

Contemplating Justice: A Prayerful Approach to Racial Justice

Examen

(adapted from text written by Elaine Ireland for the Office of Ignatian Spirituality)

Tonight we offer a guided examen adapted from one published by the Office of Ignatian Spirituality and written by Elaine Ireland.

This examen may be uncomfortable. Ignatius might tell us the more uncomfortable it is, perhaps the more important it is for us to do. It is written primarily for white folks, though tonight we are working under the assumption that anyone joining us is looking for ways to pray over their own experience of racism.

Tonight's examen focuses on awareness. I invite you to approach this with an open mind and heart, refraining from self-judgment and recrimination. Just be honest with God and with yourself.

As we begin, you may want to make sure that you won't be interrupted by others during this time of prayer. If you *are* distracted – by sounds around you or by your own thoughts – very gently bring yourself back to the prayer.

- We begin by choosing a position that is comfortable, where you can be both relaxed and alert.
 - You may want to close or lower your eyes.
 - Become aware of your breathing as it goes in and out.
 - Take a few deeper breaths, breathing out any preoccupations into God's hands.
 - Become aware of God's presence, here and now, God looking at you, looking at you with love.

- Ask the Spirit for wisdom and help: "Lord, open my eyes and my heart and shine a light on this difficult topic."

- Ask for the grace you need: "Lord, increase my awareness. Let me look at myself and others non-judgmentally and with love."

- Take a moment to thank God for all gifts of your life – and name some of them. Acknowledge to God that some of the blessings you have, though you may have worked hard to earn them – are also be a result of societal privilege that you have due to the color of your skin, your socio-economic background, or other factors you are not aware of.

Thank God for the diversity of life—for the variety of plants and animals that add so much to the wonder and delight in our world, and for the diversity within the human species. As part of the natural world, we too vary: in our genders, our

languages, religions, our skin, hair, and eye colors, our abilities and disabilities. We are all one, made in your image, an image that encompasses all of creation.

- As we being to take a few moments to look back over our lives, ask God to show you what God would like you to see about the ways in which racism and/or white supremacy has played a part in your life. Let your memory take over and ask God to guide you as you go.
- First, look back on your childhood. Do you recall hearing or experiencing racist episodes and words? Do you recall your reaction? Think about the demographics of your school, your neighborhood, your place of worship – how did that affect the way you thought about people with brown and black skin?
- Think about the people of color with whom you have interacted recently (who are not already friends): Do your interactions with people of color normally involve a subtle power dynamic (i.e. are you being served or are you the person providing charity?) Would you be willing to get to know them as a friend? To invite them into your home? How many people of color would consider you a good friend and invite you into their homes?
- Consider the systemic/institutional racism that the pandemic has brought to light: higher illness and mortality rates for black and Latinx people due to lack of healthcare and insurance, crowded living situations, un- and under-employment, food insecurity, etc.? How do these examples of systemic racism make you feel?
- From the things we have just reflected on – your childhood, recent interactions, and systemic racism -- pick one thing that “speaks the loudest” to you. It just might be the thing that makes you most uncomfortable. Try to focus on a feeling rather than a thought, so that you can pray from your heart, not your head. Ask the Holy Spirit to again shine a light on your reflection: Ask, “What am I hearing?” And the Holy Spirit to guide you what you are to learn.” In doing this, be careful not to beat yourself up.
- Ask God: “What do I need help with?” Listen for any invitations from God to one or two practical, specific things I can do or change to confront my own racism and systemic racism?”

- For anything around this topic of racism that needs healing within you or that you need to take responsibility for, ask God to begin that process in you.
- Thank God again for the opportunity to heighten your awareness and ask for the grace you need to move forward with any initial steps.

- When you are ready, close with a favorite prayer.