



ST AUGUSTINE'S
COLLEGE OF THEOLOGY

Turning Lockdown into a Retreat

Week 4: Hearing and Responding to God's Invitation

While many of the larger decisions of life have been taken from us at present, others are thrown into sharper relief. Perhaps some questions have surfaced for you over this time. It might be that you have begun to consider some ways in which you want your life to be different. On what basis do we make choices – whether large or small – that in some way will shape our future?

The Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius Loyola are a helpful source of wisdom about discernment. Within the Exercises there is a process of preparing for and making a specific choice or commitment, sometimes known in the jargon as the Election. However, discernment for Ignatius is about much more than simple decision making. At its heart discernment involves hearing and responding to God's invitation to life. More significant than any particular choice that might be taken is the intimacy of relationship with Christ from which that choice flows. For Ignatius, the Election occurs at that point where we have the greatest clarity about who God in Christ is, and who we are in ourselves. From this place we see more clearly what we want out of life and, above all, what God wants for us in his calling to live out the Gospel to the world we inhabit. If we get that daily lived dependence upon God right, then our decisions and choices will tend to flow forth naturally and without effort.

To prepare this ground it might help to ask some fundamental and basic questions.

Reviewing my relationship with God, with myself and with creation

Take your time in considering these questions, allowing the space to get in touch with how things are for you, and what you now desire.

- Who is God for me? How do I see or imagine God? Do I carry baggage from my upbringing, or from the Church, or some event that affects how God is or can be for me?
- What of Creation, the world we steward, all other sentient beings, the created order comprising all that can be touched, seen, tasted, smelled and heard?
- And what of myself? How am I with myself and others? Do I like myself? Do I find myself acceptable or even lovable or not? Am I always at the centre of my imaginary cosmos or could I recognize that maybe that is God's place?

- And is there anything here I now recognize about any of this that I would ideally like to be different? If so, can I get in touch with how I would really like it to be? What I could accept as the more creative way forward?
- And can I pray for that now?

Here is the beginning of greater knowledge of God and of self, and the beginning of the possibility of greater freedom in God's service.

The Examen

Kierkegaard said we live life forward but will only really understand it backwards. By reflecting on and being open to learn from the past we become more responsive to God's invitation to life in the present. The Examen within the Spiritual Exercises is part of a much wider strategy of digestion and reflection. It involves finding a time of quiet to notice all that has been there for us by way of the graced activity of the Holy Spirit; all that has been there for us way of obstacles to that same Spirit; and to articulate if there's anything by way of insight or gift from that period of time to carry into the time ahead.

The Examen is a prayer practice to build into each day. Perhaps it will work best for you in a time when you are walking, or a space in the day that lends itself well to quiet reflection. Dwell with each movement of the exercise, allowing space to get in touch with your experience and God's presence and working within it.

- Begin by remembering you are in God's presence.
- How have I been graced recently, perhaps in the day so far? What has been most of new life?
- What has tended to diminish or distract me from the effects of that grace?
- Is there anything to learn here or take forward as a gift into the rest of the day ahead?
- As I acknowledge what has been so far, I give thanks where I can
- I pray for God's grace for the time ahead

You may find it helpful to write down what you have noticed, felt or received.

For more by Andrew Walker on the Examen go to this article
www.theway.org.uk/back/423Walker.pdf

Some suggested readings for the week:

Luke 24. 13-35; Micah 6. 6-8; Isaiah 30. 18-26; John 1. 35-42; John 14. 15-27

If one reading seems to speak to you personally, return to it and ask God to help you go deeper into its significance for you.

And because of His visitation, we may no longer desire God as if He were lacking: our redemption is no longer a question of pursuit but of surrender to Him who is always and everywhere present.

Therefore at every moment we pray that, following Him, we may depart from our anxiety into His peace. Amen

[from the writings of WH Auden]