

The Grace of Gratitude

In the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius, he reminds us that the first sin, pride, comes from not being grateful. All things we have are gifts from God who is our Creator. Pride comes from not living in the reality that we were created, and everything we have, God has allowed.

We are created to love and serve God in this world with our whole mind, soul and strength. The Christian pilgrim strives for perfection, to be like God, and focuses on growing in virtue and holiness. In the First Principle and Foundation, St. Ignatius presents us with a road map for life, who we are, our purpose, our destiny, and how best to live our lives to achieve that end.

Furthermore, discernment of the “good spirits” helps us to see that God is calling us to Him all the time, to live the virtues that can only be perfected through the gifts of grace by the Holy Spirit.

A Particular Examination of Conscience

You may be called to consider which Gifts of the Spirit, Fruits of the Spirit or Virtues you wish to increase in your life. This Particular Examination of Conscience helps us to become more aware of our disordered attachments, our faults, and vices that lead us to sin. This review helps us also to reflect upon our growth in the Virtues in our daily life.

The Particular Examine is different from the Awareness Examen in that the Particular focuses on overcoming the defects, attachments and sins that we habitually fall into and helps us to become more aware of how and why we fall into that particular area of lacking grace. The Particular Examine is meant to be followed by an Awareness Examen, which grounds us in gratitude, helps us to notice God’s activity in our daily life, and moves us towards hope for the day ahead.

Virtues, Gifts of the Spirit, and Fruits of the Spirit

Virtue is the habitual disposition to do the good. A virtuous person makes every effort to do the next right thing, and pursue what is good and true. The moral virtues are attainable through our efforts with the help of sufficient actual grace.

“The goal of the virtuous person is to become like Christ.” St. Gregory of Nyssa

The Cardinal Virtues play an important role for the Christian pilgrim who is striving towards perfection. They are prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance.

Prudence: St. Thomas Aquinas describes Prudence as “right reason in action.” A prudent person prescribes rules and measure to his conduct.

Justice: A moral virtue that a person exercises in order to give God and their neighbor what is due to them.

Fortitude: A virtue that gives a moral person the strength and resolve to pursue the good, especially against obstacles and temptation.

Temperance: A moral virtue that gives the moral person the ability to moderate the attraction of pleasures.

The Theological Virtues help the Christian pilgrim, striving for perfection, to live in relationship with the Blessed Trinity. These are gifts given to us.

Faith: A gift from God through the Holy Spirit that empowers the Christian to believe in all that God has revealed to us.

Hope: Gives us the grace of a firm desire for the Kingdom of God and instills in us the ability to trust in Jesus Christ.

Charity: A virtue that demonstrates love of God, by loving our neighbor as Jesus commanded.

Gifts of the Holy Spirit: The moral life of the Christian pilgrim, striving for perfection, is sustained by the gifts of the Holy Spirit. They are Wisdom, Understanding, Counsel, Fortitude, Knowledge, Piety, and Fear of the Lord.

Fruits of the Holy Spirit: The Fruits of the Spirit are perfections that the Holy Spirit forms in the Christian who seeks to be like God. They are charity, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, generosity, gentleness, faithfulness, modesty, self-control and chastity. The fruits we bear are the result of accepting the gifts of the Holy Spirit and living out the virtues.

Practice Virtues opposite Vices

“Vices can be classified according to the virtues they oppose, or also be linked to the capital sins which Christian experience has distinguished, following St. John Cassian and St. Gregory the Great. They are called ‘capital’ because they engender other sins and other vices. They are pride, avarice, envy, wrath, lust, gluttony, and sloth or acedia.” (CCC 1866)

“There are a great many kinds of sins. Scripture provides several lists of them. The Letter to the Galatians contrasts the works of the flesh with the fruit of the Spirit: ‘Now the works of the flesh are plain: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and the like. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things shall not inherit the Kingdom of God.’” (CCC 1852)

In your petitionary prayer, ask the Holy Spirit which of these or another one God desires for you to amend and which of these He desires you to grow in.

Practice Virtues opposite Vices

Gratitude – Pride

Patience – Wrath/Anger

Temperance – Gluttony

Caritas – Greed/Avarice

Diligence – Sloth/Acedia

Humility – Envy

Chastity – Lust

Gratitude vs. Pride

In the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius, he reminds us that the first sin, pride, comes from our lack of gratitude, for all things we have, who we are and all of creation are gifts from the Giver. Pride comes from not living in the reality that we were created with aptitudes, limitations and with not somethings, for we always need His grace to sustain us.

In this self-directed ‘retreat’ the focus is on growing in the virtuous habit of discerning the “good spirits” that are operating in us all the time, to see out living the virtues and gifts of the Holy Spirit and to become aware of and to overcome our defaults and sins that can only be done through God’s grace.

The Grace of Gratitude and Growth

You may be called to consider which Gifts of the Spirit, Fruits of the Spirit or Virtues you wish to increase in your life. This Examen as a Particular Examination of Conscience helps us to reflect upon our growth in the Virtues within our daily life.

How to Make the Particular Examination of Conscience

“First, in the morning, immediately on rising, one should resolve to guard carefully against the particular sin or defect with regard to which he seeks to correct or improve himself.” (SE 24)*

After lunch, St. Ignatius invites us to ask God for the grace we desire, which is to recall how often we have fallen into a particular sin and to be given the grace to avoid it in the future. Here we reflect on each hour of the day up to that point, and make a tally for each time that we have fallen into the particular vice or defect. Then we “renew [one’s] resolution, and strive to amend during the time till the second examination is to be made.” (SE 25)*

Ask God to help you in your pursuit of spiritual excellence by increasing the gifts and fruits of the Holy Spirit that will strengthen you in overcoming the particular vice or defect you set out to correct.

After dinner, make a second examination of your day since the one you made at lunchtime. Go over each hour as before and “make a mark for each time he has fallen into the particular fault or sin.” (SE 26)*

Additional Directions from the Spiritual Exercises (SE 27–30)

Every time one falls into the particular sin or fault, let him place his hand upon his breast, and be sorry for having fallen. He can do this even in the presence of many others without their perceiving what he is doing. (SE 27)

Since the first line of the figure to which G is prefixed represents the first examination of conscience, and the second one, the second examination, he should observe at night whether there is an improvement from the first line to the second, that is, from the first examination to the second. (SE 28)

The second day should be compared with the first, that is, the two examinations of the present day with the two of the preceding day. Let him observe if there is an improvement from one day to another. (SE 29)

Let him compare one week with another and observe whether he has improved during the present week as compared with the preceding. (SE 30)

NOTES

Pay attention to the tallies for each examination and notice whether there is an improvement from the previous examination.

How have you amended it and by which virtue? Example: pride → gratitude or humility (piety) or patience (fortitude). How has the Holy Spirit aided you with grace and insights to amend?

Observe the tallies from the day and notice if there is an improvement from the previous day(s). What have you done that offered improvement? How has the Holy Spirit been with you?

Compare one week with another week and observe whether you have improved since the previous week.

Continue for four weeks to review with your spiritual director or confessor.

	Midday Examine	Evening Examine	Notes for the Evening Reflection
Sunday			
Monday			
Tuesday			
Wednesday			
Thursday			
Friday			
Saturday			
Summary			

* All quotes are taken from *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius: Based on Studies in the Language of the Autograph* by Louis J. Puhl, SJ.

How to Amend and Transform Our Automatic Behaviors

Romans 7:13–25

“For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.” (Rom 7:15)

SEE POST HERE: <https://www.karenshieldswright.com/post/putting-on-the-mind-of-christ>