

Journey of Faith



In Short:

- God's mercy is continuously offered freely and to all.
- The scrutinies are rites for self-searching and repentance.
- A daily examen of consciousness helps us move closer to Christ.



Scrutinies: Looking Within

We're all familiar with regret. You may regret having that piece of pie at lunch, letting a friendship fade away, or not spending enough time with your family. Though regretful, these actions aren't necessarily sinful.

Most of us will regret *and* feel guilty for the ways we intentionally hurt others and turned away from God through our sinful actions and attitudes. When we sin, we feel the weight of our guilt. We may feel it physically, spiritually, and emotionally. The good news is that we may find ways to express sorrow for the hurt, undo some of the harm we've caused, and get back into right relationship with God, others, and ourselves.

Even better, as we turn back toward God, we discover that God is always turned toward us—with arms outstretched and a heart full of love and mercy, eager to forgive.

- What regrets do you have about hurts you've intentionally caused? How do you feel about yourself as a result?



Called to Conversion

Each test or trial we encounter serves as an opportunity to turn toward, or away from, God. The word **conversion** comes from the Latin for "a turning, overturning, turning around; turning point; change." In spiritual terms, conversion is the ongoing response of our whole person turning in faith and love to the God who loves us.

The first and fundamental conversion occurs at baptism, for "It is by faith in the Gospel and by Baptism that one renounces evil and gains salvation, that is, the forgiveness of all sins and the gift of new life" (CCC 1427).

Many people connect conversion with moral change and the decision to choose right over wrong, good over evil. But morality and law don't save. God saves. Grace saves. The free gift of God's love and mercy makes true morality—choosing to follow God's will out of love, not fear—possible.

"Jesus calls to conversion. This call is an essential part of the proclamation of the kingdom: 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the gospel.'"

CCC 1427, citing Mark 1:15

What Are the Scrutinies?

When we scrutinize something, we look at it carefully and examine it thoroughly. The rites called the *scrutinies* "are meant to uncover, then heal all that is weak, defective, or sinful in the hearts of the elect; to bring out, then strengthen all that is upright, strong, and good" (*Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*, 141). The elect look within themselves to find anything that keeps them from Christ. Then they look to Christ to heal those weaknesses and strengthen them when they face temptation.

Three scrutinies for the elect occur on the third, fourth, and fifth Sundays of Lent. (A penitential rite, a type of scrutiny, may be offered for baptized candidates for full communion on or near the second Sunday of Lent.)

Following instruction on the mystery of sin during the catechumenate, the Church invites the elect to reflect on three Gospel stories that reveal the meaning of their upcoming baptism.

First Scrutiny

Christ as Living Water

In the Gospel story of Jesus meeting a Samaritan woman at a well (John 4:5–42), Jesus speaks to her of *living water*:

"Jesus...said to her, 'Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again; but whoever drinks the water I shall give will never thirst; the water I shall give will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.'"

John 4:13–14

- How do Jesus' words to the Samaritan woman relate to your upcoming baptism?

- Imagine a spring of water welling up, bubbling up, inside you. What feeling do you connect to this experience?

- How thirsty are you for Christ's living water? What dryness in your life do you hope it will quench?

Second Scrutiny

Christ as the Light of the World

In the Gospel story of Jesus healing a man who was born blind (John 9:1–41), Jesus refers to himself as the *light of the world*:

"'While I am in the world, I am the light of the world.' When [Jesus] had said this, he spat on the ground and made clay with the saliva, and smeared the clay on [the blind man's] eyes, and said to him, 'Go wash in the Pool of Siloam' (which means Sent). So he went and washed, and came back able to see."

John 9:5–7

- When have you been "blind" or unwilling to see the light of Christ? What had your attention or prevented you from seeing?
- Who or what has helped you gain new vision and ability to recognize Christ as the light?
- What blindness (sin) do you want your upcoming baptism to wash away?

Third Scrutiny

Christ as the Resurrection and the Life

In the Gospel story of Jesus raising his friend Lazarus back to life (John 11:1–45), Jesus calls himself the *resurrection and the life*:

"Jesus said to [Martha], 'Your brother will rise.' Martha said to him, 'I know he will rise, in the resurrection on the last day.' Jesus told her, 'I am the resurrection and the life; whoever believes in me, even if he dies, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die.'"

John 11:23–26

- The waters of baptism are waters of new life in Christ. What does the promise of salvation, eternal life with God, mean to you?
- How has your life been changing throughout your preparation for baptism?
- How do you expect your life to be different once you have been baptized?



Steps of the Scrutinies

1. After the homily, the elect and their godparents stand before the celebrant.
2. The assembly of the faithful prays in silence, asking that "the elect will be given a spirit of repentance, a sense of sin, and the true freedom of the children of God" (RCIA 152).
3. The celebrant (priest or deacon) invites the elect to pray in silence and may suggest they bow their heads or kneel as "a sign of their inner spirit of repentance" (RCIA 152).
4. He offers prayers of intercession for the elect.
5. He offers a prayer that the elect be "freed from the effects of sin and from the influence of the devil" (RCIA 144).
6. He may lay hands on the head of each of the elect.
7. He makes a final prayer for all the elect with his hands outstretched over them.
8. He either dismisses them to reflect on the Scripture readings or invites them to return to their seats for the Liturgy of the Eucharist.

"The scrutinies are celebrated in order to deliver the elect from the power of sin and Satan, to protect them from temptation, and to give them strength in Christ, who is the way, the truth, and the life. These rites, therefore, should...deepen their resolve to hold fast to Christ and to carry out their decision to love God above all."

RCIA 141

Praying the Examen

Saint Ignatius of Loyola (1491–1556) was a very practical man when it came to prayer. He proposed a daily exercise, which he called the Examen (or Examen of Consciousness), that has been used by many Christians ever since. The Examen is a simple prayer, a prayer for busy people who are continually seeking to do the Lord's will.

There are five simple steps to the Examen, which should take about fifteen minutes to complete:

1. *Recall you are in the presence of God.* In prayer, we place ourselves in God's presence in an especially attentive way. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you look at your life with love this day.
2. *Look at your day with gratitude.* Move through the details of your day in gratitude, remembering that every single event has been God's gift. Take care to notice what you received and what you gave. Thank God for all of these.
3. *Ask help from the Holy Spirit.* Ask for the Holy Spirit to come into your heart and help you look at your actions clearly and with an understanding of your limitations.
4. *Review your day.* Be sure to notice the details, the context of what happened, and how you acted. As you look through the day, notice especially your interior motives and feelings: *When did you fail? When did you love? What patterns and habits do you see? When did you respond positively? Where did you see signs of God's grace in your day?*
5. *Reconcile and resolve.* Talk with Jesus about what you did and what you didn't do. If you failed to love in some way, tell Jesus you're sorry and ask him to be with you the next time the same sort of situation arises. Remember all the good things and thank the Lord for being with you when you avoided a wrong choice or resisted temptation. Feel the sorrow when you apologize, but also feel the gratitude when you give thanks for God's work inside your heart as he labors daily to make you more Christlike.

End the Examen by praying the Our Father.

Conversion—our turning to God—happens continuously. We stumble and fall—we sin by failing to keep God first in our lives—but we can get back up and try again thanks to Christ's redeeming love. God eagerly awaits our return, forgives us, and offers us another chance.



- What must die in you so that Christ's new life may take root in you?



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