

Two Easy Ways to Put First Things First

By Christina Semmens

I have found that beginning and ending each day properly, or “right ordered”, is one of the keys to experiencing peace in my life. To be “right-ordered” means simply to put first things first. And that means my first, and my last, thoughts are of God.

My first thought in the morning is encapsulated in my saying “Good morning” as I offer the well-known Suscipe prayer written by St Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Jesuits:

“Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding, and my entire will. Whatever I have or hold, you have given me, and I return it all to you to do with as you will. Give me only your love and your grace, and that is enough for me.”

Suscipe is Latin for “receive”, and by offering everything back to God, I am opening myself to receive whatever it is that *God* desires for me during the day ahead. (For me, considering the reality that God is a God of *abundance*, what I am doing is the equivalent of doubling down on a sure thing! LOL)

Then, at the end of the day, I take a few minutes for my Examen.

The Examen is a very simple exercise designed to help you identify where God has been active in your life that day.

After I ask for the wisdom of the Holy Spirit to help me discern well, I spend a few moments thanking God for His blessings that day—perhaps it was a magnificent sunrise or sunset, or a hug from my son in the midst of doing chores, or the unexpected phone call from a friend. But whatever is good, true and beautiful and touches my heart are the things that I give thanks for.

I then briefly review my day to see how well I did loving God and others, and if I was faithful to my resolution to grow in virtue. I see where I did well, but also where I failed to be my best.

After identifying those times I neglected to love and be my best, I then ask God for His forgiveness and mercy for all the ways that I knowingly, and unknowingly, offended Him this day.

I then conclude by asking God to allow me to rest well so I may arise in the morning ready to try again.

Although the Examen *seems* to be a lengthy exercise, it really is not, as you shouldn't take more than 5-7 minutes to complete the process.

The purpose of the Examen is to help us see the major movements of the Spirit in our hearts and lives, so once the habit is established, the Examen becomes a beautiful way to put everything into proper order at the conclusion of the day.

I hope and pray that you, too may experience the peace and comfort that these two practices have brought me in my life. But even more importantly, that they help you put first things first.

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