



# Pastoral Letter

My co-pilgrims in the journey,

*Jesus proposed a parable to the crowds.  
"The Kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed  
that a person took and sowed in a field.  
It is the smallest of all the seeds,  
yet when full-grown it is the largest of plants.  
It becomes a large bush,  
and the birds of the sky come and dwell in its branches."  
(Mt. 13:32 ff)*

We learn from Jesus' parable today that the Kingdom of Christ is a spiritual force that works quietly yet powerfully in the hearts of those who receive it. It is not so much a visible and flashy organization, but rather a way of life that is based on faith, hope, and charity. When we live our lives according to these values, we become strong during difficulties and can sustain others in their own life journeys.

Attaining the Kingdom of God is as important as the road that leads us there. We allow the Kingdom of Christ to grow in our heart; this is what it means to journey together - this is the goal of our spiritual pilgrimage. In the process, we will be able to see the ways in which our values and charity are quietly sustaining others. We will be able to feel the strength and substance that comes from living the life of a Christian.

St. Ignatius of Loyola - whose memorial we celebrated on July 31st - taught his friends the discernment of the spirit through The Examen prayer. The Examen is a time that we can set for reflection that is exactly geared towards self-awareness that gauges the growth of the kingdom of Christ within us on a daily basis.

This process of prayerful reflection and discernment helps us determine which thoughts, feelings, and actions are coming from God and which are coming from our own human desires.

The discernment of spirits is a lifelong process. It is a way of growing in our relationship with God and in our ability to make good choices. A faithful prayer of the *Examen* incorporates the full paradigm beginning in gratitude - praise and thanksgiving to God - culminating in a heartfelt contrition that leads us to service and charity for others. (*William Watson, Sacred Story: An Ignatian Examen for the Third Millennium* (Sacred Story Press, 2012), 56.)

Let us take some time to reflect on our values and our actions, our thoughts, our feelings. Are we living a life that is consistent with the teachings of Christ? Are we being kind and compassionate to others? Are we helping those in need? The Kingdom of Christ is a beautiful and powerful thing. It is a gift that we can all receive, and it is a gift that we can all share with others. If we are open to it, the Kingdom of Christ can transform our life and the lives of those around us.

Your pilgrim priest,  
Fr. JC Merino



# Catechism of the Catholic Church



“The Examen Prayer” by St. Ignatius of Loyola

The Examen is a prayerful reflection on the day’s events, used to discern God’s presence and activity in one’s life. It is a way to grow in self-awareness, gratitude, and love of God.

To pray the Examen, begin by finding a quiet place where you can be alone and free from distractions. Take a few deep breaths to relax and center yourself. Then, ask God to help you see your day with His eyes. Reflect on the day’s events, one by one. Pay attention to the good things that happened, as well as the challenges and difficulties. Ask yourself: Become aware of God’s presence and ask for clarity and understanding. Review the day with gratitude, focusing on the joys and delights, the work you did, the people you interacted with, and the small things. Pay attention to your emotions and reflect on what God is saying through them.

Choose one feature of the day and pray about it.

Look toward tomorrow and ask God for guidance, help, and understanding.

End the Daily Examen with a conversation with Jesus, asking for forgiveness, protection, and wisdom.

After reflecting on your day, conclude the Examen with a prayer of thanksgiving and praise. Pray the Lord’s Prayer (Our Father...). Thank God for all the good things that happened, and ask Him to help you grow in your love for Him.

The Examen is a simple but powerful prayer that can help you grow in your relationship with God. It is a way to see your day through His eyes and to discern His presence in your life.