



Examen – Fostering a culture of encounter

Social Justice Week 2016: We all have a migration story

Examen is a way of prayerful reflection that helps us to detect God's presence in our life and discern His direction for us. It is a spiritual practice attributed to St Ignatius of Loyola. The practice goes through various steps of examination of conscience.

This year the theme for Social Justice Week is *We all have a migration story: Fostering a culture of encounter*. We have created this adaptation of the examen for use in groups, families and on our own to prayerfully consider how we have engaged with cultural diversity in our day and in our week.

Individual: Take around 5-10 minutes to step through these questions and reflections in silence and stillness without interruption. You may wish to have a symbol that helps you to centre, it could be a lit candle, a rock, a cross, etc.

Group: In groups it is helpful for a reader to read out the instructions and questions with long pauses for individuals to reflect deeply. The reader may wish to use only some of the sub-questions. The group could read the prayers in red together and share any thoughts or reflections with each other at the end of the examen.

Coming to God's presence

Find a place where you have space to be silent and still before God.

Ensure your posture is comfortable, open and alert to hear from God.

You may wish to repeat a prayer such as: *"Be with me Lord, and lead me in truth"* or be silent for a few minutes to centre the heart and to become still.

When you are ready, start with this simple prayer of gratitude and acknowledgement of God's presence:

Wondrous God, you have given me life and hope, gifts that I have used well, challenges to love that I have not met. Be with me now, that in your presence I may reflect.

Exploration of conscience

Next, come into an awareness of our need of God's mercy as you reflect on what you have seen, thought, and done or not done.

Retrace your steps to the different places and contexts where you have encountered other people and cultures different from your own: in homes, at workplaces, on the streets, in the neighbourhood, in the parish, at school, at the shops, on the news, on social media, etc.

Reflect on the following questions:

Who are the people that I encountered?

Did I come across someone from a culture or place different to me? Someone who seemed like a stranger? Someone with a different skin colour to mine? Someone for whom English is not their first language? Someone wearing different clothes from me, a hijab, a kippah, a turban, a sari?

Focusing on one encounter, how did I react to this encounter?

What assumptions did I draw based on appearance? What thoughts went through my mind? What emotions did I feel? Compassion or judgement? Love or fear? Frustration or patience? Joy or sadness? Indifference or concern? Hope or helplessness?

What did I do or not do in response to this encounter?

Did I walk towards or away from the person? Did I engage or avoid them? Did I listen with interest? Did I open my heart to their need? Did my actions communicate welcome or distance? Did I recognise the face of Christ in the face of the other? Did I receive something from this encounter?

How does God see this person?

At the end of the exploration of conscience or when you are ready, say a prayer to God asking forgiveness for where you have fallen short and where you need God's grace and forgiveness.

Conclude with this prayer from Psalm 51:

Have mercy on me, O God, in your faithful love, in your great tenderness wipe away my offences; God, create in me a clean heart, renew within me a resolute spirit.

Celebration and praise of God

In this next section we show gratitude to God for the gifts of diversity and the joy and hope of God's mercy received.

Reflect on the follow questions:

Where was I able to welcome others and foster a culture of encounter?

What gifts of cultural diversity have I received and appreciated?

Through the people I met? Through food? Music? Art? Ideas? Inspirations?

How did God reveal himself to me through this gift?

What else is God doing in the world which I am grateful for?

At the end of the time of gratitude, or when you are ready, give thanks and praise to God for the gifts that He has given to you and to the world.

Conclude with this prayer:

Blessed are you God of hosts for having shown me the wonders of your world. We praise you for the many gifts you have given to us your children. We praise you for your persistent love for those who are last, lost and least.



Looking to the day to come

As you receive the grace and gifts of God, reflect on the words of Pope Francis from his *Message for the World Day of Migrants and Refugees*, 2016:

"Dear brothers and sisters, migrants and refugees! At the heart of the Gospel of Mercy the encounter and acceptance by others are intertwined with the encounter and acceptance of God himself. Welcoming others means welcoming God in person! Do not let yourselves be robbed of the hope and joy of life born of your experience of God's mercy, as manifested in the people you meet on your journey!"

Reflection on the following questions:

How can I be more welcoming and attentive to the strangers I come across?

How can I foster a greater culture of encounter in my life and context?



At the end of this time of reflection, ask God to be with you as you go out to be His hands and feet.

Conclude with this prayer and the Sign of the Cross:

Father God, be with us in our day, open our eyes and our hearts to see the stranger and extend warm welcome just as you have welcomed us.