

# Journey of Faith



## In Short:

- A daily examen of consciousness moves us closer to Christ.
- God's mercy is offered freely and to all.
- The scrutinies are rites for self-searching and repentance.



• Think of a time you've regretted a choice you've made or words you've said. Why is this a regret for you?

• Did you try to repair the damage done? If so, why? If not, what would it take to try?



## Scrutinies: Looking Within

We all have regrets. Some of us may regret things we've said to our friends or family in a moment of anger or frustration. Others may regret letting a friendship fall apart without even trying to repair it. Others may regret letting an opportunity pass by without trying for it. Many times we regret the ways we've let ourselves down, the times we haven't acted like the people we know we really are.

As you reflect on your faith life, you may see some of these regrets in a different light. The times when we let ourselves down, the times when we hurt others, the times when we distance ourselves from God through our choices and attitudes: These regrets are our sins. And these sins can weigh on us physically, spiritually, and emotionally. The good news is that we can express sorrow for these sins, we can repair some of the hurt, we can mend our relationship with God, others, and ourselves.

The best news is that when we turn back toward God, we see that God is already turned toward us with arms outstretched.

## Called to Conversion

"Jesus calls to conversion. This call is an essential part of the proclamation of the kingdom: 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the gospel.'"

CCC 1427, citing Mark 1:15

Every trial we encounter is an opportunity to turn toward or away from God. Another word for this turning point is conversion, which comes from the Latin *convertere*, meaning "a turning, overturning, turning around; turning point; change." In spiritual terms, conversion is turning our whole self in faith and love to the God who loves us.

Some people think about conversion as simply a moral change, the decision to choose right over wrong, but conversion goes much deeper than that. Morality and law are important, but morality and law alone don't save. God saves. It's the free gift of God's love and mercy that makes true morality. When we act through God's grace, when we choose to follow God's will out of love and not fear or the desire to not get caught being bad, our conversion deepens.

*"Our first and fundamental conversion occurs at baptism, for 'it is by faith in the Gospel and by Baptism that one renounces evil and gains salvation, that is, the forgiveness of all sins and the gift of new life.'"*

CCC 1427

- In your opinion, why is just obeying the letter of the law not the same as choosing to follow the law out of love?



## What Are the Scrutinies?

Scrutinizing something means to look at it carefully and examine it thoroughly. The rites called the **scrutinies** "are meant to uncover, then heal all that is weak, defective, or sinful in the hearts of the elect; to bring out, then strengthen all that is upright, strong, and good" (RCIA 141). The elect participate in three scrutinies that occur on the third, fourth, and fifth Sundays of Lent. During these scrutinies, the elect look within themselves to find anything keeping them from Christ. Then they look to Christ to heal those weaknesses and strengthen them when they face temptation. Following instruction on the mystery of sin during the catechumenate, the Church invites the elect to reflect on three Gospel stories that reveal the meaning of their upcoming baptism and the process of deepening conversion.

While baptized candidates don't participate in these scrutinies, a penitential rite, a type of scrutiny, may be offered to them on or near the second Sunday of Lent.

### First Scrutiny

#### Christ as Living Water

In the Gospel story of Jesus meeting a Samaritan woman at a well (John 4:5–42), Jesus speaks to her of living water:

*"Jesus...said to her, 'Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again; but whoever drinks the water I shall give will never thirst; the water I shall give will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.'"*

John 4:13–14

- How do Jesus' words to the Samaritan woman relate to your upcoming baptism?
- What are you hoping the living water of your baptism will refresh or make grow in you?



## Second Scrutiny

### Christ as the Light of the World

In the Gospel story of Jesus healing a man who was born blind (John 9:1–41), Jesus refers to himself as the Light of the World:

*"'While I am in the world, I am the light of the world.' When [Jesus] had said this, he spat on the ground and made clay with the saliva, and smeared the clay on [the blind man's] eyes, and said to him, 'Go wash in the Pool of Siloam' (which means Sent). So he went and washed, and came back able to see.'"*

John 9:5–7

- When have you been "blind," unwilling to see the light of Christ? What prevented you from seeing?
- Who or what has helped you gain new vision to recognize Christ as the light?
- What blindness (sin) do you want your upcoming baptism to wash away?



## Third Scrutiny

### Christ as the Resurrection and the Life

In the Gospel story of Jesus raising his friend, Lazarus, back to life (John 11:1–45), Jesus calls himself the resurrection and the life:

*"Jesus said to [Martha], 'Your brother will rise.' Martha said to him, 'I know he will rise, in the resurrection on the last day.' Jesus told her, 'I am the resurrection and the life; whoever believes in me, even if he dies, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die.'"*

John 11:23–26

- What does the promise of eternal life with God mean to you?
- How has your life been changing as you prepare for baptism?
- How do you expect your life to be different once you have been baptized?



## Steps of the Scrutinies

1. After the homily, the elect and their godparents stand before the celebrant.
2. The assembly of the faithful prays in silence, asking that “the elect will be given a spirit of repentance, a sense of sin, and the true freedom of the children of God” (RCIA 152).
3. The celebrant (priest or deacon) invites the elect to pray in silence and may suggest they bow their heads or kneel as “a sign of their inner spirit of repentance” (RCIA 152).
4. The celebrant offers prayers of intercession for the elect.
5. The celebrant offers a prayer that the elect be “freed from the effects of sin and from the influence of the devil” (RCIA 144).
6. The celebrant may lay hands on the head of each of the elect.
7. The celebrant makes a final prayer for all the elect with his hands outstretched over them.
8. The celebrant either dismisses them to reflect on the Scripture readings or invites them to return to their seats for the Liturgy of the Eucharist.

“The scrutinies are celebrated in order to deliver the elect from the power of sin and Satan, to protect them from temptation, and to give them strength in Christ, who is the way, the truth, and the life. These rites, therefore, should...deepen their resolve to hold fast to Christ and to carry out their decision to love God above all.”

RCIA 141

## Praying the Examen

Saint Ignatius of Loyola (1491–1556) was very practical when it came to prayer. He even created an outline for the daily examination of our lives which he encouraged his brothers to use as a way of growing towards and better serving the Lord. Saint Ignatius taught that the foundation to a healthy spirituality required two things: finding God in all things and constantly working to gain the freedom to cooperate with God’s will.

This daily exercise, called the Examen (or Examen of Consciousness), has been—and still is—used by many Christians. It is a simple prayer for people who are continually seeking to do the Lord’s will.

There are six simple steps to the Examen, and they only take about fifteen minutes to complete:

1. *Recall you are in the presence of God.* Through prayer, we place ourselves in God’s presence in an especially attentive way. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you look at your life with love.
2. *Look at your day with gratitude.* Remember each detail and event of your day with gratitude. Every single event is God’s gift. Take care to notice what you received and what you gave back. Thank God for everything.
3. *Ask the Holy Spirit for help.* Ask the Holy Spirit to come into your heart and help you look at your actions clearly. Ask for help with understanding your limitations.
4. *Review your day.* Pay attention to the details, the context of what happened, and your actions. As you review, notice your interior motives and feelings: *When did you fail? When did you love? What patterns and habits do you see? Where did you see signs of God’s grace?*
5. *Reconcile and resolve.* Talk with Jesus about what you did and didn’t do. If you failed to love in some way, tell Jesus you’re sorry and ask him to be with you the next time a similar situation arises. Give praise for the good things and thank the Lord for being with you when you avoided a wrong choice or resisted temptation. Feel sorrow when you apologize but also feel the gratitude when you give thanks for God’s work inside your heart.
6. End the Examen by praying the Our Father.

There is no situation so desperate that it is beyond the grace of God. When we accept God's grace we can be fully restored, but this restoration is a process, and we will continue to grow and to struggle in life. Imagine this process in your mind. Are there different stages of restoration? Will there be ups and downs? How will God be at work? On your own or with a partner, describe this process of restoration in writing, as a visual, or in some other way.



After reflecting on the Examen, are there any events of your day or choices you made that really stand out to you? This can be a time you clearly saw God at work or a time you struggled. Spend time reflecting on that moment in writing.



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