

Thursday in the First Week: The Manner of Making the Examination

Summary of the Morrow's Meditation

Tomorrow we will meditate upon the manner of making the examination of conscience, and we shall see: first, the character of this examination; second, the acts which ought to accompany it. We will then make the resolution: first, to observe in our examination the rules laid down by the saints; second, to bring to it above all a sincere regret for our sins and a firm resolve to correct them. Our spiritual nosegay shall be the words of King Hezekiah: "*I will recount to Thee all my years in the bitterness of my soul*" (Is. xxxviii:15).

Meditation for the Morning

Let us adore in Jesus Christ the perfect knowledge which He has of our sins. Not a single one escapes Him; He knows all their circumstances; He penetrates into all the malice of them very different in this from men, who often perceive only the outward appearances, and who permit themselves to be deceived by the prejudices and the disguises of self-love. Let us bless this amiable Saviour, who is so willing to make us participate in His divine light that we may thoroughly know all our sins.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE

This examination ought to be made with exactness, severity, and calmness.

First, *with exactness*; that is to say, that it ought to embrace, first, the evil we have committed, the good we ought to do and which we have not done, and even the good we have done badly; second; sins against God, against our neighbour, against ourselves; external sins, coming from the senses, especially of the tongue; internal sins, which are thoughts, desires, attachments which have not God for their object; third, the number of times that we have fallen, the principle or the source of our faults, their circumstances and their consequences. In order to attain to this exactness it is easy to conceive that we must bring to it an attentive search, not stopping at the surface, but penetrating to the bottom of things. Is it thus that we make it?

Second, *with severity*; that is to say, without listening to self-love or natural tenderness, which leads us to excuse ourselves, to hide our faults from our own eyes, or at least to lessen them; we must examine ourselves as a judge would examine a criminal, or as though we ourselves were examining a stranger. A too indulgent examination sees only trifles, where serious faults really exist; for example, certain calumnies, aversions, or jealousies; in a certain kind of luxurious expenditure, a certain kind of loss of time, certain kinds of vanity, and desires to attract notice. Do we not often delude ourselves upon many of these points for want of bringing enough severity to our examinations of conscience?

Third, *with calmness*; that is to say, we must not torture the conscience with the fear of forgetting certain faults, but make the examination with the tranquillity of the accountant who is making up his accounts; of the judge who is summing up a lawsuit; of the doctor who studies a malady. Why should we trouble and distress ourselves? A defect of memory is not imputed to us as a sin. He who has an upright intention to say everything, a sincere desire to make himself known, a frank will to dissimulate nothing, and who employs a reasonable time in his examination, does all that is necessary. God does not ask that we should tell Him

all we have done, but only all that we remember, and anything that we forget is remitted as though we had accused ourselves of it. Consoling thought, well fitted to make us perform our examinations with calmness, simplicity, and freedom of heart.

ACTS WHICH OUGHT TO ACCOMPANY THE EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE

This examination would be of little use to us if it were nothing more than a philosophical study of the state of our conscience. In order to be really useful to us it ought to be accompanied by the three principal exercises of piety: first, before the examination we must place ourselves in the presence of God; adore Him as our judge; keep ourselves humbly at His feet like poor criminals, and beg Him to give us His light, which alone can discover to us our faults without awaking our passions; second, after the examination we must excite ourselves to repentance for our faults with sighs and tears; make strong resolutions to correct them, and fix upon what we will do with that end in view: vague and general resolutions end in nothing; third, we must place ourselves in the state in which we would desire to be at the hour of death, and by uniting ourselves to the heart of Jesus Christ; to that heart so full of horror for sin, and of love of penance, which is the expiation of it. Is it thus we make our examinations? It is for want of being faithful to these holy practices that our numerous examinations of conscience have not changed us. We have condemned sin without condemning the sinner, and we have remained always the same.

Resolutions and spiritual nosegay as above.