

Wednesday in the First Week: The Examination of Conscience

Summary of the Morrow's Meditation

As the first condition for confessing properly is thoroughly to examine our conscience, we will consecrate the following meditation to this examination. We will consider tomorrow: first, the importance of a daily examination of the conscience; second, the importance of the examination preparatory to confession. We will then make the resolution: first, every evening to perform with exactitude the examination of our conscience; second, to exercise special care in preparing ourselves well before confession. Our spiritual nosegay shall be the words of the Psalmist: "*I have thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto Thy testimonies*" (Ps. CXVIII:59)

Meditation for the Morning

Let us adore Our Lord, who, in order to make us understand the importance of the examination of conscience, warns us by His saints that to perform it well is the sign of the elect, that to neglect it is the character of the reprobate (St Greg., *Mor.*, II, VI). Let us thank Him for so useful a warning, and let us render to Him on that account all our homage.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE DAILY EXAMINATION OF OUR CONSCIENCE

All the saints and all the masters of the spiritual life are unanimous in speaking of the daily examination of the conscience as the most efficacious means for correcting defects and advancing in virtue (St. Chrys., *in Ps.* IV). The Pagan philosophers themselves enjoined their disciples to examine themselves every day on these three points: What have I done? How have I done it? What have I omitted to do? In point of fact, unless we make this examination every day we do not know ourselves. There exist within us vices so disguised, ill regulated feelings so hidden, passions so subtle, that we do not perceive them except by means of serious reflection. It is, with the soul which does not examine itself, or else examines itself badly, as it is with a vineyard left fallow, which, for want of being cultivated, is covered with thorns and briars; or it is like the man of business who, for want of rendering to himself every day an account of his position, allows the state of his fortune to get worse without having the least idea of it. For want of examination vices increase in the soul and virtues disappear from it; without our remarking it, the state of the conscience becomes constantly worse and worse, and such is the ignorance we are in of ourselves, that we do not even suspect it. The soul languishes, loses its strength, is no longer on its guard against temptations and dangerous occasions, and in this state it is on the point of being lost. By a daily examination, on the contrary, we remark our failings and we repair them; we say to ourselves every evening: "I have committed such and such a fault today, I will correct myself tomorrow; I will observe such or such a bad inclination in my heart, I will fight against it." Every day we say to ourselves: "I shall have to render an account this evening of the employment of my time, of my fidelity to grace," and this thought will awaken vigilance, excite my attention, and hinder bad habits from taking root. Moreover, the sight of our wretchedness, which daily examination keeps always before our eyes, preserves humility, makes presumption keep aloof, disposes us to make a good confession by means of

a clearer knowledge of our faults. Lastly, daily examination, when it is accompanied by perfect contrition, as it ought always to be, protects the soul from the danger of sudden and unprovided death, since contrition stands in place of the sacrament when we can not receive it. Let us examine ourselves as to whether we attach to this exercise all the importance it deserves, and whether we make it every day at a regular hour.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE BEFORE CONFESSION

We have to do here with a holy confession or else a sacrilegious one. If by a notable fault in our examination we omit to accuse ourselves of a single mortal sin, the confession is null and the absolution a sacrilege: what, then, can be more serious than this? If, on the contrary, each time that we confess our examination is made as it ought to be, confession purifies the soul from the past and renders it strong for the future: what can be more consoling? Nevertheless, how many times does it not happen that we make our confessions lightly, and content ourselves with casting a rapid glance over the time which has elapsed since our last confession? It is a very serious matter; it has to do with our eternity.

Resolutions and spiritual nosegay as above.