giver. How do I face the future?

With apathy, distaste, fear, despondency? Which parts of my life particularly call for the Lord's healing and protection? The more I trust in God and allow Him to lead me the more I experience hope in Him, who raises me up from weakness, poverty and pain to the joy of His Resurrection.

(Taken from an abbreviated version of this article by Fr. George Aschenbrenner)