

Let's Go Deeper...

Wednesday, February 17, 2016

On Sunday we passed Milepost 1 on our 40-day Lenten Road to Renewal: Self-Examination and Introspection.

There are numerous ways to cultivate an awareness of the Spirit's presence and leading in our lives. The time-honored practice with which I am most familiar and is a central part of my spirituality is called **The Examen**. Developed by Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556), it has been described as "a prayerful review of your everyday life for the purpose of connecting with God."



The Examen consists of five steps. As I practice them, they are:

1. **Invoke the Holy Spirit's aid.** As I prepare to examine my life in the light of God's presence, will, and way, I often pray the words of the great hymn:

*Open my eyes that I may see / glimpses of truth thou hast for me.
Silently now I wait for thee / ready my God thy will to see.
Open my eyes illumine me / Spirit divine.*

2. **Give thanks for all God's gifts.** Ignatius believed healthy souls are rooted in the soil of gratitude. He encourages each day's Examen begin with a rehearsing in one's mind of the good gifts of life. He encourages specificity. In my personal practice of the Examen, I write in my prayer journal 5-7 things for which I am grateful. On Monday, my list included: a hot shower on a cold morning, a cup of coffee, my "prayer chair," the brilliant bouquet of music Michael Rintamaa improvised for the Offertory during the 8:30 a.m. worship service, Jennie and I offering thanksgiving for our son's 30th birthday at the chancel steps after worship and receiving prayer and anointing from Elizabeth and John Zink, and a tie gifted to me by Darlene Nall that belonged to her father who was a pastor. Ignatius knew gratitude is a powerful medicine, an antidote to much of what ails us.

Speaking of gratitude, here's one of my favorite pieces from *Godspell* (I still have the original album): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=155n8qPd9A>

3. **Review the events of the day.** This is the heart of the Examen. Ignatius counsels us to look back over the events of the day. I was taught to imagine I am watching a movie of my day. I am to let the day's encounters, interactions, and events play out in my mind's eye. What did I do? Who was I with? The key to Ignatian spirituality



is to pay attention. Ignatius believed, as do I, that God is present and active throughout the day. If only we had eyes to see and ears to hear! A few years ago, feeling I was missing or forgetting much of what was transpiring during the day, I began carrying an index card in my shirt pocket. When things happened or were said that caught my eye or ear, I wrote them down. When I do my Examen (I do mine first thing in the morning as opposed to last thing at night), I review the notes on my index card.

4. Ask, “Where was God in all that?” As I remember my day, I ponder: Did anything happen or was anything said that struck me for good or for ill? I pay close attention to my feelings. Feelings of joy, peace, delight, wonder, and awe are one thing. Anger, anxiety, sorrow, and frustration are another. Feelings, I was taught, are signposts or warning flags to be paid attention to. They say, “Look over here! Something important is going on.” When I remember a particularly strong emotion, I ask God what it means. Why did it arise? What does it reveal about me? What can I learn from it about my relationship to God or others? In the event of strong negative feelings, I ask, How did I react? Could I have responded differently? Do I need to apologize? Ask God for help? In the event of positive feelings, I am moved to gratitude once again.

5. Look at the day ahead. I bring to my attention some of the appointments, people, and decisions that await me. I ask God for guidance or insight in facing what is ahead. If certain people or circumstances come into my thinking, I take that as a prompt to pray for them. I was taught to close the Examen by asking, “What is one concrete thing I can do today, Lord, to honor you or bless another?” And then to ask, “Is there anything else you would like to say to me before I begin my day?”

Learn more about Ignatian Spirituality: <http://www.ignatianspirituality.com/>

Tonight (Wednesday, February 17). Our mid-week Lenten Soup Suppers begin at 6 p.m. in the Fellowship Hall followed by Dr. Paul Jones of Transylvania University speaking about the Open Communion Table of Disciples of Christ at 6:45 p.m.

This Sunday... We’ll arrive at Milepost 2 of the Lenten Road to Renewal: Repentance. The text will be Luke 13:1-9.

--Pastor David