

Date: February 2, 2025

Texts: Psalm 139. 1-10 / I Cor. 2. 6-13

Title: "The Prayer of Examen"

Intro -

Richard Foster notes -

"How very strange that the Prayer of Examen -
(from the Latin, and referring to the idea of an accurate
assessment of the true situation... -)
[how very strange that this] - has been lost to we who live in
in an age of obsessive introspection."

i.e. - the "navel-gazing" generation has overlooked or by-passed
a discipline God has blessed throughout the Bible...
and - has offered to us - with the promise of the same...

so...

what is it, and - what might we expect...?

cf. - Tony Campolo offers this thought on where it might lead us:

- he writes of his experience as a college professor, counseling students
who are thinking of dropping out because they need time to "find themselves."

His answer to them: "What if, after you peel away each of these socially
prescribed identities and socially generated selves,
you discover you're an onion?"

What if you take that long guru journey into yourself, and when
you get there -- nobody's home?

Stop to consider the fact that if you peel away all the layers of an onion,
guess what you have left? Nothing!

And it just may be that when you take that trip to the innermost recesses
of your soul, that's exactly what you'll find."

(hmm... - doesn't sound like much of a recommendation
so far.

but he continues...)

“The self,” Campolo says, "is not an essence waiting to be discovered through philosophical introspection. Quite the contrary!

I believe that the self is an essence waiting to be created!

We create who we are through the commitments we make.

And without commitments we have no identity.”

which is where “examen” leads us.

- how do we get there...?

I) Consciousness

cf. - it begins with an affirmation that those who knew of this in the Bible - David... Paul... countless others...

experienced it not as something dreadful

(think of God peering into all the hidden crevices of your life...)

but rather - as something of immeasurable strength and empowerment

and what is this...?

it is a part of life with God that can be seen as having two aspects: the first is an “examen of consciousness”

- through which we discover how God has been present to us throughout the day, and - how we have responded to this loving presence

i.e. - how often do we trundle about during the course of a day... a week... a month... years...

- completely oblivious to the presence and activity of the loving and merciful God whose we are...?

Foster offers the following insights to help / guide us as we reflect

on the thoughts, feelings, and actions of our days to see how

God has been at work among us, and - how we responded

consider - maybe the boisterous neighbor of last night ...

(and - I really wish he had a different thing to consider, as we have a boisterous neighbor... taken to setting off small fireworks at 2:00 AM... and I'd rather hold the impression I have of him, than be challenged to change it, but...)

consider - maybe more than just an interruption of a quiet evening, or - a good night's sleep... maybe... - the voice of God urging us to be more attentive to the pain and loneliness of those around us... perhaps... the glorious sunrise you saw earlier this week (unless you were catching up on sleep after your boisterous, but possibly lonely, neighbor set off fireworks...)

- perhaps this sunrise was God's way of shouting out to us his love of beauty, and - inviting us to share in it...

i.e. - how can we become more aware of our surroundings...?
how can we more fully engage in what God has given us...?

or -
are we content to skim on by - living life on the surface...?

in the Prayer of Examen -
we rehearse the mighty deeds of God...
we heed his call "to remember"
as the Israelites set up monuments - often, piled stones of remembrance - or, "ebenezers" -
in this - we declare and we participate in
the work of remembering -
and we are strengthened by it...
we find our peace in it...
we are able to grow, because... -
we have found a solid foundation of God's presence
and God's grace - for our lives...

II) Conscience

the second aspect has to do with an “examen of conscience” -

where we look to uncover those areas of our lives that need
cleansing... purifying... healing...

we read of this in Psalm 139 - where the psalmist (where we...?)

invite God to search us and to know us...

to delve deeply into our hearts... into our souls...

and again -

far from being dreadful...

this is the scrutiny of unconditional love

we're not asking the editors of “page 6” to take a look...

(is gossip always on page 6...?)

rather -

we're asking the God who loves us enough to send his Son

to die for us...

- we're asking *this* God to see what is truly in us -

so that -

we might truly have the possibility of

goodness... healing... happiness...

and why should we ask God to search us...?

cf. - if we do it on our own -

a “thousand justifications” will arise to declare

our innocence... to protest that it's not our fault...

to bring extenuating circumstances

onto the table...

but since God is with us in the search...

we listen more than we protest...

we see more than we defend...

- we will see what we need to see... when we need to see it

but also -

this guards against the all too human tendency...

... to beat ourselves up
to take one look at things and declare ourselves unredeemable
with God alongside us, however...

we are protected and comforted...

we are brought to the place of everlasting mercy, and -
full redemption

and it's all so that...

we might understand our purpose with greater clarity, and -
do something about it

i.e. - the purpose of this...

the reason behind the "prayer of examen" - whereby we are gifted
with the priceless grace of self-knowledge...

- is to serve...

- to offer ourselves as living sacrifices to God

an offering that is not abstract, but rather -

being rooted and ground in the acceptance of the

concrete details of who we are and the way we live...

an offering that can actually make a difference

because...

it is an offering that has integrity:

integrity of being...

integrity of relationship...

relate - When something is well built, we say it has structural integrity.

So, in an earthquake, the building with excellent structural integrity survives.

When something physically collapses, we say it didn't have the integrity
to withstand the impact.

the prayer of examen is all about finding... and building...

a life of integrity

per Socrates: the unexamined life is not worth living

but -

we need to be careful... intentional...

about how we examine it

God gives us a framework -

and that framework includes honesty... and grace

thoroughness... and unconditional acceptance

i.e. - it may not be (often - will never be...) pleasant, but -

we need not fear, for it is a gift to be loved as we are loved

it is a gift that the one who loves us -

will help us to new the best... most complete...

“whole-est” version of ourself

we can possibly be

- invite him in...

say - as does the psalmist -

“Search me, O God, and know my heart...”

and see where it takes you...