

Examen Prayer for the Year

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As we transition into the new year, let's try an Examen prayer of our previous year. It's really pretty simple: the Examen helps us reflect on a past period of time—usually we reflect prayerfully over the previous day or the previous few hours. But I believe we can apply these principles to the past calendar year as well.

Step One: Become aware of God's presence.

One way of doing this is to ask the Holy Spirit to help you review the year with a holy perspective—with wisdom, grace, and faith. Ask for the grace to tear yourself away from your own patterns of thinking and seeing so that you can see your life more as God sees it. Of course you will see your failings—but God sees you as a beloved daughter or son who has a future and a hope. Of course you will see your accomplishments—but God sees your deeper self, the person behind all the activity, a person made in God's image.

Step Two: Review the year with gratitude.

As you use this holy perspective to review the year, pay attention to the good gifts from the year ending. Name specifically those that come to memory now, and thank God for them.

Step Three: Pay attention to your emotions.

Think over the year again, and notice your emotional reactions. What memories speak most loudly to you? What events, conversations, relationships, or activities bring up the most emotion now, as you remember them? Ask God to help you linger with these emotions,

whether they are pleasant or disturbing. Ask for help in understanding why you feel as you do. What can you learn about yourself or about your situation as you dwell in your emotional responses?

Step Four: Choose one feature of the year and pray from it.

While you are lingering with your memories and emotions, settle on one feature. Perhaps it is a single event, or maybe it's a pattern of your own behavior that has come to mind as you reviewed the year. Whatever it is that has emerged, allow it to fuel your prayer. Don't worry about the many other aspects of the year that you could think about right now; stay with the one thing that has come to you with the most power and pray from those thoughts and emotions.

Step Five: Look toward the new year.

Imagine what challenges and blessings might await you in the coming year. Think of important relationships, major (and minor) decisions to be made, skills to learn, habits to build, healing to seek, good work to accomplish. Make a simple list of highlights—matters that you expect to take prominence in your life in the new year. Bring them to God now, and ask for the graces you will need.

End your prayer, thanking God for love and life and holy possibilities.