

During the bombing raids of WWII, thousands of children were orphaned and left to starve. The fortunate ones were rescued and placed in refugee camps where they received food and good care. But many of these children could not sleep at night, fearing waking up to find themselves once again homeless and without food. Finally someone hit upon the idea of giving each child a piece of bread to hold at bedtime. Holding their bread, these children could finally sleep in peace. All through the night the bread reminded them, 'Today I ate and I will eat again tomorrow.'

(Sleeping with Bread, page 1)

Like these children, we can benefit from holding our 'daily bread' while we sleep. The insights of a few minutes' nightly reflection can nourish us and help strengthen us for the next day and all the days ahead.

You may like to do the examen alone, perhaps writing your discoveries and reflections in your journal. Or perhaps you would like to use these questions as a basis for dialogue with your partner or family members, as a regular spiritual stocktaking. Which ever way we choose, the examen can help to put us in touch with the voice of God that is within each one of us.

As we learn to use this tool for spiritual growth, we become more able to discern God's leading and to make life-giving decisions which enhance both our ministry and our humanity.

If you would like to read more about the examen, try reading

SLEEPING WITH BREAD

by Dennis Linn, Sheila Fabricant Linn, Matthew Linn (1995) Paulist Press

Prepared by Sue Pickering for SGM 2005

Reflecting on the day using the 'examen'



Reflecting on the day using the examen



The examen is an old term used to describe a time of reflection at day's end.

In its simplest form, the examen can mean asking ourselves questions which are designed to help us identify the 'consolations' and 'desolations' in our lives - 'the interior movements through which divine revelation unfolds'. (SWB, p. 19) We learn to recognise those things which give us life and energy or which drag energy away from us, leaving us feeling drained and empty instead of renewed and encouraged.

The examen can also help us identify patterns in our responses which might need our attention, such as a tendency to avoid conflict or to keep silent instead of speaking out about something important.

Consistent attention to these interior movements can help us resolve problems and discern a way forward which will enable us to live out our unique way of giving and receiving love.

What questions do we ask?

In their book 'Sleeping with Bread; the Linns suggest pairs of questions:

For what moment today am I most grateful?

For what moment today am I least grateful?

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When today did I have the greatest sense of belonging to myself, to others, to God?

When did I have the least sense of belonging?

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When did I give and receive the most love today?

When did I give and receive the least love today?

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How was I most aware of grace in my life today?

How was I least aware of grace in my life today?

The examen process as suggested by the Linns

Set aside ten to twenty minutes. Do whatever helps you to relax e.g. light a candle, play some short reflective music, breathe in the love of God and breathe out your cares.

Place your hand on your heart and ask Jesus or God or the Holy Spirit to bring to your heart the moment today for which you are most grateful.

Ask God to bring to your heart the moment today for which you are least grateful. Let your feelings come to the surface. You may wish to take deep breaths and let God's love fill you just the way you are.

Give thanks for whatever you have experienced. You may like to journal your learnings or share them with a family member or friend.

