

## The Examination of Consciousness

*"How do things stand between me and God? Where am I coming from, and where is my life in Christ growing?"*

*I can answer this satisfactorily only if I take leisure to reflect. For I am examining here a deep and dynamic personal relationship. Here is a way of doing that:*

- First, I take time to thank God for the good things that came into my day. I work in considerable detail here, almost like a little child. For instance, I thank God for sunshine or rain, for getting a chair fixed, for a phone call from a friend, for feeling good all day long, for having the energy to get a job done late in the evening. In this process, I may well come across some action that I did or some emotion or desire that I entertained for which I can not thank God, since it was offensive or sinful.
- Second, having thanked God for all the day's gifts as much as I can, I beg that God will give me this further gift: to see clearly and in hope how I am growing more fully alive to God in them and through them, and also where they might be keeping me from growing.
- Third, I then examine carefully what my actions, omissions, thoughts, desires tell me about my relationship with God and with myself and others in God. Each of us finds a good way to do this. Sometimes, a single event stands out dramatically; for instance: I lost my temper badly; I felt very great joy at a piece of news; I resisted making a decision someone asked me to make; I spent much too long a time on a simple task. Patiently, I ask myself what my action or my attitude meant. Did it embody love of God, or fear or distrust? Did it suggest that I have gotten overcommitted, and why would I get overcommitted? Did it suggest that I do not approve of my life or my life world?

At other times, no event stands out, but we might find a pattern emerging in the day; for instance: all day long I felt anxious and worried; every time I saw a certain person, I

wanted to have his or her attention; I got things done swiftly and easily; I erupted in anger over little things. Patiently, I ask myself what a pattern means about my belief in God, and my trust of and love for God.

At still other times, the climate of my life might emerge as clearly as the day's weather; for instance: I have grown very dissatisfied in my work; I am shaking off an old resentment at something my spouse did; I am deepening in my awareness of God's loving gaze on me; I felt confident all day while asking God for something I want a lot. Patiently again, I ask what this climate shows about me and God.

- Fourth, then, I take what I have learned to prayer, speaking to God and telling God whatever I need to say. I let God surprise me with insight and console me with faith and hope. I bring to God the larger needs that I feel right now: An old resentment that I seem unable to shake. An inveterate habit that I badly want to get rid of. A kind of mindless living through the day without thanking and praising my Creator. I beg God to teach me and help me accept the teaching.
- Fifth, and finally, I determine to keep my spirit filled with gratitude, and to take steps to get rid of mind-sets that stand between me and my Creator. I set myself to change an attitude, shake off a fear, or grow in some special way. And I offer this larger movement in my life to God my Creator. I set my mind to accept any other change or shift in my person and myself that would come, were God to give me the larger gift I ask for. For God is the Master of my life and myself; I place my trust there, and not in myself.

Most of us need a longer period of time to do this exercise, perhaps fifteen minutes or half an hour.

Inigo de Loyola considered this kind of examination perhaps the most important single spiritual exercise we do. His experience brought him to do it daily, and to urge all his friends to do the same. \*