



A Passionist “examen” in Time of Pandemic

A guide for prayer

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The experience emanating from the Corona Virus pandemic has touched all our lives in the recent months and into the unforeseen future.

I would like to offer you, my brother Passionists, and all the Passionist Family, a reflective tool by which I invite you to engage in prayerful reflection - personally and with others.



The tool I offer you is called the **EXAMEN**.

The **examen (or examination of conscience)** is an ancient prayerful reflection technique practiced in the Church which can help us to see God's hand at work in our life's experience.

As we know, St Ignatius of Loyola popularized this technique as a key prayer which he recommended as a **daily examen**, i.e. prayerful reflection on the events of the day in order to detect God's presence and discern God's direction for us.

[I do realise that this form is more in the Jesuit tradition, than the form recommended by St. Paul of the Cross – which is **meditation**].

As we are journeying through this extraordinary time of the COVID-19 experience, I am suggesting this method of **examen** for your personal and shared prayer, holy conversation, faith sharing and mutual spiritual support: personally, with your local community, with your parish, in your ministry group, etc.

As we have seen, the COVID-19 makes no distinctions and has had a profound effect on us all (personally, spiritually, mentally, socially, economically, as a family...).

While yearning for our “normal” life as we knew it, we know that for every reflective person, life will not be the same as before because we have been challenged and changed by this experience – for good or for ill.

Nevertheless, life must be adapted and go on in what has been coined: the ‘new normal’ way.

We've all been through a lot: lockdown, self-isolation, quarantine, social distancing, hygiene practices with wearing masks and gloves, handwashing and sanitizing, testing, loss of business and jobs, life-changing plans, virtual online communications, and at-home education, work and worship.



Please take time to reflect on:

- *What has been my response in this situation?*
- *Have I tried to look for and discover the opportunities in the crisis?*
- *What have I learnt?*
- *Where did I sense and detect God's comforting and loving presence?*
- *How has this strengthened my faith?*
- *And how about those feelings of desolation, and confusion, and doubts, and pain?*



✚ Remember that this crisis came to the fore during the liturgical season of Lent and Holy Week and Easter when, as Passionist disciples we journey with Jesus, challenged by and in the hope of a deeper relationship with and commitment to him and his mission.

However, as it turned out, our church life during this time was unprecedented! Our churches were closed; we were left to our own devices for taking responsibility for **our prayer and spiritual life**, with the online streaming of liturgies.

What was my experience? Did I sense a desire and yearning within me for prayer? How did I respond? Did I genuinely miss “not going to church”, partaking in the Eucharist with the community, and celebrating the sacraments? Has this given me a greater appreciation than mere ‘obligation’?

From St. Paul of the Cross:

- *“When you are alone in your room, take your crucifix, kiss its five wounds reverently, tell it to preach to you a little sermon, and then listen to the words of eternal life that it speaks to your heart...”*
- *“Holy Communion is the most efficacious means of uniting one’s self to God... let your heart be a living tabernacle for Jesus. Visit Him often in this interior tabernacle, offering Him your homage, and the sentiments of gratitude with which divine love will inspire you.”*
- *“Build an oratory within yourself, and there have Jesus on the altar of your heart. Speak to Him often while you are doing your work. Speak to Him of His holy love, of His holy sufferings and of the sorrows of most holy Mary.”*



People reacted in different ways during the 'lockdown' period to the 'sounds of silence' and the lack of the usual busyness. Further, for some, with no direct human contact with another, the loneliness was just too much to bear. For us Passionists, **silence** and **solitude** are precious gifts to cultivate, even when not alone.

Silence helps us to **hear deeper** and to **see more** than we normally do; it aids our **contemplation**. Did you come to see values and hear concerns at a deeper level which the experience of this crisis highlighted for you: such as solidarity, neighborliness, consumerism, unjust inequalities, self-sacrifice, relationships, connectedness with creation...? How has this affected you?

Solitude, on the other hand, is far from being solitary and lonely. Rather, it is about **aliveness** - 'being alone' with God, with myself and with others.

What was your experience during this time of a forced contemplative life? How did you cope? What did you discover about your relationship with God, with yourself and with others?

From St. Paul of the Cross:

- *“Love silence and solitude even when in the midst of a crowd or when caught up in your work. Physical solitude is a good thing, provided that it is backed up by prayer and a holy life. But far better than this is solitude of the heart, the interior desert in which your spirit can become immersed in God.”*
- *“Keep silence like a golden key which guards the great treasure of the other virtues that God put in you.”*
- *“Love silence, internal and external solitude in choir and in your room. Be gentle with all.”*



✚ Perhaps you, a member of your community or Province, or a loved one, or a friend came face-to-face with your vulnerability and mortality by being tested positive to the virus and having to be either quarantined or hospitalized.

Can you recall how you dealt with your fear and anxiety at the time? Who or what gave you hope? How were you an instrument of hope and comfort to the other?

From St. Paul of the Cross:

- *“In time of trouble always arm yourself with faith, confidence in God, and deep humility of heart.”*
- *“Imagine someone who has been shipwrecked in a great storm and who is just about to be swallowed up by the waves. What should he do? The only option open to you is to turn your eyes to the Lord and call to him for help.”*
- *“Is there a lot troubling you? Be like Job and say: ‘Even if God brings me to death itself, I will still hope in him.’”*



✚ Surely, an honest reflection on this pandemic crisis, as fearful and dreadful as it has been, can surface within me some new challenges and opportunities for living a more measured and loving life as God desires.

As a Passionist, called to keep alive and promote the memory of the Passion of Jesus as a sign of God’s love, what areas of my life have been identified and challenged by the Spirit to become more selfless, compassionate, empathetic, kind, understanding, tolerant, inclusive, charitable? What attitudes and actions am I being asked to let-go of which are death-dealing, in order to adopt and take-on new life-giving ways?

From St. Paul of the Cross:

- *“The way to grow in our relationship with God in times of physical or mental stress is to strengthen ourselves by doing the things that God desires.”*
- *“The easiest way to keep your peace of heart is to accept everything as coming directly from the hands of the God who loves you. If you do this, any pain or persecution, anything which is difficult to accept will be transformed into a source of joy, happiness and peace.”*
- *“God is purifying you like gold in a fire. How does he do it? He purifies you with the fire of physical pain or mental anguish, with things that give rise to feelings of bitterness. He makes you live a dying life, a life rich in everything that is good, without you understanding how he does so. Be thankful to God, give glory and honour to him alone.”*